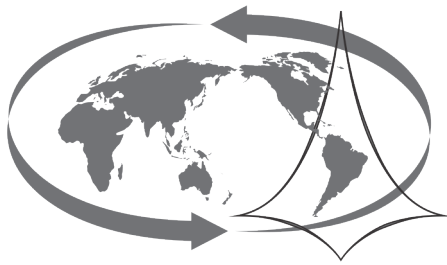


e-ISSN 2238-6912

AUSTRAL

Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations
Revista Brasileira de Estratégia e Relações Internacionais



Porto Alegre, v.15 n.29 | Jan./Jun. 2026



Austral	Porto Alegre	v.15 n.29	p. 1-271	Jan./Jun. 2026
---------	--------------	-----------	----------	----------------

About the Journal

AUSTRAL: Brazilian Journal of Strategy and International Relations was the first Brazilian journal in the field of International Relations to be fully published in English (2012). It is an essentially academic vehicle, linked to the Brazilian Centre for Strategy & International Relations (NERINT) of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). Its pluralist focus aims to contribute to the debate on the international political and economic order from the perspective of the developing world.

The journal publishes original articles in the area of Strategic Studies and International Relations, with special interest in issues related to developing countries and South-South Cooperation – their security problems; the political, economic and diplomatic developments of emerging countries; and their relations with the traditional powers. AUSTRAL is published semi-annually in English and Portuguese. The journal's target audience consists of researchers, experts, diplomats, military personnel, and graduate students of International Relations. The content of the journal seeks to ensure the publication of authors from each of the great continents of the South: Asia, Latin America and Africa. Thus, the debate and diffusion of knowledge produced in these regions is stimulated. All contributions submitted to AUSTRAL are subject to rigorous scientific evaluation.

Indexes



ELSEVIER
Scopus



DOAJ
DIRECTORY OF
OPEN ACCESS
JOURNALS



COLUMBIA
INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS
ONLINE

WZB

Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin
für Sozialforschung



LivRe
Revistas de livre acesso

latindex



Crossref

ETH zürich



Programa de apoio à
Edição de Periódicos

This journal is supported by the

Support Program for Journal Editing (PAEP) at UFRGS

Editorial Team | *Equipe Editorial*

Editor | *Editor*

Leonardo Granato (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

Associate Editor | *Editor Associado*

Érico Esteves Duarte (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

Founding Editor | *Editor Fundador*

Paulo Visentini (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

Editorial Board | *Conselho Editorial*

Analúcia Danilevitz Pereira (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

Chris Landsberg (University of Johannesburg, South Africa)

Eduardo Migon (Escola de Comando e Estado-Maior do Exército, Brazil)

Fábio Morosini (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

Gelson Fonseca Jr. (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, Brazil)

Gladys Lechini (Universidad Nacional de Rosario, Argentina)

Marcelo Milan (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

Marco Cepik (Universidade de Brasília, Brazil)

Ruchita Beri (Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, India)

Editorial Assistants | *Assistentes de Edição*

Felipe Werner Samuel (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

Igor Estima Sardo (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

Cássio Donato Monteiro D'Ávila (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

Maria Manoela Ribeiro Spolavori (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil)

Consultative Board | *Conselho Consultivo*

Adam Habib, South Africa

André Luiz Reis da Silva, Brazil

Antonio Jorge Ramalho, Brazil

Beatriz Bissio, Brazil

Bertrand Badie, France

Boris F. Martynov, Russia

Carlos Aurélio Pimenta de Faria, Brazil

Carlos Schmidt Arturi, Brazil

Celso Amorim, Brazil

Cristina Soreanu Pecequillo, Brazil

Guilherme Thudium, Brazil

Henry Kam Kah, Cameroon

Ilter Turan, Turkey

Isiaka Alani Badmus, Nigeria

José Ariososa Pérez, Cuba

José Miguel Quedi Martins, Brazil

Liu Youfa, China

Lotfi Kaabi, Tunisia

Lucas Kerr de Oliveira, Brazil

Mamoudou Gazibo, Canada

Marcos Costa Lima, Brazil

Maria Regina Soares de Lima, Brazil

Mehdi Parvizi Amineh, Netherlands

Monica Hirst, Argentina

Nilton César Fernandes Cardoso, Cape Verde

Sean Burges, Canada



© Núcleo Brasileiro de Estratégia e Relações Internacionais - UFRGS

Cover: Eduardo Faustini and Guilherme Geremias da Conceição

Layout: Felipe Werner Samuel

AUSTRAL: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations is available online in English and Portuguese at www.seer.ufrgs.br/austral

Contact

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)

Centro de Estudos Internacionais sobre Governo (CEGOV)

Av. João Pessoa, 31 - CEP 90040-000

Porto Alegre/RS - Brazil

Phone: +55 (51) 3308 7988

E-mail: austral@ufrgs.br

**www.seer.ufrgs.br/Austral
Cataloging-in-Publication (CIP)**

Austral : Revista Brasileira de Estratégia e Relações Internacionais = Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations / Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, CEGOV/FCE.

- v. 15, n.29 (Jan./Jun. 2026). – Porto Alegre: NERINT-CEGOV/PPGEEI-FCE/UFRGS, 2012-

Semestral.

e-ISSN 2238-6912

1. Political Science. 2. International Relations.
3. International Politics. 4. Diplomacy. 5. Developing Countries.

CDU 327

Biblioteca Gládis Wiebbelling do Amaral, Faculdade de Ciências Econômicas da UFRGS.

Contents

Editor's Note	7
Lula 3 and the New Autonomy Within Dependence? Brazil-United States-China Triangular Relations (2023-2026) <i>Cristina Soreanu Pecequilo</i>	10
The diversification of Brazil's defence partnerships between 2023 and 2025 <i>Plinio Cardoso and Marianne Wiesebron</i>	35
Brazil at Risk? The Omission of the Defence Sector in the Brazilian Artificial Intelligence Strategy <i>Carlos Eduardo Franco Azevedo and Rachel Camilly Soares de Souza</i>	53
BRICS and the Multiploidization of Global Governance: Navigating Post-Hegemonic Pathways <i>Nehme Al Khawly and Amir Reza Emami</i>	89
BRICS in Southeast Asia: a Liberal Perspective <i>Brice Tseen Fu Lee, Juan Pablo Sims and Yun-Tso Lee</i>	120
Iran's Driving Determinants of Enlargement Towards Africa: Case Study of Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana <i>Nazrin Alizada and Damla Kocatepe</i>	151
The Political Geography of Iran <i>Rasoul Afzali, Sara Abbasi and Sadaf Zhalehbaghi</i>	177
From the Arab Petro-Politics of 1973 to the Russia-Ukraine War: What Can We Learn From Sanctions as an Agency of Coercion? <i>Agaptus Nwozor, Oladiran Afolabi and Chukwudi G. Chidume</i>	196
Foreign Policy and Selective Assassination: An Analysis of the Bin Laden and Soleimani Cases <i>Marcos Aurélio Guedes de Oliveira, José Francelino Galdino Neto and Vinicius Santos da Cruz</i>	217

Availing the Capacity of International Organizations to Advance Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy Priorities <i>Jovhar Museyibzada and Bahriddin Usmonov</i>	236
Partners	260
Submission Standards / Previous Issues	264

*A responsabilidade do conteúdo dos artigos é de seus respectivos autores.
The responsibility for the content of the articles is of their respective authors.*

Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations
e-ISSN 2238-6912 | v.15, n.29 Jan./Jun. 2026

EDITOR'S NOTE

Entering his second year in office, President Donald Trump fulfilled the prediction made after his election by French academic Emmanuel Todd: “prepare to see what seemed unthinkable.” Threats to European Union allies and NATO itself, tariff wars, rejection of multilateral norms, and inconclusive military actions were the hallmark of his administration.

However, in early January 2026, in an action worthy of a movie production, American Special Forces attacked strategic targets in Caracas and captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. He was taken to the United States on charges of drug trafficking. More importantly, it was the political approach used: instead of the acclaimed Regime Change, Trump promoted Change inside the Regime. A skilled negotiator in the business world, he preferred to maintain the corrupt government, headed by interim Vice President Delcy Rodrigues, imposing economic agreements in the oil sector.

Alongside new embargoes and threats against Cuba, what some academics have called the “Trump Corollary of the Monroe Doctrine” began. This policy was justified by the alleged fight against groups classified as “narcoterrorists” and supported by the new wave of conservative governments in Latin America, and last, but not least, also focused on the strategy of reversing China’s growing economic presence in the Western Hemisphere.

Finally, the American-Israeli attack on Iran in February demonstrated something embarrassing: Iran’s unexpected capacity for survival and response. Despite the attackers beheading the ruling elite, the regime resisted militarily, inflicting losses on American bases and allies in the region and creating a major problem for the global economy by blocking the Strait of Hormuz. Now the world depends on the outcome of elections to be held in the second half of 2026 in the United States, Brazil, Russia, and Israel. This is a turbulent scenario, in which Europe has become responsible for supporting Ukraine in the war against Russia, which is now in its fifth year.

In this issue, Austral features three articles about Brazil: one on the triangular relations between Brazil, the US, and China, and two others on defence issues. Two other articles address BRICS issues, two about Iran—one on the sanctions policy since 1973, one on the policy of targeted assassinations, in this case, of Bin Laden, and the last on Azerbaijan’s use of international organizations.

The geographical scope of the contributors continues to expand, with contributions from scholars in the Netherlands, Lebanon, Chile, Iran, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Nigeria, as well as several universities in Brazil. In this regard, we thank the authors and the entire team of Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations, for their collaboration in ensuring the journal maintains its current publication schedule and, indeed, improves its quality standards.

We thank the UFRGS Pro-Rectorate for Research for its support through the Periodical Publishing Support Program (PAEP) for this publication, as well as the entire team that worked on the editing and translation, in particular the Assistant Editors Cássio Monteiro and Manoela Spolavori, with the collaboration of Felipe Werner Samuel, Igor Sardo, Lucas Lixinski e Sofia Portilio Avila responsible for the qualified translations. Once again, we thank Professor Cristina Soreanu Pecequilo for reviewing the translations. Finally, the teamwork of the NERINT/UFRGS members has allowed us to maintain the regularity and quality of the Austral Journal.

Paulo Visentini

Disclaimer: *AUSTRAL* prioritises British English as the standard variety of the English written language. Some English translations, however, may be written under the American English dialect.

LULA 3 AND THE NEW AUTONOMY WITHIN DEPENDENCE? BRAZIL-THE UNITED STATES-CHINA TRIANGULAR RELATIONS (2023-2026)¹

Cristina Soreanu Pecequilo²

In January 2023, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva took office in his third, non-consecutive Presidential term, in Brazil. Lula's comeback to power occurred after the 2011-2022 interim, composed of Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), Michel Temer (2016-2018) and Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022) mandates. During this period, International Relations presented a trend of continuity and discontinuity with Rousseff and Temer, as well as breaks with Bolsonaro. From the electoral campaign until the new presidency, the international agenda was presented as a recovery of Lula's 1 and 2 high profile, symbolized by the slogan "Brazil is Back".

The internal and external contexts of Brazil's "return" is different from the ones of 2003-2010. In the first decade of the 21st century, the international scenario was characterized by the rise of the emergent nations from the Geopolitical South³ (in particular China's consolidation of power), the United States (US) military engagement in Eurasia due to the Global War on Terror (GWT) in Afghanistan (2001-2014) and Iraq (2001-2011) and the 2008 global economic crisis, with the US and the European Union as its core. Brazilian room for manoeuvre was more significant facing these changes and power vacuums.

Apart from the traditional Western axis US-EU-United Nations (UN),

¹ This article was finalized on March 29th, 2026.

² Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP), Osasco, Brazil. Email: crispece@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0003-1617-186X.

³ During this article, the concepts of South or Geopolitical South will be used, to present a set of emerging nations that share converging external goals as the international order reform and autonomy. Check Costa and Duarte 2023 for the concept of Geopolitical South.

there was a possibility of opening spaces and adding power resources through South-South and North-South partnerships. Internally, the governmental coalition was supported by the alliance established between the Workers Party (PT) and the more traditional sectors of the national political-economic elite. The Vice-President José de Alencar was able to bridge the gap between these sectors and PT, with an accommodation of centre-right forces and diverse interest groups linked to the export of commodities, infrastructure and financial sector. These agendas were reconciled with the welfare ones. The Legislative scenario was mostly favourable, due to the scope of the coalition, which, despite difficulties, was able to form majorities for votes. Likewise, even though the Brazilian economy in 2002 was in a stagnant situation, Fernando Henrique Cardoso's (1995-2002) legacy was of a stable country.

The second decade of this same century presented opposing trends: an internal political dynamic marked by the break of the pact established in the first Lula government, that led to Rousseff's impeachment in 2016 (Bastos and Hiratuka 2020; Milan 2016), with the migration of the interest groups mentioned above to the centre and the far-right. The economic-social vulnerability generated by the redirection of the neoliberal model and pressures of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemics that, from 2020-2021, paralysed the global economy, prevailed in Brazil. From the electoral victory confirmation to the inauguration, leading to January 8th, 2023, Brazil endured a period of institutional crises and the risk of a democratic rupture. Initially focused on the immediate post-election period, these movements led to the interruption of public roads and popular demonstrations, culminating in the coup attempt, with the invasion and the destruction of public spaces in the federal capital, Brasília.

Even though the regime rupture was avoided, these signals, added to the election of a conservative Congress ("centrão"⁴ majority), both at the Representative and Senate chambers, represented a fragile governmental basis, supported by a coalition of progressive forces. Occupied by former São Paulo's government Geraldo Alckmin, a historical name of the Brazilian Social-Democratic Party (PSDB) that migrated to the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB), the Vice-Presidency tried to enlarge these coalitions with centre forces. Alckmin was also ahead of the Ministry of Development, Industry, Trade and Services as a way of interacting with the productive sectors.

The international scenario proved more sensitive, due to the acceleration of the hegemonic competition, generated by US-China competition. As a result of the competitive coexistence between these powers, there is a rise in

4 In Portuguese, the expression refers to the centre and centre-right political movements in Brazil, that also are joined by some members of the far-right.

geopolitical and geoeconomic clashes amongst them. From the centre to the periphery, all continents present conflicts and political polarizations: Russia-Ukraine, Israel, Yemen, the strengthening of the far-right just to mention a few phenomena. The decentralization of power is still ongoing, generating, as Visentini (2025), points out, an unstable multipolarity.

It is possible to establish a parallel, even though some conditions are different (such as US-China interdependence), between the current moment and the 1930s decade. The decline of Pax Britannica, and the prevailing imbalances since the First World War (1914-1918), the arrangements of the Versailles Treaty (1919), the Great Depression (1929), the rise of fascism and defying powers (Japan and Germany) and the US repositioning, led to the Second World War (1939-1945).

If there are similarities between the 1930s and the 2020s, would it be possible to revitalize the so-called “autonomy within the dependence” (Moura 1980), when Brazil bargained between the US and Germany? In concrete terms, the major players of the present hegemonic transition are the US and China, Brazil’s main individual partners. According to Hirst (2025), Brazil-US’s bilateralism is affected by this context, and, consequently, Brazil-China’s bilateralism will be too. What is the impact for Lula’s 3 agenda?

Based on these questions, the goal of this text is to evaluate Brazil-US’s relations and Brazil-China’s in Lula’s third term. There is no intention of exhausting or mapping all of Lula’s 3 initiatives, but to present some reflections from the general principles, focusing on the bilateral partnerships. For that, the text will be divided into three parts, added to this Introduction and Final Thoughts. In the first part, “Conjunctural and Structural Overview (2003-2022)”, there is a brief contextualization of Lula’s 1 and 2 period, and the presidencies that succeeded him. Added to this mapping there is a set of structural thoughts, systematizing geopolitical, geoeconomic and geocultural variables, with impacts in policy and decision making. The second part “Stabilization and Relative Reconstruction (2023-2024)”, presents the two-year initial period of the administration, whereas the third “Defensive Action, Adaptation and Pragmatism (2025-2026)”, evaluates the government’s continuity in adverse conditions.

Conjunctural and Structural Overview (2003-2022)

During Lula’s first government cycle, 2003-2010 (with the reelection

⁵ Some of these ideas and arguments about Brazil-United States relations in Lula 3 were previously developed in Pecequillo 2025 and Pecequillo 2025b and will be recovered here.

in 2006), the country's international relations presented a significant process of strengthening and enlargement. This process embodied both innovative patterns of State-State and multilateral South-South and North-South interactions, as well as the recovery of strategic projects such as the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) and bilateral relations with nations such as the US and China⁶.

Considering the innovations, South-American regional integration mechanisms such as the Union of the South American Nations (UNASUR), and the Community of Latin-American and Caribbean States (CELAC), variable geometry coalitions as IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) and the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China⁷) and the trade G-20 for the World Trade Organization (WTO) talks were created. The financial G-20 assumed a relevant role as an enlarged negotiation forum for economic issues.

In the South-South agenda, the South America-Africa (ASA) and the South America-Arab (ASPA) Countries Summits were relevant, adding to the diplomatic acceleration of efforts with Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Brazil emphasized South-South Cooperation (SSC) for the development of a stronger interdependence of internal social programs and the external field as *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger). Together with *Fome Zero*, projects as *Bolsa Família* (Minimum Wage), *Farmácia Popular* (Free Medicine Drugs) and *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* (Housing Financing) embodied a set of social welfare public policies (added to education access enlargement policies), that had become international references.

As for the recovery of the strategic projects and partnerships, in particular Mercosur, China and the US as mentioned, Lula's 1-2 agenda presented greater complexity. In the case of Mercosur, similar to other regional integration processes based on South America, the bloc focused on trade issues, but also worked as a platform for international projections with other regions and blocs, including the EU. The preservation of the democratic governance and the autonomy of member countries were defined as priorities.

Evaluating the partnership with China there was an upgrade in the

6 Ambassador Celso Amorim led this process, ahead of the Ministry of Foreign Relations (MRE), Ambassador Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães acted as MRE's Secretary General and the academic Marco Aurelio Garcia as Special Advisor of the President of the Republic for International Affairs.

7 In 2011, South Africa entered the alliance in its first enlargement, becoming the BRICS. In 2024, it became the BRICS Plus, with the new full members, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, followed by Indonesia in 2025. BRICS Plus also includes partner countries such as: Algeria, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Malaysia, Nigeria, Turkey, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. Data collected at: BRICS. Brasil 2025. Available at: <https://brics.br/pt-br/sobre-o-brics>. Accessed 25 March. 2026.

relationship, promoting the joining of geopolitical and geoeconomic agendas. Since its reestablishment in 1974, in the context of the Military Regime (1964-1985), within the framework of the Responsible and Ecumenical Pragmatism (1974-1979) in Geisel's government), Sino-Brazilian relations sustained a pattern that prioritized trade agendas. The partnership was characterized by a unidimensional and instrumental economic view, focusing on the opening of markets and opportunities. Despite scientific-technological efforts, such as the satellite programs *China Brazil Earth Resources* (CBERS), launched in 1998, China was neither quantitatively, nor qualitatively seen as a priority partner.

In the post-Cold War world, mostly in the 1990s, even this agenda was put on hold due to the priority given to the North-South axis by governments such as Collor de Mello (1990-1994) and the first mandate of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC- 1995-1998). The situation only began to change from 1999-2002, when FHC's foreign policy started to search for South-South alternatives, with a focus on emerging nations, Russia, India and China. In a reaction to the national economic crisis (and the lack of benefits from the North), these partnerships were defined as strategic, but the contents of the agenda was still leaning towards trade issues.

It was only in the 2003-2010 period that bilateral relations experienced a qualitative leap, with the convergence of South-South agendas. These convergences led to the introduction of multidimensional components in the Sino-American political-strategic and social exchanges. This advancement could be noticed in a greater complexity of the bi and multilateral agendas, such as the BRICS, the recovery of scientific and technological projects, the defence of multilateralism, multipolarity and the reform of the world order. Added to the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of Brazil-China bilateral relations, the year of 2004, was characterized by the enlargement of formal frameworks of cooperation, with the creation of the Sino-Brazilian High-Level Commission for Coordination and Cooperation (COSBAN) and of the Brazil-China Business Council (CEBC).

China initiated a process of taking part in infrastructure works and development in Brazil, that, in the following President's Dilma Rousseff government resulted in the Ten-Year Cooperation Plan Between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of the People's Republic of China (2012-2021) and the Brazil-China Joint Action Plan (2015-2021). Another milestone was China's rise to the position of Brazil's main sole trade partner between 2009-2010. Historically, since Brazilian independence, the Western axis, represented first by Great Britain, and later by the US, was the core of Brazil's imports and exports. In this new reality,

the US started to occupy the second position in the Brazilian trade agenda. According to Pereira (2025),

In 2001, the United States share of Brazilian exports was 24,4% and China's 3,3%. In 2009, China surpassed the US, and, in 2023, China's share was 30,7% and the United States was 10,9%. Since 2012, China gained percentages, and South America from 2013 onwards (...). Till October 2024, the aggregated numbers showed a 29,3% China's share and 11,6% for the United States (Pereira 2025, 53).

Considering imports,

(...) there is a similar behaviour. However, there is a smaller difference between the percentages. Since 2018, China's share is surpassing the United States and, in 2023, the shares were: China (21,1%); European Union (18,9%); United States (15,8%); and South America (11,3%). Till October 2024, the aggregated numbers showed China's share at 23,9% and 15,5% for the United States (Pereira 2025, 53).

Pereira (2025) shows the concentration of Brazilian exports in the primary sector, live stocking and mineral commodities⁸. This reorientation (reprimarization) is leading to Brazil's de-industrialization. Added to other elements such as lower investments in science, technology and innovation, these trends reveal a change in the national economic profile.

China's rise in the ranking of trading partners, and the increase of interdependence happened not only in Brazil. It is a part of Chinese international projection, beyond its geographical scope, that, in the 21st century, also included a process of expansion to Latin America. China had started to occupy US power vacuums in the sectors already mentioned of trade, infrastructure and development. Added to bilateral partnerships with Hemispheric nations, since 2018, Chinese presence entered a new phase with the China-CELAC Forum. At that moment, an Action Plan was presented, with the goal of expanding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI⁹) to Latin America. Even though Brazil is not a BRI member, until the ending to this

⁸ Considering Brazil-China relations, the country represents an important pillar of Chinese food security with its grain and all sorts of meat (bovine, chicken, pork) exports.

⁹ Launched in 2013, during Xi Jinping's government the BRI (either/or New Silk Road) is a project based on China's interconnectivity with Eurasian regions (Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Asia), through land and maritime infrastructure corridors. See Xing (2019) for an overview.

text in March 2026, this process is core to understanding the update of US policy in the Hemisphere during Trump's second mandate (2025-Current).

Considering Brazil-US bilateral relations, Lula's government experienced moments of cooperation, such as the establishment of the Strategic Dialogue in 2005 (changed into the Global Dialogue) and the energy sector agreements (ethanol), as well as tensions. Even though they were portrayed by the opposition as moments of Brazilian ruptures and aggression, these tensions were, in fact, a natural counter hegemonic reaction to the country's repositioning in the world's balance of power. Added to coalitions, SSC and integration projections, Brazil also increased its role and resistance in negotiation forums such as the WTO and as a major player in international mediation talks, mostly, the conclusion of the Three-party Nuclear agreement Brazil-Iran-Turkey. Although the agreement was not implemented due to US pressures, it was representative of the regional powers' ability, Brazil and Turkey, to negotiate relevant geopolitical issues as mediators (Hirst 2022).

These initiatives consolidated national autonomy, defined as the increase in power resources and of Brazil's repositioning in the world's balance of power by opening new external opportunities and partnerships (Visentini 2013)¹⁰. In the words of Ambassador Amorim, it was a "proud and active", and high profile, foreign policy (Amorim 2015). Concepts such as autonomy through diversification (Vigevani and Cepaluni 2003) and combined axis (Pecequillo 2021) also defined these dynamics.

Despite real advances, Lula's foreign policy never was, at any time, consensual. As a result, there was a break in the "proud and active" agenda from 2011-2022, the period preceding Lula's return to Planalto. During this interim period, which was encompassed by the governments of Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016), Michel Temer (2016-2018) and Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), a low-profile agenda of decline and deconstruction.

Amongst these three governments, Dilma, elected by PT as Lula's heir, represented continuity, but with lesser attention to international politics. Temer had regained the North-South agenda and Bolsonaro represented the most significant break. Although some analysts argued that the break was symbolised by its alignment to the US, during the overlapping of Trump's first mandate two-year final period that began in 2017, between 2019 and 2020, this was not a novelty in international relations.

It is necessary to qualify the break, pointing out that there is a change in Brazilian stance towards multilateralism and the liberal international order,

¹⁰ Pinheiro and Lima 2018 can be suggested for the conceptual debate regarding autonomy in Brazilian foreign policy.

focusing on Westernization and conservative values (Casarões and Farias 2021). This change tried to align with Trump's vision of opposing international regimes, mainly the social ones (human rights in general, the environment and health), criticizing SSC in international organizations and the discredit of these organisms as cooperation forums. Although, as mentioned, the alignment towards the US was not a novelty, these dimensions represented a relative break.

This translated into the abandonment of demands such as the update of multilateral organizations and the strategic emptiness of variable geometry coalitions, the BRICS and SSC as a whole, and, in South American integration, leaving CELAC and the end of UNASUR. At the same time, this multilateral abandonment was not clear-cut, as Brazil was still in negotiations, through Mercosur, of a trade agreement with the EU and, as part of the neoliberal economic agenda, was seeking to be a member of OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). So, vertical multilateralism (North-South) was a priority and the South-South one not.

The Sino-Brazilian partnership alternated ideological criticism and fake news (especially in the COVID-19 pandemics) with the exporting sectors economic dependence. These sectors were part of the core of interest groups that encompassed the governmental coalition, such as the commodities exporters, and started to put pressure on the administration to avoid losing markets. Even the own government could not risk losing the Chinese markets and others, such as the Middle East. Therefore, it was necessary to accommodate these interest groups as defined by Casarões as the 5Bs (in Portuguese): *bala* (public security), *boi* (agricultural, livestock and commodities in general), *bíblia* (evangelicals and conservative electors), *bancos* (financial sector) and *bolsolavismo* (the defense of the West, as represented by Olavo de Carvalho ideas). Realistically, we should mention that four of these five groups never ceased to be relevant in the domestic scenario, the changes are related to how they exercise their influence and mobilize coalitions: *bala, boi, bíblia e bancos*.

We are not going to list all the period's actions but indicate that several domestic disputes regarding the bi and multilateral relations of the country stand still. This finding comes from the evaluation that foreign policy is influenced by five structural frameworks. These frameworks are rooted in historical and contemporary dimensions, linked to the evolution of Brazilian foreign policy, US hegemony and international changes. What are these structural frameworks?

The first framework relates to US weight in Brazil's profile as a Western nation, influencing national models of development over time. The political, social, economic, cultural and strategic logic of alignments is engrained in

Brazilian thinking and is shared by diverse interest groups. This leads to a negative definition of national priorities, as the State's project is evaluated not endogenously, but exogenously, as one considers which kind of impact a certain policy will bring to relations with the US.

Second, since 1945, the US has been the hegemonic power of the international system, containing the rise of challengers that may threaten its interests and strategic positions in all continents. Although also sustained in co-optation and ideology, through international multilateral organizations, and the liberal rhetoric, Pax Americana, is not shy in using unilateral or war measures. Third, in Latin America this hegemony is stronger due to geopolitical reasons. The region is in the US sphere of influence, as defined by the 1823 Monroe Doctrine. According to this Doctrine, America's region should be preserved as a projection zone and security frontier. Three priorities are defined by the Doctrine: the containment of inter-regional threats, the prevention of external risks and the promotion of democratic regimes and the free market.

Fourth, despite the continuity of the hegemonic status, the US is being pressured by changes in its society and in the international system. In its society, there is a change in its economic, social and populational profile that generates imbalances and fragmentation. There is the reorganization of interest groups, with the rise of new elites such as the tech giants, that are joining the traditional ones linked to the industrial military-complex and energy. In the international system, change is related to the relocation of power resources, towards the South, in particular emerging nations, more specifically, China.

Fifth, for Brazil, China's global rise and as a bilateral partner can already be regarded as a structural framework in the definition of foreign policy. Not only China's weight in trade balance is relevant, but also there is a growth in its direct investments, infrastructure projects and transfer of multinationals. Therefore, both the US and China can, in the 21st century, be regarded as structural partners: the US in the geopolitical, geoeconomic and geocultural dimensions, and China in geopolitics and geoeconomics. What is the impact of these conjunctural and structural analysis for Lula 3?

Stabilization and Relative Reconstruction (2023-2024)

As argued, Lula's 3rd coming into power faced more significant

11 In Lula 3, Ambassador Celso Amorim acts as the Special Advisor of the President of the Republic for International Affairs, whereas Ambassador Mauro Vieira was appointed as Mi-

challenges than in his previous mandates. Also as mentioned, the milestone of Lula 3 was the recovery of principles and agendas summarized in the expression “Brazil is Back”. Guimarães (2025) explains this foreign policy phase as one of autonomy through reconstruction. The goal was to achieve Brazil’s repositioning in the world and power gains (therefore, the definition of autonomy) and to reach this from known tactics that would be adapted to new realities. In practical terms, although the goal of reconstruction was clear-cut, it highlights some problems.

First, the demand for reconstruction occurs because there was a break before, as a result of domestic political disputes and interest groups movements. Second, the dismantling of initiatives, such as the ones related to South American integration was fast. Third, this dismantling and relativization of principles and international regimes represent a lack of consensus regarding the national project. So, changes were not produced by voluntarist actions, but as part of a clash of domestic models that reflect political struggles. In the lack of understanding these oscillations or the built of a sustainable consensus, the construction-de-construction cycle may repeat. Faced by these realities, how did Lula’s 3 policies evolve in its first two-year period?

In the domestic field, welfare policies investments were resumed, and ambitious goals of modernization and development were launched in projects such as the “New Industry Brazil” and the new “National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation”. This agenda was also present in a third project with internal and external dimensions, the “South American Integration Routes”. While the Integration Routes aimed to recover regional integration projects led by Brazil, focusing on infrastructure, the others prioritized modernization purposes. As a convergent characteristic, the three projects were part of an arch, in which the role of the State as the promoter of development in strategic sectors was recovered.

However, material internal and external conditions were not conducive for the advancement of these projects. In addition, there was an international counterhegemonic reaction and the regaining of power by domestic oligarchies in the region, that put into question the so-called “Pink Tide”, that, in the beginning of the 21st century led to the rise of progressive governments. In that context, governments of right- and left-wing orientations began to alternate. Lastly, the growth of China’s presence in Latin America made the country the main individual partner of local partners, promoting the break of political integration processes.

Therefore, Brazilian room of maneuver was smaller, as well its

nister of Foreign Relations and Ambassador Maria Laurada Rocha Santos as MRE’s Secretary General.

capacity to occupy spaces. That does not mean that Brazil had no weight or leadership, but that cooperation dynamics needed to be rethought in more updated and flexible frameworks. The possibility of resuming projects like UNASUR is low in current conditions. Even Mercosur, as a strategic tool, loses ground for a Mercosur focused on trade and bi-regional talks, as shown by the Mercosur-EU negotiations during this period. The agreement was finally signed in January 2026, after almost two decades, and presented as a proof of multilateralism success.

Since the beginning, regarding multilateralism, Lula 3 was able to successfully recover Brazil's image. Another positive point was the exercise of Presidential Diplomacy. Efforts to assure that Brazil was able to host huge multilateral events during the mandate were prioritized, as the country held the presidency of blocs and alliances. Between 2023-2024, Brazil presided the National Security Council of the United Nations (from October till November 2023), as a non-permanent member, and was head of the financial G-20 (hosting the Rio de Janeiro Summit in November 2024). For the two-year period of 2025-2026, in particular during 2025, occupied the presidency of Mercosur and the BRICS Plus, and organized COP-30.

As this brief overview shows, Brazil valued multilateral agendas and social issues. However, the second decade of the 21st century presented a certain mismatch between this Brazilian focus and the geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamics that were leaning towards the reduction of the relevance of multilateral spaces. Interstate relations were more relevant than non-state ones, which affects both the dynamics as well as the perceptions of bilateral relations with the US and China.

As for the Brazil-US interchange, Joe Biden's Democratic party government played a relevant role between 2021-2023, considering the national political instability situation. Still in Bolsonaro's period, US concern was to signal that it would not support antidemocratic movements that offered the risk of a democratic rupture. From 2021-2022, several US authorities visited the country such as the Head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), William Burns, and Jake Sullivan from the National Security Council. Another concern was to contain China's geopolitical and geoeconomic advances, avoiding a direct confrontation with the Brazilian government.

Disagreements regarding Brazil's neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine War were present, but clashes were avoided. Brazil took part, as a US guest, in the Environmental Summit and the Summit of the Americas, even in the lack of political-strategic convergence. In 2022, US Ambassador to Brazil, during public audiences in the Brazilian Congress, reinforced the support for a peaceful and stable governmental transition, within democratic rules. In this context, the US, alongside the international community, condemned the

January 2023 coup attempt.

For Lula's government, the overlap with the Biden administration was seen as positive, due to the convergence of social agendas, in the fields of democracy-human rights-environment. In February 2023, during Lula's trip to the US there was the reaffirmation of this common agenda, a trend that lasted until the end of the democratic mandate in 2024. Nevertheless, the concrete results of this convergence are not as significant as the rhetorical dimension that comes along. In this field, the "Partnership for the Rights of Workers" (Decent Work Initiative), US participation in the Amazon Fund and the defence of initiatives pro-renewable energies and the fight against climate change could be mentioned.

In geopolitics, Brazil and the US negotiated together the Barbados Agreement in which the government of Nicolás Maduro established a compromise to respect the results of the 2024 elections in the country. Nevertheless, disagreements such as those already mentioned about the Russia-Ukraine War, and Brazil's criticism of Israel in the confrontation of the Gaza Strip (that began in October 2023), remained. Also, there were no economic advances, as bilateral trade sustained its trends already examined, focusing on China. The Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP) initiative, a US project of development for the Latin America region was not extended to Brazil.

It can be said that Lula's first two-year period was of stability regarding Brazil-US bilateral relations (which involved both accommodation and reconstruction), in which convergences came alongside divergences, without ruptures. In 2024, the celebration of the bicentennial of bilateral relations was considered relevant, but without further advances. This reality also is a result of the low priority given by Democrats to the Latin America region and their priority involvement in Eurasia and the Asia Pacific. A power vacuum prevailed, in which China grew, and even Brazil, was searching to recover, without success, the framework of South American integration, as analysed.

However, there was a prevailing image of Biden and his party as being cordial. This Democrat image is rooted in the 1930s when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the Good Neighbour Policy (PBV) for the American Hemisphere. Brazilian "bets" on the multilateral offensive during Lula's 3 mandate relied on an international scenario linked to the Democrat's continuity in power, either with Biden or with a Kamala Harris win¹². These bets were surrounded by a certain utopia that Biden's US would promote the

¹² It should be recalled that there was no guarantee of continuity even with a Democratic government, as it would be held by Kamala Harris and Tim Walz, since Biden was not up for re-election.

valorisation of international organizations and regimes, which was not real, at least when the geopolitical reality was considered. The convergence on issues was not as significant as it was portrayed. One of Biden's agendas, for instance, the criticism of autocracies, affected Brazil's South-South alliances. And what about China?

In comparison, Sino-Brazilian relations presented more density and range than Brazil-US dynamics. As mentioned, China, as well as the US, started to exercise a structural weight on the definition of Brazilian policies, due to the rise of its economic influence. Unlike the US, with whom there were no advances in concrete cooperation for development projects, China was in the opposite direction: the deepening of bilateral exchanges, more effective multilateral alliances and the consolidation of projects, such as the BRI.

Lula 3 regained a multidimensional political-strategic stance of the relation, in which bilateral and multilateral mechanisms overlap. Both countries are moving in different spheres of power. Although China's foreign policy seeks a horizontal agenda with its partners, in the win-win logic, reality shows that Brazil, when compared to China and the US, is the country with the least relative power. So, as in the 1930s, the country is between two major powers of the hegemonic transition.

However, unlike that period, the bargain for an autonomy within dependence, lacks two elements: first, that the country holds a consensual national project for the State, defining its priorities and what it wishes from its partners; second, that the two disputing poles are in a position to offer benefits, so that the Brazilian State can have a pendular movement towards opportunities. Despite the priorities present in Lula's 3 projects, there is no consensus about these agendas, and, considering the two poles, only China is offering possibilities of development and cooperation, whereas the US oscillates from rhetoric cooperation to pressure.

With regards to multilateralism, the BRICS Plus is the main arrangement, with the enlargement of its geographic area of projection, and it also recovers its agenda of international order reform and the defence of a pro-multipolar context and multilateral organizations as forums. A possible Brazilian participation in the BRI is not viable from the multilateral point of view, as it would represent a more direct confrontation of US interests. Nevertheless, the BRI logic, focused on the increase of China's interdependence with its partners is already reached in the bilateral dimension.

In 2023, President Lula visited China, with the priority of attracting investments and increasing transnational Chinese activities in the country

(mostly the automobile sector¹³), the convergence of environmental agendas and the update of cooperation plans (in 2022, the Strategic Plan 2022-2031, was launched). In order to consolidate this strategic partnership, the “Joint Declaration Between the Federative Republic of Brazil and the People’s Republic of China on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” was signed.

According to CEBC data, there is an expansion of the Chinese role in Brazil, that goes beyond trade. Chinese investments, previously concentrated in infrastructure (energy, communications and transports), started to explore new issues for industrialization and the Digital Economy (Cariello 2024). Considering the Digital Economy, the issue is composed of three layers: material, virtual and the traditional. The material layer unfolds into five sectors: critical mineral and rare earth elements, base technologies, equipment and devices, infrastructure and telecommunications. For its turn, the virtual layer encompasses other additional dimensions: enabling technologies, intermediary platforms, social networks, media and content, and digital, added to software. Finally, the traditional layer refers to pre-existing sectors of the economy that can be transformed through technology (Pecequilo e Marzinotto, 2024).

The Digital Economy is one of the main fields of US-China competition during the hegemonic transition process, and Brazil is one of the most affected countries. Besides having non-explored critical mineral and rare earth elements, the country is an attractive market for big tech enterprises. The geopolitics of the Digital Economy and the competition of the digital-industrial complexes, affects both relations and could be a bargaining field.

All these sectors are representatives of what Galvão and Leme (2024) define as areas of complementarity for a pragmatic convergence. From June till November 2024, this convergence, with the Vice-President’s Geraldo Alckmin visit to China, and the Chinese President visit to Brazil for the G-20 Summit, represented a qualitative leap in the relation. There was the establishment of “A Community of Shared Future for a More Just World and a Sustainable Planet” (BRASIL 2024) and a set of thirty-nine deals was closed. We are not going to list of all them, but it is worth mentioning that these projects had several priorities linked to the reindustrialization and modernization plans in Brazil, scientific, technological and innovation cooperation, added to ongoing investments in commodities and infrastructure¹⁴. This strengthening of

¹³ One of the events that better exemplifies the Chinese occupation of US spaces in Brazil was the installation of the BYD plant, an enterprise of electric vehicles in Bahia, a local that was once explored by the American multinational Ford.

¹⁴ Amongst the main deals are the “Cooperation Plan between the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of the People’s Republic of China for establishing

relations coincided with the fifty years of Sino-Brazilian bilateral relations, and their goals were exactly these ones, the creation of a new deeper phase of the partnership¹⁵.

Lula's first two years can be defined as positive in recovering the rhetoric of foreign policy and for the promotion of multilateral initiatives. On the other hand, the concrete success needs to be qualified, due to the limitations faced in some issues (South America) and the advance of others (China). In the 21st century, China has become a structural component of foreign policy. At the same time, relations with the US presented an inertial trend. The Brazilian position was not the one of a triangular bargain, but one of occupying spaces due to the US power vacuum. At the end of this period, this situation significantly changed because of the transformation of foreign policy structural elements (US-China-Hegemonic Transition), and of conjunctural realities (the Republican Donald J. Trump's election in November 2024).

Defensive Action, Adaptation and Pragmatism (2025-2026)

Trump's return to the White House in January 2025, a conjunctural event, ignited a process of acceleration of phenomenon that changed the scenario in which Brazilian foreign policy (and all countries for that matter) operated. Although general principles and priorities of Lula's government might be the same, structural and conjunctural dynamics offer distinct pressures in this two-year period. Moreover, a period that represents the final two years of Lula's third presidential mandate, with the deepening of electoral disputes and polarization. The need for a defensive action and adaptation to a context that is more and more adverse is real, as the period overlaps with the two first years of Trump's 2.0 mandate, which is characterized by an offensive.

The multilateralism arena was one of the most affected in the International Relations planning. As argued, Brazil focuses its efforts on several multilateral negotiating processes. With Trump's return to power, multilateral processes were affected as a whole. This action resembles the first mandate of the Republican President from 2017 till 2020, that led to US withdrawal from some organizations and international regimes, whereas reframing and exercising pressures on allies and institutions. This pattern repeated itself: the suspension of US participation in the World Health

synergies between the Growth Acceleration Program, the New Industry Brazil Plan, the Ecological Transformation Plan, the South American Integration Routes Program, and the Belt and Road Initiative". This and other agreements can be accessed at: BRASIL 2024.

¹⁵ For a collection regarding the fiftieth anniversary, see Castro e Loureiro 2024.

Organization and the Paris Agreement, the reassessment of NATO and making use of the UN as a political instrument.

On the other hand, considering the alliances and organizations in which the US is not participating show a counterhegemonic reaction. Critics of the BRICS Plus, mostly to de-dollarization efforts and coalitions for development are some issues that could be mentioned. The multilateral arena as a whole and the variable geometry coalitions are affected by an adverse agenda.

According to Guimarães (2025b), Trump's return to the White House demanded, for Brazilian diplomacy, the need to contain and engage US actions around five axes: geopolitics, trade, institutional/elections, regional and technology/infrastructure. For this article, a three-axis division will be applied (already present in Pecequilo 2025b): geopolitics (geopolitics and regional), geoeconomics (trade, technology and infrastructure) and geocultural (institutional and elections). In the 2025-2026 period, Brazil-US relations may be divided into four phases¹⁶: January-July, August-September, September-December and January-March.

Considering the first phase, January-July, Brazil-US relations experienced a pattern of normalcy, even with the launch of the trade war in April (*Liberation Day*). Trump's trade war was based on the International Emergency Economic Powers Act of 1977 (IEEPA), a mechanism created in the 1970s decade still. The trade issue, similar to the migration one, was declared a national emergency, which allows the use of exceptional measures. Its roots are in Super 301 Law, which allows US unilateral actions against partners that, in their view, are exercising unfair trade practices.

In the trade war field, the additional tariff applied to Latin America and Brazil was 10%. So, Brazilian commodities exports to the US were preserved (bovine meat, orange juice, fish, oilseeds, among others) and machinery components. Brazil is one of the countries with which the US has a trade surplus. From a logical point of view, the application of higher tariffs would not make sense as it would affect food prices and US inflation.

This situation allowed a certain accommodation from the Brazilian government in the geoeconomics axis. However, July's month started to show signs of a deterioration of the relationship. The juxtaposition of geopolitics-geoeconomics, Trump's pressures against de-dollarization, a BRICS Plus goal, increased. Even though, they were mostly rhetorical, the pressures

¹⁶ This timeline was already presented in Pecequilo 2025b and is enlarged in this article. Although each phase may look short, this temporal division is justified due to changes in US policy.

indicated that the US would not tolerate any initiative that could harm the US dollar. On the geocultural field, the arrest of former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and other people condemned by the acts of January 8th, 2023, led to a new rearrangement of far-right forces in both nations.

One of Trump's first indication that the pressures on Brazil were about to increase happened when the Magnitsky Law¹⁷ was directed towards Brazilian authorities such as the Minister of the Federal Supreme Court Alexandre Moraes and the Minister of Health Alexandre Padilha. The Law establishes that US Visas would be suspended, banning travels to the country due to corruption acts, authoritarianism and violation of human rights. Even though the Brazilian far-right presented these actions as an answer to its request for an intervention in Lula's government, there was an additional motive that was even more relevant: to ban the attempt to impose regulations on US technological companies (big techs).

The next phase, August-September, began under the shadow of this escalation and was only finished after the brief encounter of Presidents Lula and Trump at the United Nations General Assembly on September 23rd, 2025. The most relevant issue of the period was the imposition of the 50% tariff on Brazilian products exported to the US, including food commodities. Following the same logic applied to other countries such as India (and even allies as Japan and South Korea), the US government was using its tariff measures as a political pressure instrument.

For the Brazilian far-right, tariffs were essential to reignite a cycle of mobilization. The offensive stance of party leaders and of the ones holding public office against Lula's government and pro-US alignment were the symbol of this period. Episodes such as the "cap war" were used as a tool for social media engagement: as the Make America Great Again (MAGA) red caps were in favour of concessions and an alignment to Trump's positions, the blue caps with the "Brazil belongs to the Brazilians" writing were preaching autonomy.

Apart from these mediatic smokescreens, the caps are representative of development and international relations models. As they argued in favour of a subordinate position to the US, generating panic, the alignment sponsors were representative of economic interest groups that were seeking to yield to Trump's pressures. Lula's government kept a balanced position, going from a defensive action, to one of accommodation and pragmatism, focusing on Brazilian sovereignty and diplomatic negotiation. This move was positive for

¹⁷ The Magnitsky Law was created by former President Barack Obama in 2012 as a tool of US unilateral pressure towards other nations' authorities that were, according to their assessment, practicing corruption acts and rights violations (see BBC 2025, for further development).

Lula, both inside and outside the country. After the seconds-long Lula-Trump encounter at the UN's Assembly General opening, a change of path came through.

The meeting marks the beginning of the third phase of bilateral relations, September-December. Brazil remained coherent and showed strength, which is respected by Trump, and preserved talks with national and US productive sectors. These talks, as well as US inflationary pressures, led to the cut on commodities tariffs (meat and orange juice) mostly, and the suspension of the Magnitsky Law. Brazilian industrial sectors and some commodities such as fish and fruits were not benefited by significant cuts at that time. In October 2025, Lula and Trump met briefly one more time. During this meeting, the commitment for a new presidential meeting for 2026, that remains with no date. At the same time, trade talks remained under the command of the Vice-President and MDIC Alckmin to include more Brazilian products on the list of those exempted from fees.

The last event of this cycle happened in December, when the US launched the National Security Council, NSS-2025, from now on. Added to the consolidation of MAGA, America First and Peace Through Strength principles, the NSS-2025 established a rebalancing of US priorities. This rebalancing had direct impacts for Brazil and China, as it envisions the Western Hemisphere as US interest "first priority", bringing the Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. The Americas, followed by Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa, signalling US global hegemonic projection. But mainly, the US warned the US vacuum that prevailed in the Western Hemisphere in previous decades would not be tolerated. Therefore,

After years of neglect, the United States will reassert and enforce the Monroe Doctrine to restore American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere, and to protect our homeland and our access to key geographies throughout the region. We will deny non-Hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or other threatening capabilities, or to own or control strategically vital assets, in our Hemisphere. This "Trump Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine is a common-sense and potent restoration of American power and priorities, consistent with American security interests. Our goals for the Western Hemisphere can be summarized as "Enlist and Expand." We will *enlist* established friends in the Hemisphere to control migration, stop drug flows, and strengthen stability and security on land and sea. We will expand by cultivating and strengthening new partners while bolstering our own nation's appeal as the Hemisphere's economic and security partner of choice (The White House 2025, 15-16, italics from the original).

During his first mandate, Trump had already begun this regional counterhegemonic reaction with projects such as Growth in the Americas. This project tried to answer hemispheric demands for investments and development, through public-private partnerships. However, there were no advances from the geoeconomic point of view, as the US has less regional projection capacity than China, due to the resources destined for the hemisphere and the already consolidated Chinese influence.

Within the January-March framework, January began with the first episode linked to the Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in Venezuela, with a unilateral operation for ousting President Nicolás Maduro on day three. A new military intervention, in the Middle East, happened on February 28th, in Iran. Trump was not shy to mention the possibility of an intervention in Cuba, in which the humanitarian crisis was aggravating, and other nations such as Nicaragua and Yemen. There is an acceleration of processes, and the enlargement of US actions with global impacts. A few months before these military operations Trump was presenting himself as a potential candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, as responsible for peace processes and negotiations.

In 2026, the geopolitical peace through strength exercise is prevailing. Not only Trump enhanced the military features of foreign policy, as he is making these efforts in a condition of lower domestic popularity and social and institutional pressures. At this point, the US is enduring the effects of domestic budget cuts (public services paralysis, the lay-off of public servants, healthcare cuts for low income, elderly and children), as it enlarges its foreign operations, and inflation remains high (with a potential to get even worse due to the energy and food crises). Another event that could be mentioned was the US Supreme Court reversal of tariffs in February 2026. The Supreme Court considered IEEP illegal, but until the end of this article, the US government continues to impose tariffs to its partners, using other decision-making tools.

Considering MAGA, an event that must be mentioned, as Trump's popularity is falling, was the *Conservative Political Action Conference* (CPAC) meeting that exposed MAGA fragmentations and the search for new leadership envisioning 2028 (among them, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and the Vice-President J.D. Vance) and the far-right movements in other nations. In this sense, it should be mentioned the participation of Flavio Bolsonaro, the candidate for the Brazilian presidency that, in his speech during the convention, accused Biden's US of interfering in the 2022 elections, and stressed the importance that Trump's government would act, institutionally, in Brazil, during the 2026 election (Alves 2026).

Summing up, the brief 2025-2026 period shows an ideal type of the

intersection of geopolitical, geoeconomic and geocultural components of Brazil-US relations. How do these set of Trump's 2.0 circumstances and the rendering of the Corollary affect Brazil-China bilateral relations?

Making a conjunctural and short-term analysis, officially, the commitments assumed by both countries in their bilateral relations remain unchanged. Nevertheless, a difference must be pointed out: although there are no setbacks on bilateral agendas, and, one may add, multilateral ones, between Brazil-China, there is a foreign pressure that affects both nations in a distinct way due to their vulnerability level. As one considers events such as the intervention in Iran, for instance, Brazil's resistance to the crisis is lower than China's.

However, the concern with Trump's 2.0 impacts is not limited to the macro level in which the partnership operates, as the global instabilities that affect China may redirect its priorities to its geographic region, leading to a lesser projection in Latin America. In the micro level this could reduce investments and actions in Brazil, and the country could also be targeted in the Sino-American disputes. In this field one issue needs to be taken into account: the access to Brazilian critical mineral and rare earth elements, and its exploration by foreign companies. Already a focus of the Sino-American conflicts that involves Brazil as mentioned, the scenario is even more complex due to the new policies announced by the White House.

Amongst them, in February 2026, Trump launched "Project Vault" (The White House 2026). The goal of this project is to stock critical minerals and rare earths for US usage by any means necessary, preserving its autonomy. Comparing Brazil, China and the US, the US is the country with the highest vulnerability in the sector, due to the scarcity of its reserves, China is the largest owner and producer, and Brazil owns the resources but is unable to fully explore their potential. In December 2017, during Trump's first mandate, a draft of this project was presented in the "Executive Order 13817, *A Federal Strategy to Ensure Secure and Reliable Supplies of Critical Minerals*".

On the Brazilian side, the Law Project 4404/2025 for the creation of the National Policy on Critical and Strategic Minerals (PNMCE) is still being discussed in the Legislative, and several other regulations regarding these resources. As one of the greatest owners of these reserves, this legal vacuum calls attention. One of the most updated documents in the country is the Law no. 10567 (2021), but so far there is few progresses in the regulation of the sector¹⁸. This is a most pressing issue and the lack of a sovereign legislation

¹⁸ Due to this vacuum, and the political clashes in Brazil, state governments such as Goiás, had held direct talks with the US for agreements in this sector, even though it is a prerogative of the federal level. The deal was closed but would not hold legal validity (Xavier 2026).

in Brazil shows the concrete difficulties for the country, in order to exercise its bargain with its main partners.

Final Thoughts

The period of January 2023 until March 2026, can be defined as one of ambiguous autonomy. Even though it announced the reproduction of an autonomy within dependence, Lula's 3 foreign policy endured several internal and external obstacles that did not help the bargaining practice. Nevertheless, in particular due to the increase of China's presence in Brazil, there were Brazilian resource power gains, despite US vacuums and pressures. The milestone of the Integration Routes projects, the New Industry Brazil initiative, and the National Science and Technology Strategy, as well as the agreements signed by Brazil and China during this period (and with other BRICS Plus) represented the existence of qualitative advances. If these advances would be sustained due to the nearness of a new presidential election cycle in 2026 is a question mark.

Another question refers to the internal management capacity and the continuity of State's planning in a society polarized by social-economic models. US structural influence in Brazilian foreign policy is complex, as it involves, as analysed, geopolitical, geoeconomic and geocultural elements. National projections must also take into account multilateralism imbalances, that demand more pragmatic and innovative South-South alliances, the dominance of interstate relations and potential breakthroughs generated by the Sino-American hegemonic transition.

The situation can become even more critical in 2027, as Trump 2.0 will be facing mid-term elections in November 2026. Since 2025, one of Trump's assets is the Republican majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate: the loss of one of these two chambers, or of both, may put his political project in check. If there is some strategic clarity in Trump's 2025-2026 actions, within the boundaries of the "predictable unpredictability", and the unilateral factors, interstate politics, and peace through strength, the reversal of his favourable internal conditions can change this stance. The acceleration of the 2028 US presidential race is also a variable to consider.

For Brazil, internal and external vulnerabilities, domestic polarizations and models' oscillations can lead to a new low-profile interregnum. One cannot rule out, considering the structural elements described in the text, and the conjunctural dynamics, that the combination of geopolitical, geoeconomic and geocultural variables, leads to a rapprochement with the US and a new

economical instrumentalization of Sino-Brazilian relations. In the overlapping of a new Brazilian government with different options than the ones of Lula 3, to the last half of Trump 2.0 mandate, the hypotheses of the revival of an “alignment with no reward” (Moura 2021) should be considered. More than ambiguity, the greatest risk is one of dependence, without autonomy.

References

- Alves, Giovana. 2026. “Nos EUA, Flávio Bolsonaro apela por pressão sobre eleições no Brasil”. *Metrópoles*, March 28. <https://www.metropoles.com/brasil/nos-eua-flavio-bolsonaro-apela-por-pressao-sobre-eleicoes-no-brasil>.
- Amorim, Celso. 2015. *Têrã, Ramalá e Doha- memórias da política externa ativa e ativa*. Benvirá.
- Bastos, Paulo Z., and Celso Hiratuka. 2020. “The foreign economic policy of Dilma Rousseff’s government and the limits of dependency.” *Latin American Perspectives* 47 (2): 25-46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X19894590>.
- BBC. 2025. “O que é a Lei Global Magnitsky, que EUA usaram contra Alexandre de Moraes”. *BBC*, December 12. <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/cpvdd77og2ko>.
- Brasil. 2024. *DECLARAÇÃO CONJUNTA ENTRE A REPÚBLICA FEDERATIVA DO BRASIL E A REPÚBLICA POPULAR DA CHINA SOBRE A FORMAÇÃO CONJUNTA DA COMUNIDADE DE FUTURO COMPARTILHADO BRASIL-CHINA POR UM MUNDO MAIS JUSTO E UM PLANETA MAIS SUSTENTÁVEL*. Accessed March 27, 2025. https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/canais_atendimento/imprensa/notas-a-imprensa/declaracao-conjunta-sobre-a-formacao-conjunta-da-comunidade-de-futuro-compartilhado-brasil-china-por-um-mundo-mais-justo-e-um-planeta-mais-sustentavel.
- Brasil. 2024. *MINISTÉRIO DAS RELAÇÕES EXTERIORES*. Notas à Imprensa. Accessed January 25, 2025. https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/canais_atendimento/imprensa/notas-a-imprensa/atos-adotados-por-ocasio-da-visita-de-estado-ao-brasil-do-presidente-da-china-xi-jinping-2013-20-de-novembro-de-2024-1.
- Brasil. 2021. “Decreto no. 10.567 de 24 de March de 2021”. *Presidência da República*. Secretaria-Geral. Subchefia para Assuntos Jurídicos. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_Ato2019-2022/2021/

- Decreto/D10657.htm.
- BRICS. 2025. *Brasil 2025*. <https://brics.br/pt-br/sobre-o-brics>.
- Cariello, Túlio. 2024. “Investimentos chineses no Brasil 2024-reindustrialização e transição energética”. *CEBC*. <https://www.cebc.org.br/>.
- Casarões, Guilherme. 2019. “Eleições, política externa e os desafios do novo governo brasileiro”. *Pensamiento Proprio* 49-50: 231-254
- Casarões, Guilherme Stolle Paixão and Deborah Barros Leal Farias. 2021. “Brazilian Foreign Policy under Jair Bolsonaro: Far-Right Populism and the Rejection of the Liberal International Order”. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 35 (5): 741–61. doi:10.1080/09557571.2021.1981248.
- Castro, Ana C., Marcia Loureiro, eds. 2024. *Brasil e China 50 anos: trajetória e perspectivas*. FUNAG.
- Costa, Hugo Bras Martins da and Rubens de Siqueira Duarte. 2023. “Global South versus Geopolitical South: A Debate on the Analytical Relevance of the Concepts”. *AUSTRAL: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations* 12 (24). <https://doi.org/10.22456/2238-6912.132863>
- Galvão, Marcos e Rafael Leme. 2024. “Brasil e China: convergência pragmática, estabilidade e progresso constante”. *Carta Brasil-China*. Edição Especial. Agosto 2024. p. 5-8. Available at: <https://www.cebc.org.br/2024/08/15/edicao-especial-50-anos-de-relacoes-brasil-china/>. Accessed 26 march. 2026.
- Guimarães, Feliciano de Sá. 2025. “Autonomia pela reconstrução: a política externa do governo Lula III”. *Cadernos IPRI*. DOI: 10.61623/cpe.vi11i16.a07
- Guimarães, Feliciano de Sá. 2025b. “Contain and Engage: How Brazil Should Deal with Trump 2.0.” *CEBRI-Journal* 4 (14): 16-33. <https://doi.org/10.54827/issn27647897.cebri2025.14.02.01.16-33.pt>
- Hirst, Monica. 2022. “Emerging powers and peace negotiations: The experience of Brazil in the nuclear talks with Iran”. *AUSTRAL: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations* 8 (15). <https://doi.org/10.22456/2238-6912.91944>
- Hirst, Monica. 2025. “Brasil-Estados Unidos: um bilateralismo político em tempos de transição mundial”. In *As relações Brasil-Estados Unidos no século XXI*, edited by Monica Hirst and Lia Valls Pereira. FUNAG.
- Milan, Marcelo. 2016. “Restauração oligárquica e retomada neoliberal plena:

- um ensaio sobre as origens das crises gêmeas e do golpe de Estado de 2016 no Brasil”. *AUSTRAL: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations* 5 (9). <https://doi.org/10.22456/2238-6912.66485>
- Moura, Gerson. 1980. *Autonomia na dependência: a política externa brasileira de 1935 a 1942*. Nova Fronteira.
- Moura, Gerson. 2021. *O alinhamento sem recompensa*. Edusp. <https://www.edusp.com.br/livros/alinhamento-sem-recompensa/>.
- Pecequilo, Cristina S. e Francisco Luiz Marzinotto Jr. 2024. “O complexo industrial-digital: inserção do Brasil no ecossistema sio-estadunidense”. *Revista Tempo do Mundo* 36: 253-282
- Pecequilo, C. S. 2021. “Brazilian foreign policy: from the combined to the unbalanced axis (2003/2021)”. *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 64 (1): e011. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-732920210011>.
- Pecequilo, Cristina S. 2025. *O Brasil Entre Dois Mundos- Os Estados Unidos e a China*. Edições 70/Altabooks.
- Pecequilo, Cristina S. 2025. “Poder, Pragmatismo e Transformação”. *CEBRI Revista* 4 (16). <https://cebri.org/revista/br/artigo/240/poder-pragmatismo-e-transformacao>.
- Pereira, Lia Valls. 2025 “As relações comerciais Brasil-Estados Unidos no século XXI”. In *As relações Brasil-Estados Unidos no século XXI*, edited by Monica Hirst and Lia Valls Pereira. FUNAG.
- Pinheiro, Leticia.; Maria Regina. S. de Lima. 2018. “Between autonomy and dependency: the place of agency in Brazilian foreign policy”. *Brazilian Political Science Review* 12 (3): e0003- 1/22
- The White House. 2025. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.
- The White House. 2026. *Introducing Project Vault, a critical mineral stockpile for American businesses*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/videos/introducing-project-vault-a-critical-mineral-stockpile-for-american-businesses-%F0%9F%92%8E%F0%9F%87%BA%F0%9F%87%B8/>.
- Trump, Donald J. 2017. “Executive Order 13817, A Federal Strategy To Ensure Secure And Reliable Supplies Of Critical Minerals”. *The American Presidency Project*, December 20. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-13817-federal-strategy-ensure-secure-and-reliable-supplies-critical>.
- Vigevani, Tullo e Gabriel Cepaluni. 2007. “A política externa de Lula da Silva:

a autonomia pela diversificação”. *Contexto Internacional* 29 (2).

Visentini, Paulo Fagundes. 2013. *A projeção internacional do Brasil: 1930 a 2012*. Elsevier.

Visentini, Paulo Fagundes. 2025. “A Multipolaridade Instável: construindo um conceito da transição sistêmica e suas alianças fluídas”. *Revista de Segurança, Desenvolvimento e Defesa* 2 (1): 173-183.

Xavier, Camila. 2026. “O que dizem diplomatas sobre Caiado, Trump e as terras raras”. *Metropoles*, March 23. <https://www.metropoles.com/colunas/milena-teixeira/o-que-dizem-diplomatas-sobre-caiado-trump-e-as-terras-raras>.

Xing, Li, ed. 2019. *Mapping China's One Belt, One Road Initiative*. Palgrave MacMillan.

ABSTRACT

In Brazilian foreign policy history, the concept of autonomy within dependence, created by Gerson Moura (1980), refers to the bargaining between the US and the Germany before the Second World War, during the Getúlio Vargas government (1930-1945). During the hegemonic transition Brazil chose to negotiate with the two competing poles, gaining advantages for its national project of development. The goal of this text is to analyse whether the actions of Lula 3 whereas facing the United States and China, represent a new autonomy within dependence in the context of the 21st century, by emphasizing a pragmatic triangulation, or if the current domestic and foreign conditions, lead to the restructuring of this same dependence without autonomy.

KEYWORDS

Brazilian Foreign Policy, Brazil-China Bilateral Relations, Brazil-US Bilateral Relations

Received on April 29, 2026

Accepted on May 30, 2026

THE DIVERSIFICATION OF BRAZIL'S DEFENCE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN 2023 AND 2025

Plinio Cardoso¹

Marianne Wiesebron²

This article seeks to identify the Brazilian government's initiatives to diversify defence partnerships between 2023 and 2025 (Lula's third term). It begins with an overview of the agreements concluded in previous years to provide a brief context. The focus of this study is to identify, in official sources and in specialised press, agreements in the sector that took place during the aforementioned period, even where the commercial deal has no immediate impact on Brazilian foreign policy. Particular emphasis is given to the failed attempt to secure a Chinese partner for Avibras in 2024. Furthermore, this study catalogues and links these initiatives to the much-publicised efforts to revitalise the defence industry and to the drive to diversify suppliers and technological partners.

Brazil is developing various defence partnership projects with nations across all continents. The activities resulting from the implementation of these agreements are carried out directly by each branch of the Armed Forces – given the distinct decision-making autonomy each branch wields in procurement of weapons systems – but also by the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs, the latter acting through the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (*Agência Brasileira de Cooperação*, ABC).

Notable among the defence cooperation initiatives are the following projects: the training of the Namibian Navy; the Brazilian Aeronautical Technical Mission (*Missão Técnica Aeronáutica Brasileira*, MTAB) in Paraguay, which has been running since 1982; the agreement with Cape Verde, which includes a Brazilian naval mission in that country; the donation of uniforms to the Cape Verdean Coastguard and the conduct of joint exercises; and partnerships with neighbouring Argentina, covering the cyber defence sector,

¹ Leiden University. Leiden, Netherlands. E-mail: plinio.brazil@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0003-1393-7401.

² Leiden University. Leiden, Netherlands. E-mail: marianne.wiesebron@skynet.be.

support for the Brazilian operation in Antarctica and participation in the Embraer KC-390 Millennium transport aircraft project (Brasil 2024a).

In addition to these better-known agreements, Brazil has also sought partners further afield from its strategic neighbourhood. For example, the Brazilian Air Force began negotiations with Ukraine in 2003 to launch the Cyclone-4 rocket, an unsuccessful project that was eventually terminated in 2015 (Almeida Filho 2025, 287–301). Brazil acquired 12 MI-35 attack helicopters from Russia, which have since been decommissioned and resold, and also considered the acquisition of air defence systems from that country (Padilha 2017). It is worth mentioning the partnership with the so-called Visegrád Group (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia), which covers Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence (CBRN), cyber defence and includes the Czech Republic's participation in the development of the KC-390 Millennium transport aircraft. The latest development is the rapprochement for the establishment of closer ties with Poland.

Poland. In December 2025, Embraer signed a memorandum of understanding with the Polish state-owned company PGZ (Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa S.A.) for industrial cooperation involving the transfer of technology relating to the KC-390 Millennium aircraft (Cardoso 2025). Poland's interest in this aircraft must be understood in the context of the Russian occupation of Crimea since 2014. Since 2022, when Russian troops reached areas near Kyiv, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) has been pressing for increased defence spending among its member states. The adoption of standardisation and the sharing of reliable suppliers are some of the hallmarks of the transatlantic alliance. In this regard, it is worth noting that Portugal, also a NATO member, is the largest international partner in the KC-390 Millennium aircraft development programme.

Portugal. In October 2023, the first of the five KC-390 Millennium aircraft contracted by the Portuguese Air Force in 2019 entered service. In Europe, in addition to Portugal and Poland, Hungary has had a KC-390 Millennium aircraft in service since 2024. Also, within the NATO framework, it is worth noting that the Netherlands, Austria and the Czech Republic have already expressed an interest in operating the Brazilian aircraft (Embraer 2023). This means there is potential to provide services arising from its use, including maintenance, training, the supply of parts and systems, and new acquisitions.

The Portuguese case illustrates this well and demonstrates the internationalisation of strategic Brazilian companies, which has been encouraged under the governments of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT). Embraer won the tender for the privatisation of the

Portuguese state-owned company OGMA in 2004 (Lula's first term), first becoming a shareholder and then the controlling shareholder in 2012 (Dilma's government). In Embraer's case, although the Brazilian government privatised the company, it still retains the power to veto foreign control over the company's management (golden share), a provision the Bolsonaro government attempted to overturn to allow its acquisition by the US firm Boeing.

The tests carried out by OGMA to prepare the KC-390 Millennium aircraft for entry into service have helped to build the capacity of the Portuguese aerospace industry. In this regard, the April 2023 agreement enabled OGMA to produce a NATO-standard version of the A-29 Super Tucano aircraft, which is already in use by 16 countries (TV Brasil 2023). In addition to President Lula, the signing ceremony was also attended by the then Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa, who currently chairs the European Council and, as such, wields some influence over the European Union's decisions on security and foreign policy. Furthermore, in 2025, the Portuguese government contracted the purchase of a sixth aircraft and expressed interest in acquiring up to ten additional KC-390 Millennium aircraft to offer to other countries, notably NATO members, under a business model to be brokered by the Portuguese (Força Aérea Portuguesa 2025).

This successful partnership with Portugal is an example of how diplomatic relations can lead to synergy within the defence industry and institutions. Portugal represents an opportunity for Embraer to expand into the buoyant NATO market. Furthermore, this partnership enables the Brazilian Air Force to find in Portugal a reliable logistics hub for transatlantic air operations, which has proved vital from vaccine transport operations during the COVID-19 pandemic to, more recently, the repatriation of Brazilian nationals. Portugal's strategic location was evident, for example, in October 2024, when the Brazilian Air Force managed to evacuate 1,105 Brazilians from the conflict zone in Lebanon in just eight days, thanks to the possibility of refuelling in Lisbon (Agência Força Aérea 2024).

Although Brazil's efforts to diversify its defence trade relations are clear – including initiatives aimed at self-sufficiency – the country generally remains dependent on the supply of military equipment and weapons systems from NATO members. This is the case, for example, with the procurement of frigates, submarines and combat aircraft. The Tamandaré-class Frigate Programme, launched in 2017 and currently in full development, is led by the German company Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems (tkMS).

The submarine modernization programme, for instance, is being carried out in partnership with the French firm Naval Group and, with the

technology transfer, includes construction in Brazil. And the fighter aircraft modernisation programme, which has been under development since 2015 and aims to replace the US-made F-5s with F-39 Gripen aircraft, is being carried out in partnership with the Swedish firm Saab — with the caveat that Sweden only became a member of NATO in 2024. Despite this reliance on NATO member states, the mentioned programmes share the common feature of technology transfer to the Brazilian Armed Forces and Brazilian companies (Campos 2026).

Such partnerships stem from Brazil's interest in collaborating with highly skilled defence industries, such as those found in France, Germany and Sweden. This rapprochement with these countries could enable the Brazilian defence industry to supply NATO countries, whose defence spending has been rising, notably following the Russian siege of Kyiv in 2022. Furthermore, NATO members, bowing to pressure from Trump, have agreed to increase spending on security and defence by 2025 to 1.5 per cent and 3.5 per cent of gross domestic product, respectively, by 2035 (NATO 2025). This could open up a market for Brazilian products and services. The following section outlines partnerships with non-NATO countries between 2023 and 2025.

United Arab Emirates. The most significant agreement to diversify defence partnerships was signed in 2023 with the EDGE Group. Founded in 2019, EDGE is a conglomerate of companies controlled by the government of the United Arab Emirates, which has a strategy of strong expansion in the global defence market. In April of that year, the Brazilian Navy and the EDGE Group signed an agreement to accelerate the development of the National Surface-to-Surface Anti-Ship Missile (*Míssil Antinavio Nacional de Superfície*, MANSUP). The significance of the agreement stems from the future industrial-scale production of this missile, which will equip the four new Tamandaré-class frigates (Agência Marinha de Notícias 2023). That same month, the EDGE Group opened an office in Brasília and, since then, has been acquiring Brazilian companies and announcing investments in Brazil totalling US\$3 billion (CNN Brasil 2026).

Also in 2023, EDGE acquired a 50 per cent stake in SIATT (formerly Mectron), a Brazilian company specialised in the production of anti-ship missiles, which is based in São José dos Campos. This deal enabled EDGE not only to gain access to the technologies developed for the MANSUP by Brazilian engineers – a missile that could be exported to Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America – but also to establish a reliable supplier of missiles for its parent company. An example of this was EDGE brokering a US\$300 million deal for SIATT missiles to the government of the United Arab Emirates in 2024, which enabled that Brazilian company to export for the

first time (Poder Naval 2024; EDGE Group 2025).

Still in 2024, EDGE acquired a controlling stake in Condor, a manufacturer of non-lethal weapons with customers in over 80 countries (Infomoney 2026). Since then, the Abu Dhabi-based company has expressed interest in developing radar systems in Brazil in partnership with the Spanish firm Indra, as well as cyber defence solutions for the Brazilian Navy (Aeroin 2026; EDGE Group 2026). It is important to emphasise that interest in Brazil stems not only from its specialist engineers, its existing industrial capacity and the availability of raw materials, but also from the fact that the country combines all these factors in a region far removed from armed conflicts, given the serious consequences of a blockade in the Middle East, as seen in the current conflict between the US and Israel on one side and Iran on the other.

Benin. In 2023, Brazil and Benin signed an international cooperation treaty, which was approved by the Senate in December 2025. The agreement provides for joint military education and training projects, the conduct of joint exercises, the exchange of strategic information, and cooperation regarding defence materials, equipment and services. The agreement also includes the exchange of methods and procedures used in security and defence operations, particularly in international peacekeeping missions, as well as the sharing of knowledge in science and technology (Senate Agency 2025).

Saudi Arabia. In 2024, the Vice-President and Minister of Development, Industry, Trade and Services, Geraldo Alckmin, and the Saudi Arabian Minister of Defence, Prince Khalid bin Salman, signed a defence cooperation agreement in Riyadh. The partnership provides for cooperation in 11 strategic areas: the defence industry (mission 6 of the *Nova Indústria Brasil*, 'New Industry Brazil' plan); the exchange of information; technology transfer; the financing of military systems; joint military training; the purchase and sale of equipment; research, development and studies on defence projects; emergency and crisis management; military health services; and logistical support. This agreement updates and strengthens the commitment established by the 1984 Protocol on Industrial-Military Cooperation between Brazil and Saudi Arabia. The new agreement will be valid for five years, renewable for the same period, and provides for the establishment of a Joint Military Committee, to be led by the defence ministers of both countries (Brazil 2024b).

India. In October 2025, Vice-President Geraldo Alckmin and Defence Minister José Múcio met with the Indian Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, in New Delhi. This high-level meeting had been preceded by the first edition of the Brazil–India Political–Military Dialogue (2+2 Mechanism), which had also taken place in the Indian capital in 2024 (the second edition took place in Brasília in 2025). These initiatives give concrete form to the decision by

President Lula and the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, to deepen cooperation in this sector. As a result, commanders of the Armed Forces of both countries have established arrangements for cooperation in military training and the maintenance of the French Scorpène-class submarines, which are in service with both navies (Brazil 2025). This rapprochement represents a significant step forward in the diversification of Brazil's military partners and highlights the potential of this partnership, given the stature of these nations. It is worth recalling that in 2015 the US Naval War College organised the 'Regional Maritime Cooperation' workshop for allied navies at the Brazilian Naval War College. Thus, a decade separates these events, marking a shift from US mediation towards an increasingly strengthened relationship between Brazil and India.

In this regard, the focus of this cooperation will be on military procurement, with potential benefits for both countries' industrial bases. India has already expressed an interest in acquiring six Embraer E-145 aircraft for conversion into early warning and air traffic control platforms. It is worth noting that Embraer also aims to sell the KC-390 Millennium multi-mission aircraft to India, including the prospect of co-production with the Indian company Mahindra Systems. It has therefore announced that it will open a regional office in New Delhi. There is, therefore, scope for industrial partnerships, technology transfer and the co-production of equipment, particularly in the areas of airborne systems, radars, munitions and armoured vehicles (Brazil 2025).

The decision to forge closer ties with India is underpinned by 77 years of diplomatic relations. Since 2006, Brazil and India have maintained a 'strategic partnership' and have cooperated closely in forums such as the BRICS, the G20 and IBSA (a forum for trilateral dialogue and cooperation between India, Brazil and South Africa). It should also be noted that the navies of IBSA have, since 2008, periodically conducted the IBSAMAR naval exercise to strengthen interoperability and maritime security, as well as to simulate combat and air-sea operations between the three countries.

It is worth noting the strategic importance of South Africa in relation to the Cape maritime route, one of the main global alternatives to the Suez Canal. In this regard, the South African Navy's participation in the 'Will for Peace' naval exercise, which took place in January 2026, is particularly noteworthy. Organised by China, Russia and Iran, this operation aims to protect trade routes and promote interoperability between navies within the BRICS+ framework at a time of heightened geopolitical tension following US attacks on Iran. It should be noted that Brazil is participating in the manoeuvres solely as an observer, a stance also adopted by Indonesia and

Ethiopia (Poder Naval 2026).

The Indian example demonstrates how diversifying partners could reduce Brazil's dependence, particularly at a time of escalating investment in defence products. Furthermore, it strengthens cooperation with partners in the Global South. In this regard, it is important for Brazil to seek partners who share the "same ambition to develop an autonomous defence capability, anchored in mutual trust and the pursuit of indigenous technological solutions", in the words of Vice-President Geraldo Alckmin (Brazil 2025).

South Korea. In October 2025, Brazil and South Korea signed a memorandum of understanding on technological cooperation, knowledge transfer and the co-development of defence systems. The agreement covers the fields of aviation, artillery, communications and cyber security. Furthermore, it provides for joint studies on propulsion systems, radars and next-generation military vehicles. Whilst South Korea seeks to expand its exports of defence products, Brazil is seeking to diversify its suppliers to reduce its dependence on NATO member states.

This agreement could lead to the joint production of drones, armoured vehicles and medium-range missile systems, as well as training and exchange programmes between the Armed Forces of the two countries. South Korea has already expressed interest in acquiring Embraer KC-390 Millennium aircraft. Furthermore, the Asian country possesses air defence technologies sought by the Brazilian Army, such as AESA radars, air defence missile systems and hybrid propulsion. The first technical meeting to implement this agreement is still expected to take place in 2026, focusing on systems interoperability and the training of officers (Budeguer 2025).

The alignment with the US that hinders diversification

During the tariff crackdown imposed by Trump against Brazil in 2025, it is speculated that the Lula government considered blocking the purchase of military equipment from the US, just as it had done against Israel in the face of the genocidal offensive in Gaza. Lula would thereby seek to replace the dependence on the US with equipment from China, Europe and Russia. However, despite the dire state of bilateral relations – characterised not so much by provocations against President Lula as by the absence of a US ambassador to the country – military exercises and the fulfilment of contracts have been ensured by the Armed Forces, even though this runs counter to the country's foreign policy (Bonin 2025).

One example illustrates this disconnection between foreign policy

and the autonomy of the Brazilian military in overseas procurement. Back in 2024, despite the expected upheavals on the international political scene resulting from Trump's return to the White House, a delegation from the Brazilian Army travelled to Washington to negotiate the purchase of twenty Black Hawk helicopters, as well as spare parts, training and Javelin missiles. This case illustrates how the Army's office in Washington carries out procurements that are out of step with the demands of the other branches of the Armed Forces. Furthermore, it highlights how this autonomy to negotiate directly abroad – due to the Ministry of Defence's inability to centralise such procurements – ensures the country's dependence on US military equipment (Campos 2025a; Campos 2025b).

Among defence scholars, there is a prevailing perception that the Brazilian military accepts the country's dependence on and subordination to US interests. This is, for example, the position of Professor Carlos Eduardo da Rosa Martins, of the Institute of International Relations and Defence at UFRJ. Consequently, the Brazilian military does not contribute to a foreign policy capable of safeguarding the national interest in the strategic environment – as evidenced by the Lula III government's inability to prevent, notably through mediation, the US military intervention that resulted in the abduction of Venezuelan President Maduro in January 2026.

Such dependence and subordination prevent the government from implementing the guidelines set out in national defence documents and grounded in the constitutional principles that guide Brazil's foreign relations, notably that of the self-determination of peoples. Thus, this ideological stance of the Brazilian military is in itself a limiting factor on any diversification of partnerships. According to Martins, "the most they aspire to is collaboration with the United States, perhaps associate membership in NATO, or some assistance in exchange for alignment. There is no independent plan to use our capabilities to create an autonomous technological base" (Campos 2026).

Criticism from defence experts is echoed by external oversight bodies. For example, the Federal Court of Accounts (TCU), an oversight body belonging to the National Congress, identified in an audit of military procurement failures in the publicity of tenders, the misuse of funds for the acquisition of durable goods, accounting irregularities, weaknesses in internal controls and favouritism towards certain companies. Regarding the latter shortcoming, the TCU pointed out that the Ministry of Defence maintains a ministerial order that directs Armed Forces procurement towards foreign companies to the detriment of domestic ones, thereby undermining the country's development objectives (TCU 2025; Campos 2025c).

It should be noted that procurement in the defence sector is particularly

prone to corruption and ulterior motives due to the secrecy surrounding negotiations. The need for secrecy stems, notably, from the scope of the partnership, which generally involves cooperation between governments to ensure the continuity of supply. Consequently, objective criteria typically applied in tendering processes, such as technical specifications and price, are generally diluted by foreign policy interests. However, despite the existence of the Ministry of Defence since 1999, it remains the responsibility of each branch of the Armed Forces to determine requirements, analyse the market, and negotiate demand, payment terms and offset arrangements. Furthermore, each branch of the Armed Forces assesses the quality of the product delivered or service provided and oversees the execution of the contract, including the verification, negotiation and adjustment of the contractual economic and financial balance. In other words, there is no effective ministerial control to segregate the different phases of the procurement process in order to avoid conflicts of interest.

Closer ties with China and the attempt to sell part of Avibras

Upon his return to the presidency in 2023, Lula announced agreements with China during his visit to Beijing that same year. The most significant aspect of the strengthening of relations was the visit to China by the Commander of the Brazilian Army, General Tomás Paiva, in June 2024. On that occasion, General Tomás met with the Chinese Defence Minister, Admiral Dong Jung, and visited Norinco, a defence company based in Beijing. This visit signalled the Brazilian government's endorsement of Norinco's acquisition of a 49 per cent stake in the Brazilian company Avibras Indústria Aeroespacial, which was facing financial difficulties (Defesanet 2024).

Avibras' strategic importance lies in its ability to produce a rocket and missile launch system called ASTROS, which can destroy ground targets within a range of 300 kilometres (Avibras 2024). Avibras Indústria Aeroespacial S/A is a private company, based in São José dos Campos, in the state of São Paulo, with over 50 years' experience. A change in the company's management has affected its finances, and its employees are facing wage arrears. Interestingly, whilst it is a leading player in the development of defence products in the Southern Hemisphere, Avibras has also made its mark on the history of the Brazilian labour movement, as its workers have been suffering from delayed wages for almost three years (Ficher 2026).

For its part, Norinco (the official English name for China North Industries Corporation, 北方工) was founded in 1980 and is the cornerstone

of equipment development for the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Norinco serves as an instrument for the implementation of China's 'Going Global' and 'Belt and Road Initiative' strategies (China Daily 2019; Xinhua 2024a).

In addition to Norinco, which submitted its letter of intent just one month before General Tomás's visit, two other companies were in the running to acquire Avibras's shares: the Australian firm DefendTex and a company from the United Arab Emirates. The United States backed DefendTex and suggested sanctions against Avibras should Norinco succeed. Norinco's proposal, however, envisaged keeping majority shareholding in Brazilian hands, which would have been more advantageous for Brazil given the company's strategic importance to the capabilities of the Brazilian Army.

The expectation at the time was that, should Norinco win this dispute, defence cooperation between Brazil and China would move beyond a mere exchange of military students to include industrial production and the development of weapons systems on a scale never before seen by Brazil in its relationship with the United States. Brazil already has a long-standing partnership with China in the field of satellites. However, if this partnership were to succeed, it would represent a groundbreaking opportunity for cooperation in military technologies. The visit in question was mentioned in passing in the Chinese press:

Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun on Monday met with Brazilian Army Commander Tomás Ribeiro Paiva in Beijing.

Noting that this year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Brazil, Dong said the relationship between the two militaries enjoys a solid foundation for cooperation and extensive common interests, and deepening this relationship holds broad prospects.

Dong called on both sides to enhance exchanges, learn from each other, and take China-Brazil military relations to a new height.

Tomás said that the Brazilian army is willing to further strengthen communication and exchanges with its Chinese counterpart and deepen cooperation in various fields. (Xinhua 2024b)

As the note above suggests, Brazil and China have been cooperating for many years (Marcondes, Batista Barbosa 2018; OPEB 2023). For example, President Dilma signed a defence cooperation agreement with China in April 2011 (Barros et al. 2024). Even during the Bolsonaro administration, both countries agreed to uphold multilateralism and the central role of the United Nations in peace and security.

President Lula's visit to President Xi Jinping in Beijing in April 2023 resulted in the announcement of a strengthened strategic partnership. In June 2023, 18 high-ranking Chinese generals visited the Brazilian Army Headquarters, a move of great symbolic significance as it demonstrated both countries' willingness to forge partnerships in defence. However, this exchange has not yet led to deeper cooperation on military matters. In 2024, for example, Brazil had only two military attachés in China. By comparison, Brazil has four military attachés in the US and cooperation offices for each of the armed services in Washington. Norinco's attempt to acquire a significant stake in Avibras, which involved diplomatic negotiations and mutual trust, was the first step – albeit an unsuccessful one – towards a potentially significant agreement between the two countries. As this example involves the defence industrial base, it may serve as inspiration for other BRICS members, much like Embraer's rapprochement with India.

Another opportunity for cooperation between BRICS members lies in the field of communications and satellites. There is great potential for cooperation and investment in information and communication technologies. Brazil and China, for instance, have already signed a Memorandum of Understanding on this subject to encourage mechanisms that facilitate the creation of joint ventures and technological partnerships between companies in both countries. Brazil and China have also launched a successful satellite programme, although there has been criticism regarding the lack of technological benefits for Brazil (Almeida Filho 2025, 287–301).

The China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite Programme (CBERS), established in 1988, aims to strengthen and expand cooperation for the peaceful use of outer space, emphasising the joint development of new technologies and projects involving technology transfer. As members of the BRICS, Brazil and China have agreed to expand cooperation in areas such as lunar exploration and deep space. Furthermore, this partnership includes the development of the BINGO Radio Telescope, currently under construction in Brazil, which is dedicated to research into dark matter. However, this partnership is not merely bilateral, as it has the potential to include other members. For example, Brazil and China have set the goal of developing the BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation, an example of South–South cooperation with benefits for all involved (Brazil 2023).

The successful joint development of satellites illustrates how the BRICS countries can cooperate on security and defence. This field is particularly sensitive to unilateral sanctions and is intrinsically linked to the development of a multipolar system, as sovereign states must seek to reduce their dependence on the hegemonic power in terms of the military industry

and strategic communications.

Final remarks

This article sought to identify attempts by the Lula III government to diversify its partnerships in the field of national defence between 2023 and 2025. Projects such as the Brazilian-built frigates demonstrate that significant initiatives were undertaken to diversify suppliers and partners in the development of defence projects. In this regard, attention should be paid to the EDGE Group, based in the United Arab Emirates, which has been acquiring Brazilian defence companies.

Emphasis was placed on the rapprochement with China and the attempt to sell part of Avibras to a state-owned enterprise in that country. Despite the nationalistic tone of the defence documents, the Lula III government pursued these negotiations as a means of bringing Avibras – a strategic company with expertise in rocket launch technologies – closer to the Chinese state-owned firm Norinco. Although the deal did not go ahead, this case demonstrates an unprecedented interest in forging closer ties with China within the defence industry. If we examine only the period between 2023 and 2025, the Avibras case appears to highlight the Lula III government's difficulty in finding a domestic solution for the company's future. It is worth noting that the decline in Brazilian government procurement accelerated Avibras's indebtedness from 2020 onwards, resulting in the suspension of its activities in 2022. Between 2024 and 2025, in addition to the Chinese firm Norinco, at least two other foreign groups – the Australian firm DefendTex and the Saudi firm Black Storm Military Industries – expressed an interest in acquiring control of the company (LRCA Defense Consulting 2026).

In April 2026, Avibras resumed operations under a commercial arrangement involving an investment of R\$ 300 million from businessman Joesley Baptista of the JBS group (Gouvea de Andrade 2026). The following month, the Ministry of Defence recognised the new entity as a strategic defence company (Avibras Aeroco 2026), which entitles it to a preferential tax regime. This corporate manoeuvre has fuelled speculation as to why an investor from the food sector would have rescued the company. It is worth noting that JBS became the world's largest producer of animal protein thanks to loans granted during the Lula I and II administrations by the federal bank BNDES, which currently holds 20% of the group's shares as a result of shares provided as collateral (JBS 2025).

The fact is that, in light of the increase in defence spending announced

by the federal government in 2025 (Queiroz 2026) – which is in line with the global trend – the new Avibras appears to be close to achieving financial stability. President Lula’s visit in July 2026 to the ceremony marking the resumption of the company’s production line in Jacareí, accompanied by Vice-President Geraldo Alckmin, the Minister of Defence, José Múcio, and the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Luciana Santos, as well as three military commanders, demonstrates the government’s recognition of the company’s strategic importance, as it remains a Brazilian enterprise (Garcia 2026). This visit is highly symbolic, as, as a former metalworker and trade unionist, Lula was able to play a part in – and most likely contributed to – the revival of a company marked by one of the most emblematic cases of recent industrial collapse, which has already gone down in the history of the Brazilian labour movement.

References

- Aeroin. 2026. “Empresa árabe e espanhola fecham parceria para desenvolvimento de radares no Brasil”. April 16. <https://aeroin.net/empresa-arabe-e-espanhola-fecham-parceria-para-desenvolvimento-de-radares-no-brasil/>
- Agência Força Aérea. 2024. “Operação Raízes do Cedro”. <https://www.fab.mil.br/noticias/mostra/43258/OPERA%C3%87%C3%83O%20RA%C3%8DZES%20DO%20CEDRO%20-%20FAB%20j%C3%A1%20resgatou%20mais%20de%201.100%20brasileiros%20em%20repatria%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20no%20L%C3%ADBano>
- Agência Marinha de Notícias. 2023. “Marinha e Grupo EDGE assinam acordo para acelerar o desenvolvimento de míssil antinavio”. June 16. <https://www.agencia.marinha.mil.br/ciencia-e-tecnologia/marinha-e-grupo-edge-assinam-acordo-para-acelerar-o-desenvolvimento-de-missil>
- Agência Senado. 2025. “CRE aprova acordo que amplia cooperação na área de defesa entre Brasil e Benin”. *Agência Senado*, December 9. <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2025/12/09/cre-aprova-acordo-que-amplia-cooperacao-na-area-de-defesa-entre-brasil-e-benin>
- Almeida Filho, Raimundo. 2025. *O Brasil na era espacial*. Viseu.
- Avibras Aeroco. 2026. “Avibras Aeroco marca nova fase da indústria de defesa e aeroespacial brasileira”. April 29. <https://avibrasaeroco.com/avibras-aeroco-marca-nova-fase-da-industria-de-defesa-e-aeroespacial-brasileira/>

- Avibras. 2024. "Astros". <https://www.avibras.com.br/site/areas-de-atuacao/defesa/astros.html>
- Barros, Pedro Silva; Lima, Raphael Camargo; Barros, Paula Macedo. 2024. *O Setor de defesa brasileiro no exterior: desafios, oportunidades e subsídios para a revisão dos documentos de defesa* (Publicação Expressa). Ipea, fevereiro. 80 p.: il. Mapas. (Texto para Discussão, n. 2973). <http://dx.doi.org/10.38116/td<td2973>-port>.
- Bonin, Robson. 2025. "Lula avalia boicote a produtos militares dos EUA e alarma caserna". *Revista Veja*, August 15. <https://veja.abril.com.br/coluna/radar/lula-avalia-boicote-a-produtos-militares-dos-eua-e-alarma-caserna/>
- Brasil. 2023. "Joint Communiqué between the Federative Republic of Brazil and the People's Republic of China on the Deepening of their Global Strategic Partnership". *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, April 14. https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/canais_atendimento/imprensa/notas-a-imprensa/declaracao-conjunta-entre-a-republica-federativa-do-brasil-e-a-republica-popular-da-china-sobre-o-aprofundamento-da-parceria-estrategica-global-pequim-14-de-abril-de-2023
- Brasil. 2024a. "Parcerias e acordos em Defesa". *Ministério da Defesa*. <https://www.gov.br/defesa/pt-br/assuntos/relacoes-internacionais/cooperacao-internacional>
- Brasil. 2024b. "Brasil e Arábia Saudita assinam acordo de cooperação em defesa". *Ministry of Development, Industry, Trade and Services (MDIC)*, June 4. <https://www.gov.br/mdic/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2024/junho/brasil-e-arabia-saudita-assinam-acordo-de-cooperacao-em-defesa#:~:text=Brasil%20e%20Ar%C3%A1bia%20Saudita%20assinam%20acordo%20de,Minist%C3%A9rio%20do%20Desenvolvimento%2C%20Ind%C3%BAstria%2C%20Com%C3%A9rcio%20e%20Servi%C3%A7os>
- Brasil. 2025. "Brasil e Índia dialogam sobre oportunidades de cooperação em Defesa". *Ministry of Development, Industry, Trade and Services (MDIC)*, October 15. <https://www.gov.br/mdic/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2025/outubro/brasil-e-india-dialogam-sobre-oportunidades-de-cooperacao-em-defesa>.
- Budeguer, Noel. 2025. "Brasil e Coreia do Sul assinam acordo histórico de defesa em Seul, com foco em tecnologia, drones e mísseis". *Revista Sociedade Militar*, October 22. <https://www.sociedademilitar.com.br/2025/10/brasil-e-coreia-do-sul-assinam-acordo-historico-de-defesa-em-seul-com-foco-em-tecnologia-drones-e-misseis-nbd.html>

- Campos, 2025c. “TCU mira compras militares das Forças Armadas no exterior, aponta favorecimento a empresas e pressiona Defesa a diminuir contratos fora do país”. *Revista Sociedade Militar*, December 16. <https://www.sociedademilitar.com.br/2025/12/tcu-irregularidades-compras-militares-exterior-defesa-wvt.html>
- Campos. 2025a. “Exército é contra boicote à compra de armamentos militares dos EUA sugerido por ala radical do governo”. *Revista Sociedade Militar*, August 15. <https://www.sociedademilitar.com.br/2025/08/exercito-brasileiro-armamentos-militares-eua-wvt.html>.
- Campos. 2025b. “Fabricante brasileiro esclarece crítica à aquisição de fuzis estrangeiros pela Marinha”. *Revista Sociedade Militar*, December 21. <https://www.sociedademilitar.com.br/2025/12/fabricante-brasileiro-acusa-marinha-ignorar-fuzil-nacional-favorecer-eua-wvt.html>
- Campos. 2026. “Militares do Brasil aceitam subordinação aos EUA, diz especialista, e país abre mão da autonomia estratégica”. *Revista Sociedade Militar*, January 7. https://www.sociedademilitar.com.br/2026/01/militares-brasil-subordinacao-eua-autonomia-estrategica-wvt.html#goog_rewarded
- Cardoso, Marcelo. 2025. “Embraer fecha acordo de transferência de tecnologia do KC-390 com a Polônia”. *Aeromagazine*, December 2. <https://aeromagazine.uol.com.br/artigo/embraer-acordos-pgz-parceria-defesa-polonia.html>.
- China Daily. 2019. “China North Industries Group Corporation Limited (Norinco Group)”. April 19. <https://govt.chinadaily.com.cn/s/201904/19/WS5cb99660498e079e6801e9be/china-north-industries-group-corporation-limited-norinco-group.html>
- CNN Brasil. 2026. “Entrevista com Rodrigo Torres, CFO da EDGE”. *Hot Market*, April 19. https://www.youtube.com/live/Qr6l5WbtOLY?si=LC_kK3XmBm_DYtDr
- Defesanet. 2024. “Comandante do Exército Brasileiro visita indústria chinesa de armas em meio a negociação da AVIBRAS”. July 10. <https://www.defesanet.com.br/brasilchina/comandante-do-exercito-brasileiro-visita-industria-chinesa-de-armas-em-meio-a-negociacao-da-avibras/>
- EDGE Group. 2025. “EDGE, SIATT and the Brazilian Navy advance to the next phase in the development of the MANSUP-ER anti-ship missile”. April 3. <https://edgegroup.ae/news/edge-siatt-and-brazilian-navy-advance-next-phase-development-mansup-er-anti-ship-missile>
- EDGE Group. 2026. “EDGE and the Brazilian Navy Strengthen Strategic Cooperation in Cyber Defence Capabilities”. April 15. <https://>

edggroup.ae/news/edge-and-brazilian-navy-strengthen-strategic-cooperation-cyber-defence-capabilities

Embraer. 2023. "Primeiro KC-390 Millennium na configuração OTAN entra em serviço na Força Aérea Portuguesa". October 19. <https://www.embraer.com/media-center/pt/?mediatype=NEWS&detail=13991-Primeiro-KC-390-Millennium-na-configuracao-C3%A7%C3%A3o-OTAN-entra-em-servi%C3%A7o-na-For%C3%A7a-A%C3%A9rea-Portuguesa>

FAP. 2025. "Formalizada aquisição do sexto KC-390 para a Força Aérea". *Força Aérea Portuguesa (FAP)*, September 17. <https://www.emfa.pt/noticia-5309-formalizada-aquisicao-do-sexto-kc390-para-a-forca-aerea>

Ficher, Alisson. 2026. "Após quase 4 anos de crise, Avibras tenta renascer: trabalhadores liberam acordo e fábrica pode reabrir em 2026 com governo e Exército no centro das negociações". *Revista Sociedade Militar*, January 24. <https://www.sociedademilitar.com.br/2026/01/apos-quase-4-anos-de-crise-avibras-tenta-renascer-trabalhadores-liberam-acordo-e-fabrica-pode-reabrir-em-2026-com-governo-e-exercito-no-centro-das-negociacoes-afch.html>

Garcia, Edmon. 2026. Youtube, canal Brasil com Ciência, #BCC340 - Lula reinaugura Avibras e promete investimentos em Defesa, July 27. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OW4FokEeaUg&t=1443s>

Gouvea de Andrade, Matheus. 2026. "O que investimento de Joesley Batista em fabricante brasileira de armamentos em dificuldade indica sobre boom do setor bélico". *BBC Brasil*, May 15. <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/c4g4mmg22djo>

Infomoney. 2026. "Como o Brasil virou peça-chave da estratégia de defesa da EDGE, dos Emirados Árabes". April 17. <https://www.infomoney.com.br/business/como-o-brasil-virou-peca-chave-da-estrategia-de-defesa-da-edge-dos-emirados-arabes/>

JBS. 2025. "J&F e BNDES fecham acordo para Dupla Listagem da JBS". March 17. <https://www.jbs.com.br/imprensa/jf-e-bndes-fecham-acordo-para-dupla-listagem-da-jbs/>

LRCA Defense Consulting. 2026. "Avibras S.A. e Avibras Aeroco: como a mesma marca virou duas empresas diferentes". July 6. <https://www.lrcadefenseconsulting.com/2026/07/avibras-sa-e-avibras-aeroco-como-mesma.html>

Marcondes, Danilo; Batista Barbosa, Pedro Henrique. 2018. "Brazil-China Defense Cooperation: A Strategic Partnership in the Making?". *Journal of Latin American Geography* 17 (2): 140–66. <http://www.jstor>

- org/stable/44861540
- OPEB. 2023. “Relação militar-diplomática entre Brasil e China”. Observatório de Política Externa e da Inserção Internacional do Brasil (OPEB). <https://opeb.org/2023/06/13/relacao-militar-diplomatica-entre-brasil-e-china/>
- OTAN. 2025. “NATO Summit in The Hague”. *Organização do Tratado do Atlântico Norte (OTAN)*. <https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/2025/6/overview---2025-nato-summit-in-the-hague>
- Padilha, Luiz. 2017. “Brasil abandona projeto de defesa antiaérea da Rússia”. *Defesa Aérea & Naval*, February 4. <https://www.defesaaereanaval.com.br/naval/brasil-abandona-projeto-de-compra-de-defesa-antiaerea-da-russia>
- Poder Naval. 2024. “SIATT fecha acordo de US\$ 350 milhões com o governo dos Emirados Árabes Unidos”. September 29. <https://www.naval.com.br/blog/2024/09/29/siatt-fecha-acordo-de-us-350-milhoes-com-o-governo-dos-emirados-arabes-unidos/>
- Poder Naval. 2026. “África do Sul inicia exercícios navais com China, Rússia e Irã próximos à rota marítima do Cabo”. *Poder Naval*, January 10. <https://www.naval.com.br/blog/2026/01/10/africa-do-sul-inicia-exercicios-navais-com-china-russia-e-ira-proximos-a-rota-maritima-do-cabo/>
- Queiroz, Gustavo. 2026. “O que explica o aumento de gastos militares no governo Lula”. *DW*, May 21. <https://www.dw.com/pt-br/o-que-est%C3%A1-por-tr%C3%A1s-do-aumento-de-gastos-militares-no-governo-lula/a-77253628>
- TCU. 2025. Acórdão 2892/2025, Plenário, Relator Weder de Oliveira, Session of 3 December 2025, Federal Court of Accounts (TCU). https://pesquisa.apps.tcu.gov.br/documento/acordao-completo/*/KEY:ACORDAO-COMPLETO-2657776/NUMACORDAOINT%20asc/o
- TV Brasil. 2023. “Embraer e empresas portuguesas assinam acordo para adaptação de aeronave”. October 24. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHFMKVkrVWQ&t=13s>
- Xinhua. 2024a. “China releases report on implementation of global security initiative”. July 18. <https://english.news.cn/20240718/a6fa7964260a4754affca5bc6bc9obb8/c.html>
- Xinhua. 2024b. “Chinese defense minister meets Brazilian army commander”. July 8. <https://english.news.cn/20240708/088fabca446842baaf67c63c8cba528b/c.html>

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the initiatives of Lula's third administration to diversify Brazil's defence partnerships between 2023 and 2025, highlighting both significant advances and structural obstacles. On the one hand, the period saw unprecedented agreements with non-traditional actors, such as the EDGE Group of the United Arab Emirates, as well as closer ties with India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Benin, and the consolidation of the partnership with Portugal, which expanded Embraer's access to the NATO market. On the other hand, the attempt to sell part of Avibras to the Chinese company Norinco failed, highlighting the difficulty of establishing partnerships with the Global South in a strategic sector. The study points out that, despite the official discourse of strengthening the national industry and reducing external dependence, the autonomy of the Armed Forces in acquisitions, the technical-military alignment with the United States, and the governance weaknesses of the Ministry of Defence limit effective diversification, keeping Brazil predominantly linked to NATO suppliers and reflecting a mismatch between presidential foreign policy and the institutional practice of the Armed Forces.

KEYWORDS

National defence, International cooperation, Brazil-China relations

Received on July 7, 2026
Accepted on July 28, 2026

BRAZIL AT RISK? THE OMISSION OF THE DEFENSE SECTOR IN THE BRAZILIAN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE STRATEGY

Carlos Eduardo Franco Azevedo¹

Rachel Camilly Soares de Souza²

Introduction

The revolution provoked by Artificial Intelligence (AI) has reshaped the strategic perceptions of states in the 21st century and may influence the balance of power and international conflicts (Horowitz 2018). The capacity for large-scale data processing, machine learning, and real-time decision-making confers upon AI a determinant role in contemporary defense doctrines (Scharre 2018). Global military powers have systemically incorporated these technologies into their national defense strategies, recognizing their transformative potential for maintaining sovereignty and protecting national interests (Payne 2018).

The development of autonomous weapon systems, threat detection algorithms, and intelligence mechanisms grounded in AI currently constitute essential elements for any power that intends to ensure its autonomy in the international scenario (Ayoub and Payne 2015). In Brazil, however, a serious institutional gap is observed. The Brazilian Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (EBIA), published in 2021, although comprehensive across various sectors, neglects fundamental aspects related to the application of AI for National Defense purposes (Brasil 2021). This omission, far from representing a mere documentary lapse, configures itself as a strategic vulnerability, especially considering the growing use of AI technologies.

In this context, follows the research question of this article: What

¹ Escola de Comando e Estado Maior do Exército (ECEME), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. E-mail: francoazevedo@francazevedo.com. ORCID: 0000-0002-8021-0723.

² Escola de Comando e Estado Maior do Exército (ECEME), Rio de Janeiro, Brasil. E-mail: rachelcamillyss@gmail.com. ORCID: 0009-0004-1888-0218.

are the implications of the absence of National Defense in the Brazilian Strategy for Artificial Intelligence? This article proposes a critical analysis of the Brazilian strategic gap, comparing international models of AI integration into Defense doctrines, and evaluates the resulting vulnerabilities for National Defense. It further suggests guidelines for the formulation of a specific public policy for AI in the Defense sector or its complementation within a pre-existing policy. The central hypothesis is that the absence of a strategy for the incorporation of AI into National Defense constitutes a critical failure that compromises Brazilian sovereignty in multiple dimensions: technological, military, economic, and geopolitical.

To this end, the study adopts a multidisciplinary theoretical approach, incorporating contributions from international security, contemporary strategic studies, and the technical literature on AI applied to defense. The relevance of this study lies in the need to foster academic and political debate on the insertion of AI into Brazil's Defense, to mitigate vulnerabilities and consolidate a digital protection strategy compatible with contemporary geopolitical challenges. Therefore, it seeks to contribute to filling this critical gap in contemporary Brazilian strategic thought.

Methodology

This study sought to critically analyze the absence of the Defense sector in the EBIA and its implications for national sovereignty. To this end, a qualitative approach was adopted (Gil 1999; Godoy 1995), based on a multidisciplinary analysis that incorporated contributions from international security theory, contemporary strategic studies, and the technical literature on AI applied to defense. The choice of this approach is justified by the need to understand in depth the nuances and interconnections between public AI policies and the Defense sector, as well as the complex relations of power and technological dependency in the international scenario.

The research was developed through the collection and analysis of documentary data (Gil 1999), with the systematic review of official documents and reports as its primary source. At the national level, the EBIA, published in 2021, and the Brazilian Artificial Intelligence Plan (PBIA), from 2024, were examined. These documents were central to identifying Brazil's official approach regarding AI and, more specifically, the presence or absence of guidelines aimed at the Defense sector.

Complementarily, national AI strategies and defense documents from globally prominent countries were consulted. The selection of these

countries, the United States, China, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and Israel, was based on three explicit criteria: (i) international leadership in AI research and development, according to indicators such as the Stanford AI Index (AI index report 2025) and OCDE.AI; (ii) geopolitical and military relevance, particularly regarding the use of dual or strictly military AI; and (iii) the existence of formalized national strategies that allow for a structural comparison with the EBIA. These criteria ensured institutional diversity while maintaining a minimum level of methodological comparability across the cases.

To ensure consistency in the comparison, a textual analysis protocol was applied to the selected strategies. This protocol involved identifying and quantifying key defense-related terms – such as “national defense”, “military”, “armed forces”, “national security”, and “sovereignty” – as well as equivalent expressions used across different political-strategic traditions. In instances where literal translations failed to adequately capture the strategic meaning, a criterion of conceptual equivalence was adopted, taking into account terms such as *souveraineté*, *autonomie stratégique*, *technological sovereignty*, or *resilience* when used with the same analytical function. This approach minimized linguistic asymmetries and strengthened the validity of the comparison.

The collected data were subjected to a comparative and textual analysis (Schneider and Schmitt 1998). Initially, a systematic textual analysis of the EBIA and the selected international strategies was conducted. This technique allowed for the quantification of the frequency of key terms related to defense and security (such as “military,” “armed forces,” “national defense,” “national security,” and “sovereignty”) in the documents, evidencing the gap in the defense dimension of the Brazilian strategy compared to the approaches of other nations. Therewith, structural differences between the documents were observed, examining how each country articulates AI with its military doctrines, innovation policies and institutional mechanisms of civil-military integration. This phase sought to identify the presence of terms, as well as the way they fit into institutional arrangements, strategic priorities and conceptions of technological autonomy.

Subsequently, an in-depth comparative study was carried out (Schneider and Schmitt 1998), in which Brazil’s approaches and priorities were contrasted with international trends. This comparison highlighted Brazil’s misalignment with global powers and the strategic vulnerabilities resulting from the omission of the Defense sector in the national AI policy.

However, limitations inherent to the adopted method are acknowledged: national strategies vary in depth, terminology, and degree of transparency; some military capabilities remain classified; and linguistic differences may

introduce nuances of interpretation. Nevertheless, by explicitly stating criteria, procedures, and limitations, the aim was to reinforce the study's reliability, consistency, and reproducibility. Finally, based on the identified gap and the international comparative analysis, the implications for Brazil's sovereignty and security were discussed, considering the context of hybrid threats and persistent technological dependency, elements crucial for understanding the contemporary strategic scenario.

Artificial Intelligence and National Defense: Global Overview

Coined in the 1950s, the term artificial intelligence refers to computer programs that simulate intelligence. According to Russell and Norvig (2016), AI can be defined as the ability of computer systems to perform tasks that would normally require human intelligence, such as speech recognition, decision-making, and problem-solving. From a Brazilian perspective, AI is defined as computational systems that, by processing large volumes of data for specific objectives and autonomies, can predict, classify, recommend, or decide, impacting physical and virtual environments (Brasil 2024a; Brasil 2024b).

The integration of Artificial Intelligence into defense systems represents a significant transformation in military paradigms. According to Allen and Chan (2017), the development of AI can be as transformative as nuclear weapons, aviation, and cyberspace. Unlike incremental innovations, AI has fundamentally reconfigured the operational, tactical, and strategic capabilities of global armed forces. This disruptive technology not only enhances systems but also enables new operational models, generating new military capabilities (Horowitz 2018).

Military applications of AI encompass various functions, increasing the military power of states. In the domain of autonomous systems, AI has enabled the development of unmanned platforms with greater operational independence. According to Scharre (2018), "The rise of artificial intelligence will transform warfare," making autonomous aerial, land, and naval vehicles an inevitable trend in military doctrines. The use of AI in defense revolutionizes different fronts, including logistics automation, decision optimization, and the development of autonomous weapons. In military logistics, for example, the US Department of Logistics uses AI tools, such as the Logistics Federation (LOGFED), to train commanders and staff in sustainment (Matos 2024).

As these applications multiply across various operational contexts, three technological trends that frequently appear in the defense strategies of

numerous countries and help to shed light on the general direction taken by this transformation are observed. They emerge as trends that interconnect in practice: the growing use of AI to support command and control processes, the expansion of autonomous systems across multiple domains, and the increasingly deep integration of AI techniques into cyber operations.

First, AI has been incorporated into command and control activities, enhancing the capacity to integrate information, anticipate scenarios, and support decision-making in environments characterized by complexity and a growing volume of data. The examples discussed, such as the use of advanced decision-support tools and the optimization of logistics processes, illustrate how AI contributes to making military decision-making more responsive and less vulnerable to information overload.

A second set of applications appears in autonomous and semi-autonomous systems, whether aerial, ground-based, or naval, which have become central to how armed forces conduct reconnaissance, surveillance, and, in some cases, even offensive operations. Technologies described in the text, such as intelligent drones, autonomous navigation algorithms, and target identification systems, demonstrate that the autonomization of platforms is a structural transformation in battlefield operations.

Finally, AI also plays a role in the cyber domain, where it is used for threat detection, response automation, and the protection of critical infrastructure. Ongoing discussions regarding AI-driven cyberattacks highlight how adaptive models and automated intrusion techniques are altering the information environment, presenting unprecedented challenges for national defense.

Furthermore, the rapid digitization driven by AI has transformed cyber defense and modern conflicts. AI is essential for strengthening the security of critical infrastructures and command and control systems, both military and civilian, given that cyber attacks can compromise a country's sovereignty (Faria 2014). AI in Information Security is increasingly sought to prevent and combat hacker attacks, a challenge that transcends the private sector and directly impacts national security (Zequim and Ribeiro 2022).

Despite its transformative potential, AI presents unprecedented risks to international security. The technological competition between the US and China could generate new hybrid wars, with autonomous weapons and cyber attacks shaping the future of conflicts (Johnson 2019). The absence of an effective debate and regulation could lead to the uncontrolled proliferation of autonomous weapons, threatening international stability (Haner and Garcia 2019). The introduction of AI into autonomous systems in conflicts is a controversial topic, requiring international ethical and legal monitoring.

The practical use of AI on the battlefield is already a reality, demonstrated by drones and swarms in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (Rosa, Silva and Ribeiro 2024). The Israel Defense Forces have deployed AI-based systems in their operations, including autonomous armored vehicles and target suggestion systems like “The Gospel” and “Lavender” (Serhan 2024).

In Brazil, however, initiatives for incorporating AI into Defense remain incipient and fragmented. Although there are isolated efforts – such as the Brazilian Air Force’s (FAB) AI Laboratory (Brazilian Air Force 2024), the Military Institute of Engineering’s (IME) LIARC and the Pró-Defesa V Program-IATQ – these actions lack systemic coordination and a national strategic framework, as will be detailed in the following comparative analysis.

Comparison with the international scenario highlights Brazil’s distance from other nations. According to the report “The Global AI Vibrancy Ranking” (2024) from Stanford University, countries like the US, China, the UK, and India lead in AI development, while Brazil appears in 34th place out of 36 states (Fattorini et al. 2024). This technological misalignment compromises Brazil’s ability to respond autonomously to contemporary conflicts. To understand this gap and successful approaches, it is essential to analyze international models of AI in Defense, which are detailed in the next section.

Although the United States and China naturally stand out due to the sheer volume of documentation and the scale of their defense programs, the other countries analyzed share similar trajectories and, in some instances, are even further along in integrating AI into Defense. France and the United Kingdom, for example, link AI to clear operational concepts, such as “information advantage” and “AI-ready” in the British case, and “*autonomie stratégique*” in French doctrine, translating these guidelines into sustained investment in autonomous systems, cyber defense, and AI applications for command and control. Despite having fewer resources, these nations possess established institutional frameworks that bridge civil and military innovation, demonstrating a high degree of internal coherence in their strategies.

Russia and Israel, in turn, reinforce trends already discussed regarding the United States and China, particularly the use of AI to support large-scale operations, automate target selection processes, and sustain offensive and defensive actions in the cyber domain. Russia prioritizes automation-based capabilities to offset industrial constraints while also integrating AI into surveillance and electronic warfare systems; Israel, as previously discussed, combines autonomous technologies, rapid data analysis, and operational integration within highly volatile urban environments. Thus, even if the level of documentary detail is lower, the strategic direction is comparable: all of the

countries are incorporating AI into three core areas, command and control, autonomous systems, and cyber capabilities, reflecting an international convergence in the militarization of AI.

Aspects Related to International Models of AI Applied to Defense

The technological revolution driven by AI has redefined strategic and operational paradigms in global defense and security. AI's capacity to process data, learn patterns, and automate processes transforms the operation and protection of nations by military organizations. This disruptive technology enhances existing systems and enables new operational models and defense strategies. Prominent research areas in the sector over the last five years include cybersecurity, machine learning, robotics, sensing, data analysis, decision support, simulation, and neural language processing (Sá et al. 2025).

The growing importance of AI is reflected in market data. According to Fortune Business Insights, the global AI market was valued at US\$ 233.46 billion in 2024, projecting growth of 29.2% to US\$ 1,771.62 billion by 2033 (Fortune Business Insights 2025). In this ecosystem, AI applied to Defense, although smaller, demonstrates notable dynamism, valued at US\$ 7.15 billion in 2024 and projected to reach US\$ 23.06 billion by 2033 (Global Growth Insights 2025). This growth is driven by defense budgets, global security concerns, and advances in AI, which enhance capabilities in surveillance, threat detection, and autonomous systems. Thus, AI is not only a tool for efficiency but an asset that confers strategic superiority and enhances defenses, becoming a competitive and evolving sector. Governments and private entities invest heavily to obtain this advantage, resulting in continuous innovations.

This landscape of investments and technological advances serves as a basis for understanding the approaches of different nations. International models reveal diverse approaches, but with a common denominator: AI is a pillar of national security and sovereignty. The main initiatives of key countries are detailed below.

The US maintains global leadership in AI (1st in Stanford's The Global AI Vibrancy Ranking 2024) and demonstrates a strong commitment to integrating the technology into its defense. Its national strategy, "Maintaining American Leadership in AI-2025" (2025), aims to consolidate leadership in R&D, autonomous systems, logistics, data infrastructure, and open-source AI (Fattorini et al. 2024). One pillar is the "Project StarGate" (2025),

a public-private partnership estimating US\$ 500 billion in investments for infrastructure and data centers (Open AI 2025). The US also has an exclusive AI strategy for Defense, materialized by the creation of the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center (JAIC) in 2018 and, subsequently, the Chief Data and Analytics Officers (CDAOs) in 2022, which absorbed the JAIC, centralizing the integration of AI into military operations (Barreiros e Poty 2021). The DoD plans to invest US\$ 1.8 billion in AI in 2025 (up from US\$ 874 million in 2022) (Vincent 2024). Important projects include Maven, JADC2, and Loyal Wingman Drones.

China (2nd in The Global AI Vibrancy Ranking 2024) intends to become the main global center for AI innovation by 2030, challenging US leadership (Fattorini et al. 2024). Its AI strategy in Defense includes the “Military Intelligence 2030” program, integrated into “Made in China 2025,” which transfers civil innovations to military applications (Kania, 2017). China’s AI strategy, as observed by Kania (2020), stands out for its military-civil fusion, which integrates universities, industries, and the military in technological development. This approach aims to eliminate barriers between sectors, promoting innovation in dual-use technologies for civilian and military applications. It allows the same technologies and teams to act simultaneously, accelerating the incorporation of AI advances in Defense. Although R&D spending is comprehensive (US\$ 500 billion in 2024), investment in AI-equipped hardware for military purposes ranged between US\$ 1.6 billion and US\$ 2.7 billion annually (2018-2020). China focuses on “AI Warfare,” surveillance, autonomous drones, and decision support, consolidating itself as an emerging power in AI applied to Defense (Fedasiuk, Melot and Murphy 2021; Fattorini et al. 2024).

The United Kingdom (3rd in The Global AI Vibrancy Ranking 2024) adopts a dual approach, with national AI strategies and a specific one for Defense (Fattorini et al. 2024). Its AI National Strategy (2021) and AI Opportunities Action Plan (2025) aim for US\$ 500 billion in the British economy by 2030 (United Kingdom 2021; United Kingdom 2025). The country invests in AI Doctoral Training Centres (US\$ 127 million) and “AI Growth Zones” (AIGZs), fostering innovation in strategic regions (United Kingdom 2025). In Defense, the Defence AI Strategy (2022) seeks to make the UK an effective and influential organization in AI, promoting safe and responsible military development (United Kingdom 2022). The UK and France collaborated on the Maritime Mine Countermeasures System (MMCM), an innovative AI solution to detect and neutralize mines without risk to sailors. The system, delivered in 2025, employs sonar on a drone boat to map mines, which are neutralized by a remote vehicle. AI speeds up the process and reduces the

need for manned ships, offering advantages in efficiency and safety (Padilha, 2025). Combining innovation and national security, the UK demonstrates a robust commitment to AI, reinforcing its position as a global actor in artificial intelligence.

France (6th in The Global AI Vibrancy Ranking 2024) seeks sovereignty in AI for Defense, with investments in infrastructure and innovation (Fattorini et al. 2024). In March 2024, it launched the “*Stratégie ministérielle sur l’intelligence artificielle*”, aiming to guide and accelerate the use of a credible and effective “defense AI”. A main initiative is the creation of the Ministerial Agency for Defense AI (AMIAD), which centralizes resources and seeks to guarantee French mastery of these technologies, avoiding dependency (France 2024). The strategy also highlights the importance of a supercomputer dedicated to AI by 2025, the largest in Europe, capable of processing classified data (France 2024). As part of the effort, France announced US\$ 126 billion for infrastructure and data centers, reinforcing its technological and strategic capacity. The “France 2030” plan dedicates 2.5 billion euros (US\$ 2.7 billion) to AI in Defense, consolidating the strategic role of the technology (Rondepierre 2024). With robust investments, advanced infrastructure, and international collaboration, France reinforces its position as a global actor in AI for Defense.

Israel (16th in The Global AI Vibrancy Ranking 2024) is recognized for tactical-operational innovation and the systemic integration of AI, focusing on military and security applications (Fattorini et al. 2024). The country invested US\$ 300 million in the National AI Program, including a national supercomputer and an “AI Factory” to integrate algorithms into military strategy. This approach encompasses military operations, target identification, logistics, and autonomous systems, consolidating AI as central to the doctrines of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) (Mimran and Dahan 2024). IDF officials highlighted the growing use of AI, especially in the Israel-Hamas conflict (2023). Systems like Alchemist, Fire Factory, and Depth of Wisdom collect and analyze vast volumes of intelligence (signal, geographic, human, and surveillance), allowing efficient dissemination of information among units and precise military attacks with unmanned vehicles and other autonomous technologies (Renic and Schwarz 2023). Additionally, Israel uses Gospel and Lavender for target suggestion and monitoring, and autonomous armored vehicles for bomb disposal. The integration of AI offers a continuous technological advantage, allowing it to assimilate and apply intelligence from various war domains efficiently and precisely.

Russia (29th in The Global AI Vibrancy Ranking 2024) launched its National AI Strategy until 2030 in 2019, prioritizing Defense, health,

education, and business automation. The strategy seeks to reduce foreign dependency and modernize technological capabilities. Since 2017, Russia has emphasized that leadership in AI is essential for sovereignty and global position (Russia 2019; Fattorini et al. 2024). Militarily, Russia developed the Concept for the Use of Robotic Systems for Military Purposes until 2030, aiming to robotize 30% of combat power by 2025, with a budget of US\$ 346 billion until 2021. It also created an AI department within the Ministry of Defense, reinforcing its commitment to automation (Nadibaidze 2022). The practical application of AI was announced by Putin during the invasion of Ukraine (2022), with hypersonic missiles like the Kinzhal, demonstrating the integration of advanced technologies (Ayres and Medeiros 2022). These advances reflect the Russian effort to modernize its armed forces and compete, consolidating its geopolitical position.

Finally, Brazil (34th in The Global AI Vibrancy Ranking 2024) presents incipient and fragmented initiatives in AI for defense (Fattorini et al. 2024). The EBIA does not explicitly focus on Defense, and the PBIA plans to invest R\$ 23 billion (US\$ 4.6 billion) in AI by 2028, with no specific budget for military AI. In the Brazilian context, defense initiatives include: the FAB AI Laboratory (R\$ 6.5 million/US\$ 1.3 million), LIARC at the IME, the development of AI models for aircraft wreckage detection by the ITA, the inclusion of AI disciplines in Military Schools, the leadership in the Pró-Defesa V Program-IATQ, the promotion of the symposium “Artificial Intelligence in the Military Expression of National Power,” and the publication of the Brazilian Army’s Strategic Directive on AI (2024). However, these initiatives lack systemic coordination and a consolidated doctrinal foundation, reflecting the absence of a specific national policy for AI in Defense.

The Brazilian Artificial Intelligence Strategy and the Gap in Defense

The Brazilian Artificial Intelligence Strategy (EBIA), established by Ordinance MCTI No. 4,617 of April 6, 2021, represents the first systematic effort to formulate a national public policy for this emerging technological field (Brasil 2021). The document establishes a vision, objectives, and thematic axes to guide the development and application of AI in the country, seeking to position Brazil as a protagonist in the so-called “Fourth Industrial Revolution” (Brasil 2021).

The EBIA is structured around nine thematic axes: Legislation, Regulation, and Ethical Use; AI Governance; International Aspects;

Education; Workforce and Capacity Building; Research, Development, Innovation (R&D&I) and Entrepreneurship; Application in Productive Sectors; Application in Public Power; and Public Security (Brasil 2021). For each axis, the document establishes strategic objectives and indicative actions, outlining institutional responsibilities and estimated implementation deadlines.

In a critical analysis of the EBIA's structure and content, an emphasis on regulatory, educational, and basic research aspects is observed, without adequate depth in specific sectoral applications. Thereby, we point out that although the EBIA presents a comprehensive conceptual structure, it demonstrates an imbalance between generalist formulations and concrete operational guidelines, resulting in a document that, although meritorious as a first initiative, lacks implementable specificity.

The International Aspects axis highlights global cooperation in AI but does not mention strategic partnerships for the development of defense technologies. In a competitive global scenario, where countries invest heavily in military AI, Brazil demonstrates that it ignores this essential dimension. Although the document encourages AI research and development, it does not direct efforts toward defense-oriented technologies. Leading AI countries often prioritize projects with dual (civilian and military) applications, an aspect not considered in the Brazilian strategy (Brasil 2021).

Although there is an axis dedicated to "Public Security," it is limited to aspects such as predictive policing and combating organized crime. There is, however, no mention of the role of AI in Defense against external threats or in strengthening Brazil's cyber defense or even in the defense of critical infrastructures. In a world where cyber attacks can compromise a country's sovereignty, the lack of this approach is worrying (Brasil 2021).

Even though the EBIA does not mention Defense, the Brazilian Army, in turn, formalized the Strategic Directive for Artificial Intelligence (Ordinance EME/C Ex No. 1,318 of May 14, 2024), establishing institutional guidelines for the integration of AI within the organization. Its central objective is to promote the modernization and operational efficiency of the Army, through the responsible employment of AI systems in different areas, such as logistics, communication, intelligence, and personnel management. By defining fundamental concepts, principles, and strategic goals, the directive seeks to strengthen decision-making, scenario anticipation capacity, and the Army's technological competitiveness, aligning its initiatives with the institution's Information Policy (Brasil 2024b).

Furthermore, the regulation emphasizes the importance of mastering Emerging and Disruptive Technologies (EDT) as an instrument of State security and for the transformation of strategic deterrence. It provides for the

consolidation of institutional competencies for the development, deployment, and ethical use of AI, ensuring that its application is in compliance with the Army’s moral and legal principles. In this context, Ordinance EME/C Ex No. 1,318/2024 represents a structured effort to position the institution in tune with global trends of military modernization, ensuring that technological innovation is integrated in a responsible and strategic manner into its operations (Brasil 2024b).

This analysis evidences that the EBIA, although representing a significant institutional advance as the first formal national policy for AI, presents critical gaps in its conception and structure. The absence of specific treatment for the Defense sector does not constitute a mere punctual omission, but reflects a conceptual approach that disregards the strategic criticality of AI for National Defense, misaligning Brazil from predominant global trends in this field.

The Gap in Defense

The detailed analysis of the EBIA reveals a significant absence of guidelines, objectives, and specific actions for national defense. This gap is not a mere punctual omission, but a structural failure in the strategic conception of the document, with profound implications for Brazilian sovereignty and national security in a global scenario mediated by disruptive technologies.

To measure the extent and gravity of this gap, a systematic textual analysis of the EBIA was conducted, comparing the frequency of key terms related to defense and security with the national AI strategies of other powers. The results in Table 1 evidence a misalignment of the Brazilian approach in relation to predominant international trends.

Table 1: Frequency of Key Terms in Selected National AI Strategies

Keyword	USA	China	UK	France	Russia	Israel	Brazil
National Defense	14	11	24	3	0	6	0
National Security	23	8	18	1	1	4	0
Military	7	13	0	0	0	0	2 (d)
(Internal Security/Public Security)	3	5	3	0	0	0	5(d)

Keyword	USA	China	UK	France	Russia	Israel	Brazil
Sovereignty	0	1 (a)	0	6	1 (a)	4 (a)	0
Explicit Defense/Military Section	Yes	Yes (b)	Yes	Yes	No	No (c)	No
Total Explicit Mentions	47	38	45	4	1	10	7 (d)

Source: prepared by the authors based on the national AI strategies of the countries.

Legend:

(a) When the word “sovereignty” was not found, the emphasis on “independence, autonomy, and technological autonomy” was considered.

(b) In China, there is a section for civil-military integration for technologies of a dual nature;

(c) In Israel, AI is considered transversal to the functions of the State, but the central drive is defense. In that country’s strategy, the word “resilience” was used as a synonym for National Defense;

(d) In Brazil, the key terms were found 7 (seven) times, but out of context, referring to policing and data protection; and

(e) The strategies considered in the analysis were:

-United States of America: Winning the Race: America’s AI Action Plan, 2025.

-China: Next Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan, 2017.

-United Kingdom: National Artificial Intelligence Strategy, 2021.

-France: Stratégie Nationale en Intelligence Artificielle (SNIA), 2021.

-Russia: National Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence over the Period Extending up to the Year 2030, 2019.

-Israel: National Program for Artificial Intelligence Program and Snapshot, 2025.

-Brazil: Brazilian Artificial Intelligence Strategy (EBIA), 2021.

(f) Word counts were performed on available public documents and may vary slightly depending on the version or translation used.

Table 1 reveals that while powers like the USA, China, and the UK present a high number of explicit mentions of the key terms (47, 38, and 45 mentions, respectively), the EBIA records only two mentions of “military” and five of “public security,” focused on policing and data protection. There is no mention of “national defense,” “national security,” or “sovereignty” in its main body. The scarce mentions occur in generic or illustrative contexts of the “Public Security” axis, without strategic objectives, concrete actions, or implementation mechanisms for the scope of this study (Brasil 2021). In this sense, the EBIA differs from the other countries. China, for example, formalizes “civil-military fusion” as a strategic pillar, guaranteeing the rapid

incorporation of AI advances into defense (Kania 2020). The USA and the UK, in addition to national AI strategies, have exclusive strategies for Defense.

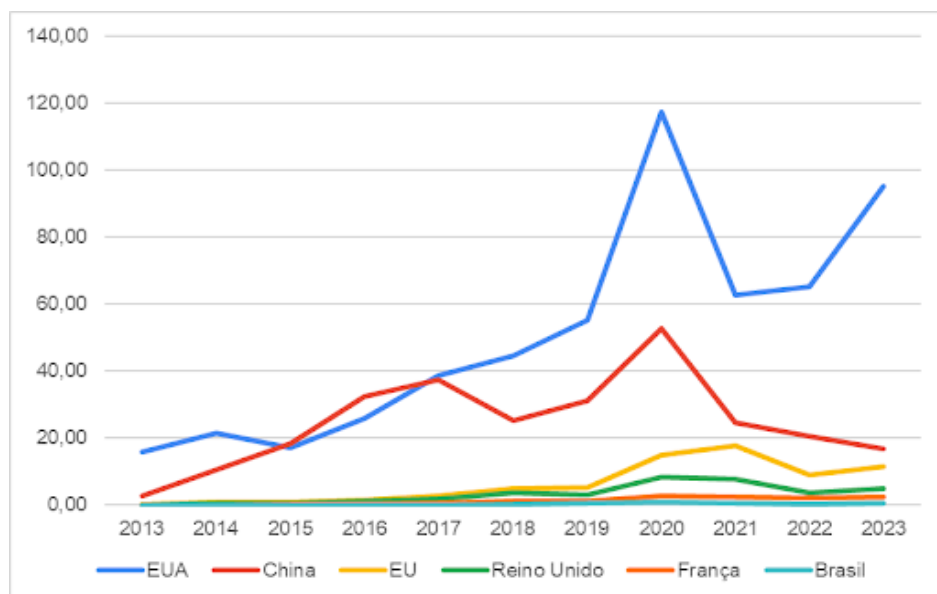
The contrast of the EBIA with the other strategies is notable, even in countries with few direct mentions, where sovereignty is revealing. France (6 mentions of “souveraineté”), Russia (1 mention of “technological sovereignty”) and Israel (4 mentions of “technological sovereignty”) explicitly state AI as a vital component for autonomy and non-technological dependence. The EBIA, however, does not address technological sovereignty in defense. For these nations, AI is not just a tool for efficiency, but a pillar of self-determination and protection of national interests in a complex geopolitical environment. Russia, despite few explicit mentions of defense, underlines “technological sovereignty” as a fundamental principle, suggesting that AI applications for defense are intrinsic to the pursuit of autonomy.

Technologically, the strategic gap results in growing external dependence on critical military systems. According to the Brazilian Academy of Sciences (2023), dependence on foreign nations and multinationals in AI can compromise the security, sovereignty, and competitiveness of domestic companies. To develop new technologies based on AI, it is fundamental to master its principles. The insufficiency of technical knowledge will intensify subordination to large corporations and powers that already dominate the sector.

The Brazilian gap is not limited to the conceptual and lexical dimension. The disparity in AI investments is even more evident. The Brazilian AI Plan (PBIA) forecasts US\$ 4.6 billion for AI until 2028, with no specific budget for military AI. Isolated initiatives by the Armed Forces include, as we have seen, the FAB’s AI Laboratory (US\$ 1.3 million), the development of AI models for aircraft wreckage detection by ITA, and LIARC at IME (Brazilian Air Force 2025a; Brazilian Air Force 2025b; Sá et al. 2025). However, these initiatives are marked by institutional fragmentation and budgetary limitations.

This fragmentation and the volume of investment contrast sharply with the international scenario, especially regarding the fostering of the innovation ecosystem and venture capital. In 2023, for example, the United States attracted US\$ 95.037 billion in venture capital investments in AI, while China recorded US\$ 16.967 billion. In the same period, Brazil attracted only US\$ 482 million in venture capital investments in AI (Chart 1). This abysmal difference in private fostering of innovation is a critical indicator of the fragility of the Brazilian ecosystem and, by extension, of the country’s capacity to develop AI solutions for its Defense needs, compromising military technological autonomy.

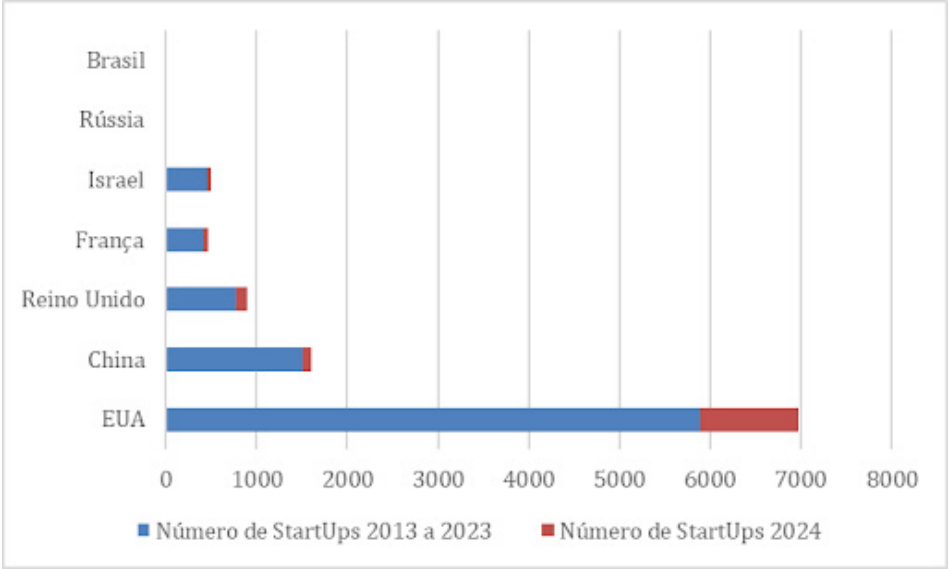
Chart 1: Venture Capital Investments by Country (2013-2023)



Source: OCDE.AI (2025)

Even more worrying is the number of AI startups, essential engines of innovation and agility, including for defense. While the USA has 6,966 AI startups (2013-2024) and China has 1,606, Brazil did not register a significant number in this period (Chart 2). This absence of a vibrant environment for new AI enterprises in Brazil, compared to other countries, reflects a fundamental failure in the capacity to generate and scale innovations in the sector and, consequently, to supply the technological demands of National Defense with cutting-edge domestic solutions.

Chart 2: Number of Startups by Country in the Period 2013-2024



Source: OCDE.AI (2025)

This Brazilian gap contrasts with international trends. Analysis of the ITS report (March 2020) on AI strategies of 20 countries revealed that 7 (35%) contained “defense” and/or “national security” (Instituto de Tecnologia e Sociedade do Rio 2020). Even Finland and Sweden, with a pacifist tradition, include implications of AI for national security in their strategies.

The SIPRI report (2020) demonstrates how AI reconfigures national defense dynamics and strategic power. All eight nuclear states analyzed (USA, Russia, China, France, UK, India, Pakistan, and North Korea) have active programs for integrating AI into strategic systems, but with disparities in capabilities and investments. The USA leads with US\$ 2 billion annually via Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), while Pakistan faces limitations, with only 650 specialized AI researchers.

In intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), the report documents that seven of the eight countries (87.5%) developed automatic target recognition systems, and four (50%) implemented onboard data processing in unmanned vehicles. China stands out, with significant advances in hypersonic vehicles with AI, such as the DF-ZF. India, despite its advances, still depends on imports for 73% of its critical defense components, evidencing a technological asymmetry that tends to deepen. This dependence creates strategic vulnerabilities, such as risks of embargo and backdoors in

sensitive systems (Boulanin et al., 2020).

In the field of public policies and governance, only three of the eight countries (37.5%) established explicit ethical guidelines for the military use of AI. France allocates €100 million annually for research that prioritizes human oversight, while China imposes no public restrictions on the development of autonomous systems. This normative divergence hinders international agreements; only two significant multilateral initiatives were registered until 2020. The lack of common standards for the development and employment of military AI creates a fragmented and dangerous strategic environment, where incidents or arms races can arise from misinterpretations of adversarial capabilities and intentions (Boulanin et al., 2020).

The SIPRI report on AI in South Asia highlights that India has invested in AI to strengthen its security and stability. That country created a Ministry of Defense task force in 2018, the Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics, to improve intelligence and data analysis. In 2022, it launched the Defence Artificial Intelligence Council and the Defence AI Project Agency, with 75 priority AI projects and a budget of ₹1,000 crore annually until 2026. India also develops emerging technologies, such as unmanned vehicles and cyber warfare, with AI playing a significant role. The application of AI in nuclear and non-nuclear weapons systems is a growing concern, with implications for strategic stability in the region (Topychkanov 2020).

In contrast, Brazil has not yet developed official AI policies with a military or national security focus. Although there are emerging initiatives in the civil field, as suggested by discussions on regulation and investments in AI, there are no programs comparable to India's in scale, institutionalization, or strategic application. The absence of clear public policies and the lack of institutions dedicated to defensive AI research limit Brazil's capacity to effectively integrate AI into its military and national security operations.

Despite the growing incorporation of the term "innovation" in national agendas since the 1990s, Brazil has not yet fully assimilated its systemic and interactive meaning. This is reflected in fragmented policies and reactive, poorly articulated innovative performance (Cassiolato and Lastres 2005). Since the 1960s, empirical studies (SAPPHO Project, UK; Yale Innovation Survey, USA) contributed to replacing the linear view of innovation with a more complex conception. These studies revealed that innovative success is associated with the capacity of firms to interact with external knowledge agents, originating the notion of innovation as a collaborative, cumulative, and institutionally conditioned process.

Understanding the absence of artificial intelligence in Brazilian defense policy gains depth when situated within Latin American structuralist

thinking, notably within the framework of CEPAL. This approach values the centrality of knowledge, productive transformation, and local institutional conditions in development, aligning with contemporary perspectives on innovation systems that emphasize the need for active state policies to foster technical and productive changes (Cassiolato e Lastres 2005). In both analytical frameworks, development does not stem from spontaneous market forces, but from intentional arrangements that coordinate capabilities, institutions, and strategic sectors.

From the perspective of innovation systems, such arrangements are dynamic, historically constructed, and depend on continuous interaction between firms, universities, research centers, government bodies, and civil society. It involves building networks that generate learning, technological diffusion, and endogenous capabilities (Dagnino 2009). In the Brazilian case, however, there is a dissonance between the rhetoric valuing innovation and the institutional practice that sustains it: fragmented policies, poor coordination among initiatives, and a productive structure dominated by low-tech sectors limit the consolidation of a robust national system.

Cassiolato and Lastres (2005) argue that for innovation systems to function effectively in countries like Brazil, it is necessary for the State to act as a coordinator, strengthening internal production chains and ensuring lasting policies capable of building local capabilities. Yet, as Dagnino (2009) points out, Brazil frequently adopts policies that are discontinuous, excessively financial in nature, and insufficiently oriented toward institutional building or the strengthening of the national productive base.

These challenges intensify because the articulation between science, technology and development does not automatically generate socioeconomic progress. Without a conducive institutional environment, intersectoral coordination mechanisms and policies coherent with local capabilities, knowledge production tends to remain disconnected from productive reality, reinforcing historical dependencies and external vulnerabilities. It is at this point that dependency theory, especially in Cardoso and Faletto, contributes to understanding why strategic technologies, such as artificial intelligence, remain absent from central defense guidelines in Brazil.

To these authors, dependency does not operate through the institutional, political and epistemological mechanisms that place peripheral countries in subordinate positions in the global system. The reconfiguration of dependency in the second half of the 20th century shows that, even when external control is not explicit, it reproduces itself through the penetration of international capital, the importation of technologies and the alignment of domestic elites with the external logics of accumulation (Cardoso and Faletto

1970).

Furtado (1974) adds that underdevelopment is a structural phenomenon, functional to the global capitalism itself, in which the domain of innovation remains concentrated in core countries. In these economies, the interplay between science, technology and political power enables the internalization of technical progress; in the periphery, innovation tends to be imported in a subordinate manner, without the domain of the underlying scientific principles or the supporting infrastructures. This critique remains fully valid in the digital age: by importing technologies without mastering their internal logic, a country reinforces its peripheral status, turning technology into a vehicle for subordination rather than autonomy.

These interpretations help explain why AI, despite its global strategic significance, remains marginal to Brazil's defense policy. The absence of a clear guideline reflects a persistent historical pattern of subordinate integration regarding critical technologies. The "integration" into global innovation networks, often interpreted as a sign of modernization, frequently serves merely as a mechanism that deepens dependency, given that knowledge and technology production remain externalized. This pattern is reinforced by national elites who, by adopting imported paradigms and models, neglect to formulate technological strategies aligned with the country's specific vulnerabilities and potential. Consequently, dependency becomes not only economic but also institutional and epistemological.

The result is a persistent dissociation between science, technology, defense, and the project of the nation. Without a strategy that articulates universities, Armed Forces, state agencies, and productive sectors, it becomes unviable to build a sovereign military-technological complex. Even isolated initiatives, such as research labs or modernization programs, tend to lose continuity because of the lack of strategic coordination. In the specific case of AI, this fragmentation entails delegating critical functions to external actors, importing systems, algorithms, and infrastructures over which Brazil lacks full control. This practice exacerbates vulnerabilities, particularly in the cyber domain, where technological dependence can directly compromise national security.

Therefore, the absence of AI in Brazilian defense policy is not an accident, it is the updated expression of a historical pattern of structural subordination. It reflects the reproduction of a model in which the country occupies a peripheral role, consuming technologies conceived at the core without internalizing their production logic. Breaking this pattern requires more than incremental adjustments; it demands a fundamental shift in how Brazil conceives of innovation, sovereignty, and national power. Ultimately,

it requires recognizing that technological sovereignty, especially in strategic areas such as military AI, is not inherited, but built.

Implications of the Absence of an AI Strategy for Defense in Brazil

In the context represented by vulnerabilities brought with the digital revolution, AI interacts as a tool that permeates various areas in the Defense sector. The technological environment incorporated into the operational theater of conflicts presents itself as a new form of employment of violence that uses physical, cybernetic means, irregular elements, political elements, among others (Campany 2021). These elements are part of the constitution of the concept of Hybrid War developed by Hoffman (2007) in his thesis entitled “Conflict in the 21st Century: the rise of Hybrid Wars”.

Starting from this idea, the concept of hybrid threats was developed, which according to the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE n.d.), are: “Harmful activities that are planned and executed with malicious intent. They aim to undermine a target, such as a state or an institution, through a variety of means, often combined.” Although they prioritize the use of non-military tools, they generate significant impacts on the affected societies that, at times, correspond to those of a military aggression. Among these, include cyber attacks, disinformation, sabotage, sponsorship of criminal or terrorist organizations, the exploitation of economic vulnerabilities, and even the corruption of public agents (Campany 2021).

In South America, disinformation has established itself as a recurring hybrid threat, being employed to manipulate public opinion, weaken governments, and influence political processes (Caixeta 2024). This phenomenon aims to destabilize the political scenario by compromising the population’s trust in democratic institutions and fostering internal divisions. In Brazil, the 2022 presidential elections evidenced this scenario, with the digital environment transforming into a strategic space for the fomenting of hybrid threats. The rapid dissemination of information, allied with the difficulty of tracking and attributing these campaigns, makes digital war a highly influential factor with great destabilizing potential (Caixeta 2024).

Advances in information and communication technologies, as well as the expansion of accessible services, enabled the transition from the traditional model of war to the concept of hybrid war. In this new scenario, threats

characteristic of conventional conflicts, such as nuclear ones, were gradually complemented by new forms of threat (Susnea and Ionuț-Cosmin 2021). Among them, cyber threats stand out, which consist of actions conducted by States or international organizations with the objective of attacking and compromising the computer systems and information networks of other nations (Canada 2022).

Therefore, the absence of a specific component for AI in Defense in the Brazilian strategy manifests itself in a particularly critical manner in the domain of cyber defense. For Brundage et al. (2018) AI can be used to expand existing threats, introduce new threats, and alter the typical character of threats, making them more effective, targeted, and difficult to attribute. Furthermore, it can allow cyber attacks to be carried out on a larger scale and with greater efficacy, reducing the need for human intervention and increasing the complexity of necessary responses.

The recent evolution of cyber attacks evidences a fundamental transformation in their nature and complexity. AI-based Advanced Persistent Threats (APTs) are characterized by adaptive capacity, autonomous behavior, and the ability to invade conventional detection systems. Traditional detection and mitigation tools may not be sufficient to deal with these threats, given their evolutionary and stealthy nature. AI, especially deep learning, is seen as a promising solution to improve the detection and defense against APTs (Walsh, Worrell and Scanlon 2024).

The convergence between AI and social media represents a growing risk for the integrity of the informational ecosystem. Generative language models and image synthesis, when combined with automated disinformation networks, allow the coordinated dissemination of false narratives on an industrial scale (Chesney and Citron 2019). The exponential speed of these campaigns increases their efficacy, making the digital environment particularly vulnerable to manipulations (Woolley and Howard 2018).

Advances in technology and trends of power and interdependence have driven the growth of the use of hybrid war, providing innovative capabilities both in the military and non-military domains (Costa 2024). As a consequence, not only the war apparatus will be transformed, but also the human dimension in war will be affected. The reflection of AI applications in hybrid war can be described and explained by the synergistic use of five different instruments and means of power, known as DIME – Diplomatic, Informational, Military, Economic –, which are used to exploit enemy vulnerabilities (Cullen and Reichborn-Kjennerud 2017).

The military dimension includes the use of AI-enabled military systems, encompassing aquatic, aerial, and terrestrial robots. Great progress

has been made in the development of AI-based weapons and technologies. For example, Israel has employed M113 armored personnel carriers, loaded with explosives, to neutralize traps and explosive devices in the Gaza Strip (Monitor do Oriente Médio 2024). Furthermore, AI programs, such as “The Gospel” and “Lavender”, are used to suggest targets for airstrikes and monitor suspected Hamas members, contributing to a rapid identification and elimination of targets, although often resulting in significant civilian casualties (Serhan 2024). These examples illustrate the growing use of AI in military operations, highlighting the need to balance technological efficacy with ethical and legal oversight.

The economic dimension of AI can be explained in the context of hybrid war. When States are targets of hybrid attacks, they often resort to counter-attacks through economic coercion, such as financial isolation and sanctions. AI-based tools are employed to optimize capital investments, assess credit quality, ensure regulatory compliance, monitor commercial transactions, and detect fraud (Zia 2021). AI has great utility in the information domain, which is crucial for shaping political discourse, influencing popular perceptions, and altering political outcomes through the manipulation of information availability (Barbosa 2020).

Another point is the dependence on foreign technologies. Without the autonomous development of AI systems, Brazil may find itself obliged to import solutions from other countries, which can compromise national sovereignty and the security of military information. Furthermore, the absence of an AI strategy can lead to a technological lag in relation to other nations that already incorporate these technologies into their armed forces. This lag can result in operational disadvantages, especially in high-risk missions, such as demining and reconnaissance operations, where AI can be employed to minimize human risks (Sputnik 2024).

Although this work focuses on the EBIA, the recently published Brazilian AI Plan presents the same deficit that we contest. The Plan still focuses on secondary applications, leaving aside core technologies such as language models. To change this scenario, it is essential to articulate innovation policies and the protection of strategic data (Outras Mídias 2024). This approach reproduces the historical pattern of importing know-how, aggravated by the lack of investments in semiconductors and high-performance computational infrastructure (Fernandes 2024).

The analysis of ethical dilemmas in the scope of AI in the military field demands the convergence of three complementary axes: the measurement and monitoring of responsible AI practices (Global Index on Responsible AI), global normative principles consolidated in Responsible AI frameworks, and

the legal-humanitarian reflection on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) conducted by organisms such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Although each report addresses distinct dimensions, the integration of the three perspectives reveals that current technological governance is marked by structural asymmetries, with direct implications for international security and the protection of civilians.

From the point of view of measurement, Responsible AI highlights indicators of security, transparency, and accountability as foundations for responsible AI (Responsible AI 2024). However, the military application of AI, especially in lethal contexts, is treated peripherally, without examining in depth dilemmas such as the humanitarian implications documented in recent conflicts, for example, between Israel and Hamas. The absence of specific metrics for military AI capabilities and for the vulnerability of different national contexts, especially in the Global South, limits the index's capacity to capture geopolitical inequalities.

The reports of the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021) and the OECD AI Principles (2019), provide a robust normative framework. They emphasize principles such as human-in-the-loop, auditability, mitigation of biases, and compliance with International Humanitarian Law (Jobin, Ienca and Vayena 2019; Floridi 2021). However, these frameworks are predominantly elaborated in the Global North, reflecting its values and priorities. For countries of the Global South, with limited institutional resources, the uncritical adoption of these frameworks can result in technological dependence and in regulatory gaps, perpetuating an asymmetric model of governance.

In turn, the ICRC report on autonomous weapons (ICRC 2016) brings a concrete legal-operational perspective, evidencing how the increase in autonomy in critical attack functions puts at risk principles such as distinction, proportionality, and precaution. The convergence of these reports allows identifying that the central challenge is not only technological, but normative and structural. A truly responsible global AI governance regime needs to include specific metrics for military capabilities within the ethical scope, adapted to the institutional realities of the Global South. Without such an integrated approach, the risk is to consolidate a scenario in which powers unilaterally define the ethical limits of military AI, while other States bear disproportionately the human and strategic costs of its implementation.

The SIPRI report, *Bias in Military Artificial Intelligence* (2024), addresses the risks associated with biases present in military AI systems, emphasizing their ethical, humanitarian, and strategic implications. Although the study does not focus specifically on emerging countries, its

conclusions are highly relevant for these nations, which are in the process of developing or acquiring AI technologies applied to defense. The report defines bias in military AI as the systemically distorted performance of a system that can generate unfair or harmful decisions, influenced by social, cultural, or economic factors, such as race, gender, or class. Such biases can arise from three main sources: bias in society, bias in data and algorithms, and bias in the operational use of the technology, and can compromise the efficacy of operations and generate serious humanitarian consequences, such as incorrect identification of targets or failures in the assessment of critical needs (Blanchard and Bruun 2024).

For emerging countries, the impact of these biases is particularly relevant, given that the research infrastructure and available data often present limitations. The absence of diversity in training data, combined with still incipient regulations on the military use of AI, increases the probability of distorted outcomes, reducing the reliability and ethics of operations. Thus, it is essential that these nations adopt responsible development practices from the outset, incorporating oversight mechanisms, algorithm validation, and review by multiple stakeholders, including universities, industry, and civil society. In this way, it is possible to reduce the risks of biases and strengthen the legitimacy of the use of AI in the context of security and defense (Blanchard and Bruun 2024).

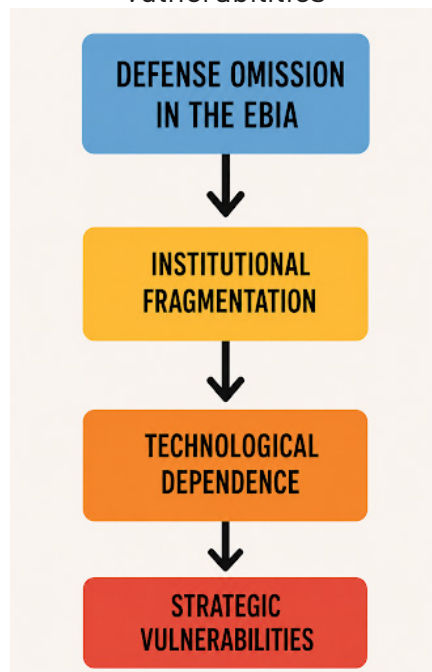
Furthermore, the implementation of transparency in development processes and international cooperation are central strategies to mitigate the risks associated with military AI. Aligning practices and norms to global ethical standards contributes to the construction of more reliable, secure, and consistent systems with the principles of international humanitarian law. For emerging countries, this approach not only strengthens technological capacity but also helps to consolidate credibility and trust in a global strategic scenario where AI plays a growing role in deterrence, decision-making, and the maintenance of regional stability (Blanchard and Bruun 2024).

Bringing the case of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, the use of AI systems, such as Lavender and Gospel by Israel, raises concerns about the dehumanization of the conflict, exacerbating historical inequalities and violating principles of international humanitarian law. This scenario highlights the urgency of establishing international regulations that govern the use of AI in military contexts, ensuring that the technology is employed in an ethical, transparent, and responsible manner, with effective human oversight, to prevent abuses and protect human dignity in times of war.

Given this international landscape, which elucidates systematic integration between AI development and defense capacity among major

powers, the lack of a chapter dedicated to Defense in EBIA triggers a chain of interconnected vulnerabilities, as illustrated in Figure 1. First, without clear strategic guidelines, the country does not establish priorities, coordination mechanisms or specific goals for AI applied to the military sector, enhancing the institutional fragmentation already present in the defense field. Second, this lack of coordination hinders project continuity, limits the development of autonomous capabilities, and reduces long-term planning capacity. Third, a direct consequence is heightened technological dependence on foreign suppliers, particularly in sensitive systems, cyber infrastructure and dual-use technologies, restricting national autonomy in critical areas.

Figure 1: Causal chain - from the omission in the EBIA to strategic vulnerabilities



Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

This cycle culminates in strategic vulnerabilities that directly affect the security of critical infrastructure and the country's ability to respond to hybrid threats and high-complexity conflicts. Thus, the initial omission of Defense in the EBIA not only represents a documental gap, but unleashes a process that connects, linearly and cumulatively, institutional fragmentation,

technological dependency and concrete risks to national sovereignty.

Proposals and recommendations

The analysis developed in the previous sections evidences the pressing need for a strategic reformulation for AI in Brazil, particularly regarding the Defense sector. The EBIA, although an initial milestone, presents significant limitations by neglecting the dimension of AI applied to Defense. To overcome this gap, the revision and amplification of the EBIA is proposed to incorporate specific guidelines for the development of AI in the aforementioned sector, with a focus on dual-use technologies that enable synergy between civilian and military applications.

This approach would allow maximizing investments and accelerating the development of national capabilities, especially in a scenario of budgetary restriction. The implementation of a specific National Program for the development of AI applied to defense emerges as a strategic imperative for Brazil, aligning itself with global trends of strengthening technological sovereignty.

It is understood that such a program should be structured around four fundamental axes: (i) development of sovereign computational infrastructure; (ii) training of specialized human resources; (iii) applied research in priority areas; and (iv) technology transfer to the Defense Industrial Base (BID). Furthermore, the governance of this program should adopt the triple helix model, integrating government, academia, and industry, with agile financing mechanisms and intellectual property protection. This approach would allow overcoming the bureaucratic limitations that historically compromise strategic initiatives in Brazil.

Concretizing the Proposals: International Lessons and National Mechanisms

For the proposals for incorporating AI into Brazilian Defense to become operational, it is essential to detail the “how” of their implementation, drawing inspiration from international models and exploring legal and institutional mechanisms already existing in Brazil.

The prioritization of dual-use technologies is a fundamental strategy to optimize investments in scenarios of limited resources. This approach finds a parallel in China’s “military-civil fusion,” which integrates

universities, industries, and military institutions to accelerate the transfer of innovations from the civilian sector to military applications (Kania 2020). Similarly, the United States seeks collaboration between the Department of Defense, academia, and industry, as exemplified by the “Stargate” project, which foresees massive investments in AI infrastructure with public-private partnerships, with an estimated investment of the order of US\$ 500 billion over the next four years (HuffPost 2025; Open AI 2025). For Brazil, focusing on areas such as cybersecurity or logistical optimization, which have vast civilian and military application, allows leveraging resources from multiple sources.

The implementation of the triple helix in Brazil must be accompanied by mechanisms that facilitate technology transfer to the Defense Industrial Base (BID), combating the historical technological dependence that authors such as Cardoso and Faletto (1970) and Furtado (1974) already pointed out and that persists until today as asserted by Girardi and Galdino (2024). The absence of specific guidelines for AI in defense compromises the development of a national industrial base in this strategic sector, reproducing center-periphery asymmetries. To reverse this framework, it is essential to explore and strengthen instruments such as:

- **Innovation Law (Law No. 10,973/2004 and its updates):** Which already provides mechanisms for interaction between Scientific and Technological Institutions (ICTs) and companies, including laboratory sharing, secondment of researchers, and patent licensing.

- **Technological Commissions:** A powerful instrument for the State to induce the development of specific AI solutions by the national industry, defining the need and sharing the technological risk.

- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and Joint Development Contracts:** Structures that allow the private sector to share the investment and risk in long-term AI projects, while the public sector guarantees demand and the testing environment.

- **Fostering Intellectual Property (IP):** Clear IP policies are essential to incentivize innovation and facilitate the licensing of technologies developed in universities or military centers to the BID.

The national experience already offers a successful model for this integration: the Integrated Border Monitoring System (SISFRON). It is a strategic project of the Brazilian Army that demonstrates the country’s capacity to develop and integrate complex systems, with the active participation of the national industry (such as Savis and Bradar) in supplying advanced technologies. SISFRON serves as an internal “case study” that validates the

premise that Brazil can build sovereign technological capabilities, even in a domain different from AI, providing a roadmap for the future incorporation of AI in Defense.

The adequate dimensioning of investments in R&D constitutes a fundamental element for the development of national capabilities in AI for Defense. China's investment in research and development continues on an ascending trajectory, with expenditures totaling approximately US\$ 500 billion in 2024 (Xinhua 2025). Meanwhile, in the United States, important initiatives in artificial intelligence have been implemented, such as the "Stargate" project, which foresees investments that could reach the same value in the coming years (US\$ 500 billion) (HuffPost, 2025). Although Brazil cannot compete on the same scale of investment, the strategy must focus on the optimization of resources and the induction of an innovation ecosystem that overcomes the "insufficiency of technical knowledge" and the "subordination to large technology corporations and the powers that already dominate this sector" (Brazilian Academy of Sciences 2023).

Finally, we highlight that the revision of the EBIA must contemplate not only technological aspects, but also the ethical dilemmas and humanitarian impacts related to the employment of AI in military systems. The discussion should reference Responsible AI frameworks (such as the OECD principles and the DoD Ethical Principles for AI) and the recent debates on compliance with International Humanitarian Law, using cases such as Israel/Gaza and Ukraine to exemplify the ethical challenges, as already pointed out in section 2.

Conclusion

The analysis developed in this article, based on a multidisciplinary and comparative approach of international models, evidences that the strategic incorporation of Artificial Intelligence in the Defense sector constitutes an unavoidable imperative for the preservation of Brazilian sovereignty and national interests in the 21st century. By performing a critical analysis of the Brazilian Artificial Intelligence Strategy and quantifying the gap in the Defense sector, this work proposes concrete paths for overcoming this strategic vulnerability. The growing digitalization of conflicts and the emergence of hybrid threats demand advanced technological capabilities that Brazil has not yet developed satisfactorily, placing at risk not only its geopolitical projection but also the security of its critical infrastructures.

The lack of strategic autonomy identified in the Brazilian Defense sector

reflects historical patterns of technological dependence and discontinuity of public policies that compromise national development. As demonstrated by the evidence presented, this vulnerability is particularly acute in the field of military AI, where Brazil figures as a mere consumer of foreign technologies, often subject to restrictions and conditionings that limit its operational sovereignty.

The proposals outlined, such as the robust inclusion of defense in the Brazilian AI Strategy, the creation of a specific National Program for the military sector, the amplification of investments in R&D, and the establishment of strategic partnerships, constitute viable paths to reverse this framework. However, success depends on the implementation of State policies with adequate time horizons and consistent resources. The analyzed international experience offers both lessons and warnings for the Brazilian case, evidencing that merely incremental solutions will be insufficient in the face of the accelerated digital transformation of the global strategic environment.

The development of national capabilities in AI for defense demands a systemic approach that integrates multiple actors (government, academia, industry), contemplates diverse dimensions (technological, ethical, legal, operational), and establishes clear priorities aligned with national strategic objectives. In this sense, more than financial resources, Brazil needs strategic vision and adequate institutional arrangements that enable overcoming historical obstacles to its autonomous technological development.

The window of opportunity for the development of significant capabilities in AI for Defense is narrowing rapidly, as technological powers consolidate their leadership and widen the distance in relation to other countries. Brazil, due to its territorial dimension, strategic natural resources, and geopolitical position, cannot abdicate the development of technological capabilities compatible with its national interests and regional responsibilities, also contributing to the stability and security in South America. The question, therefore, is not if the country should invest in AI for Defense, but how to do it efficiently, ethically, and aligned with its national development project.

It is concluded, thus, that the effective incorporation of AI in the Brazilian national defense requires a profound revision of the EBIA to explicitly include the defense dimension, as well as the establishment of governance mechanisms that guarantee the continuity of national efforts in this strategic field. Only through a consistent State policy, which transcends political cycles and mobilizes adequate resources, can Brazil develop the necessary technological capabilities to face the challenges of the 21st century and guarantee its sovereignty in the digital and physical domains.

Acknowledgement

The authors received financial support for this research from the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) through the Program for Support to Teaching and Scientific and Technological Research in National Defense (Pró-Defesa V), under Public Notice No. 36/2023, Process No. 23038.011220/2023-31.

This study was funded by FAPERJ – Carlos Chagas Filho Foundation for Research Support of the State of Rio de Janeiro, SEI Process No. 260003/008748/2026.

References

- Brazilian Academy of Sciences. 2023. *Recomendações para o avanço da inteligência artificial no Brasil*. <https://www.abc.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/recomendacoes-para-o-avanco-da-inteligencia-artificial-no-brasil-abc-novembro-2023-GT-IA.pdf>
- AI Index Report. 2025. *Stanford University*.
- Allen, Greg and Taniel Chan. 2017. *Artificial intelligence and national security*. Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.
- Ayres Pinto, Danielle and Sabrina Medeiros. 2022. “Inteligência artificial e seu uso no contexto militar: desafios e dilemas éticos”. *Cadernos Adenauer* 23 (2): 97-112.
- Ayoub, Kareem and Kenneth Payne. 2015. “Strategy in the Age of Artificial Intelligence”. *Journal of Strategic Studies* 39 (6): 793-819.
- Barbosa, Alexandre. 2020. “A Desinformação como Ferramenta da Guerra Híbrida”. PhD diss., Escola de Guerra Naval.
- Barreiros, Daniel and Italo Poty. 2021. “Estratégia Norte-Americana para o desenvolvimento de Inteligência Artificial Militar: um horizonte de curto prazo (2020-2030)”. *Austral* 10 (19): 206-224.
- Blanchard, Alexander and Laura Bruun. 2024. *Bias in Military Artificial Intelligence*. SIPRI.
- Boulanin, Vincent et al. 2020. *Artificial Intelligence, strategic stability and nuclear risk*. SIPRI.
- Brasil. Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia e Inovação. 2021. *Aprova a Estratégia*

Nacional de artificial.

- Brasil. Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia e Inovação. 2024a. *Aprova o Plano Brasileiro de Inteligência Artificial*.
- Brasil. Ministério da Defesa. Exército Brasileiro. 2024b. *Aprova a Diretriz Estratégica de Inteligência Artificial para o Exército Brasileiro EB20-D-02.031*.
- Brazilian Air Force. 2024. “FAB aposta em Inteligência Artificial para eficiência, segurança e inovação tecnológica”.
- Brazilian Air Force. 2025a. “CCA-SJ assina convênio inédito na área de Inteligência Artificial”.
- Brazilian Air Force. 2025b. “Pesquisa desenvolvida no ITA utiliza Inteligência Artificial”.
- Brundage, Miles et al. 2018. *The Malicious Use of Artificial Intelligence: Forecasting, Prevention, and Mitigation*. Cornell University (Arxiv).
- Caixeta, Alécia. 2024. “A nova fronteira digital: Guerra Híbrida e o impacto da inteligência artificial na soberania dos países da América do Sul”. In *Geografia e sociedade: Compreendendo as dinâmicas globais*, edited by Adilson Basquerote. Atena Editora.
- Campany, Luigi. 2021. Ameaças híbridas e a segurança marítima do século XXI. PhD diss., Escola de Guerra Naval.
- Canada. 2022. An introduction to cyber threat environment. Canadian Centre for Cybersecurity. *Communications Security Establishment*. <https://www.cyber.gc.ca/sites/default/files/ncta-2022-intro-e.pdf>
- Cardoso, Fernando Henrique, and Enzo Faletto. 1970. *Dependência e desenvolvimento na América Latina: ensaio de interpretação sociológica*. Zahar.
- Cassiolato, José Eduardo, and Helena Lastres. 2005. “Sistemas de inovação e desenvolvimento: as implicações de política.” *São Paulo em Perspectiva* 19 (1): 34-45.
- Chesney, Robert and Danielle Citron. 2019. “Deep Fakes: A Looming Challenge for Privacy, Democracy, and National Security.” *California Law Review* 107 (6): 1753–1819.
- China. 2017. Ministry of Defence. Next Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan.
- Costa, Aristóteles. 2024. Guerra Híbrida: análise das características, impactos e estratégias de defesa no contexto contemporâneo. Diss., Escola de Guerra Naval.

- Cullen, Patrick and Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud. 2017. Understanding hybrid warfare: a multinational capability development campaign project. *MCDC*.
- Dagnino, Renato. 2009. "Elementos para uma teoria crítica da tecnologia." *Revista Brasileira de Ciência e Tecnologia* 1 (1): 3-33.
- United States of America. 2025. *Winning the Race: America's AI Action Plan*.
- Faria, Luis Claudio. 2024. *O impacto da IA para a Defesa Cibernética: proposta para criação do Comando Conjunto de Inteligência Artificial*. Undergraduate Thesis, Escola Superior de Guerra.
- Fattorini et al. 2024. The Global AI Vibrancy Tool. Stanford University.
- Fedasiuk, Ryan, Jennifer Melot and Ben Murphy. 2021. *Harnessed Lightning: How the Chinese Military Is Adopting Artificial Intelligence*. Center for Security and Emerging Technology, Georgetown University.
- Fernandes, Miguel. 2024. A regulamentação da IA: como evitar a irrelevância tecnológica em meio à busca por equilíbrio. *Exame*, December 18. <https://exame.com/inteligencia-artificial/a-regulamentacao-da-ia-como-evitar-a-irrelevancia-tecnologica-em-meio-a-busca-por-equilibrio/>.
- Floridi, Luciano. 2021. *The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*. Oxford University Press.
- Fortune Business Insights. 2025. *Fortune Business Insights*. Accessed July 21, 2025. www.fortunebusinessinsights.com
- France. 2021. Ministry of the Armed Forces. *Stratégie Nationale en Intelligence Artificielle*.
- France. 2024. Ministry of the Armed Forces. *La stratégie française en intelligence artificielle*.
- Furtado, Celso. 1974. *O mito do desenvolvimento econômico*. Paz e Terra.
- Gil, Antônio Carlos. 1999. *Métodos e técnicas de pesquisa social*. Atlas.
- Girardi, Rômulo, and Juraci Ferreira Galdino. 2024. "A 'dualidade' Da Dualidade tecnológica: Implicações para países em desenvolvimento". *Coleção Meira Mattos* 18 (62): 189-216.
- Global Growth Insights. 2025. *Global Growth Insights*. Accessed July 21, 2025. www.globalgrowthinsights.com
- Godoy, Arilda Schmidt. 1995. "Pesquisa qualitativa: tipos fundamentais." *Revista de Administração de Empresas* 35 (3): 20-29.
- Haner, Justin and Denise Garcia. 2019. "The Artificial Intelligence Arms Race: Trends and World Leaders in Autonomous Weapons Development".

Global Policy 10 (3): 331-337.

- Hoffman, Frank. 2007. *Conflict in the 21st century: the rise of hybrid wars*. PhD diss., Potomac Institute for Policy Studies.
- Horowitz, Michael. 2018. "Artificial Intelligence, International Competition, and the Balance of Power". *Texas National Security Review* 1 (3): 36-57.
- HuffPost. 2025. "Trump anuncia una inversión privada de hasta 500.000 millones en inteligencia artificial". *Huffpost*, January 22. <https://www.huffingtonpost.es/global/trump-anuncia-inversion-privada-500000-millones-inteligencia-artificialbr.html>
- Hybrid CoE. n.d. *Hybrid Threats as a Concept*. Accessed March 28, 2025. <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/hybrid-threats-as-a-phenomenon/>.
- ICRC. 2016. *Autonomous Weapon Systems: Implications of Increasing Autonomy in the Critical Functions of Weapons*. International Committee of the Red Cross.
- Instituto de Tecnologia e Sociedade do Rio. 2020. Resumo detalhado dos Planos estratégicos de desenvolvimento de Inteligência Artificial. <https://itsrio.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/RelatorioAI.pdf>.
- Israel. Ministry of Defence. 2025. National Program for Artificial Intelligence Program and Snapshot.
- Jobin, Anna, Marcello Ienca, and Effy Vayena. 2019. "The Global Landscape of AI Ethics Guidelines." *Nature Machine Intelligence* 1 (1): 389-399.
- Johnson, James. 2019. "Artificial Intelligence & Future Warfare: Implications for International Security". *Defense & Security Analysis*. Vol. 35 (2): 147-69.
- Kania, Elsa. 2017. *Battlefield singularity. Artificial intelligence, military revolution, and china's future military power*. Center for a new American security.
- Kania, Elsa. 2020. 'AI Weapons' in China's Military Innovation. Brookings Institution.
- Matos, Mauro Esdras. 2024. "A Integração da Inteligência Artificial com a Logística do Exército dos Estados Unidos da América". *Revista Doutrina Militar Terrestre* 12 (38): 38-45.
- Mimran, Tal and Gal Dahan. 2024. Artificial Intelligence in the Battlefield: A Perspective from Israel. *Opinio Juris*, April 20. <https://opiniojuris.org/2024/04/20/artificial-intelligence-in-the-battlefield-a-perspective-from-israel/>.
- Monitor do Oriente Médio. 2024. "Israel usa veículos blindados para limpar bombas na beira da estrada em Gaza". *Monitor do Oriente Médio*, December 30. <https://www.monitordo Oriente.com/20241230-israel->

usa-veiculos-blindados-para-limpar-bombas-na-beira-da-estrada-em-gaza/

Nadibaidze, Anna. 2022. "Great Power Identity in Russia's Position on Autonomous Weapons Systems." *Contemporary Security Policy* 43 (3): 407–35.

OECD. 2019. *Recommendation of the Council on Artificial Intelligence*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

OECD.AI. 2025. "Investments in AI and Data." *OECD.AI*. <https://oecd.ai/en/data?selectedArea=investments-in-ai-and-data&selectedVisualization=vc-investments-in-ai-by-country>

Open AI. 2025. "Anunciamos o projeto Stargate." *OpenAI*, January 21.

Outras Mídias. 2024. IA: a chance que o Brasil não pode desperdiçar. *Outras Mídias*, July 11. <https://outraspalavras.net/outrasmidias/ia-a-chance-que-o-brasil-nao-pode-desperdicar/>

Padilha, Luiz. 2025. França e Reino Unido desenvolvem um novo sistema para lidar com ameaças de minas submarinas. *Defesa aérea e naval*, April 4. <https://www.defesaaereanaval.com.br/defesa/franca-e-reino-unido-desenvolvem-novo-sistema-para-lidar-com-ameacas-de-minas-submarinas>.

Payne, Kenneth. 2018. "Artificial Intelligence: A Revolution in Strategic Affairs?" *Survival* 60 (5): 7-32.

United Kingdom. Ministry of Defence. 2021. *National Artificial Intelligence Strategy*.

United Kingdom. Ministry of Defence. 2022. *Defence Artificial Intelligence Strategy*.

United Kingdom. Ministry of Defence. 2025. *AI Opportunities Action Plan*.

Renic, Neil, and Elke Schwarz. 2023. "Crimes of Dispassion: Autonomous Weapons and the Moral Challenge of Systematic Killing." *Ethics & International Affairs* 37 (3): 321–43.

Responsible AI. 2024. *Global Index on Responsible AI*. CIFAR.

Rondepierre, Bertrand. 2024. "French military AI chief: AMIAD has an annual budget of €300 million and will receive a supercomputer". *Politico Europe*, March.

Rosa, Carlos Eduardo, Eduardo Araújo da Silva, and Pedro Barbezani Ribeiro. 2024. "A Geoestratégia dos Drones Aéreos". *Regeo-Revista Interdisciplinar* 15 (1): 1-21.

Russell, Stuart and Peter Norvig. 2016. *Artificial intelligence: a modern approach*.

Pearson.

- Russia. Ministry of Defence. 2019. *National Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence Over the Period Extending up to the Year 2030*.
- Sá, Hebert Azevedo, Romullo Girardi, Julio Cesar Duarte, and Juraci Ferreira Galdino. 2025. “Tendências da inteligência artificial aplicada à defesa: forças, fraquezas, oportunidades e ameaças para o Brasil”. *Boletim De Conjuntura* 21 (62):01-33.
- Scharre, Paul. 2018. *Army of None: Autonomous Weapons and the Future of War*. W. W Norton & Company.
- Schneider, Sergio, and Cláudia Job Schimitt. 1998. “O uso do método comparativo nas Ciências Sociais.” *Cadernos de Sociologia*. 9 (1): 49–87.
- Serhan, Yasmeeen. 2024. “How Israel Uses AI in Gaza—And What It Might Mean for the Future of Warfare”. *Time*, December 18. <https://time.com/7202584/gaza-ukraine-ai-warfare/>
- Sputnik. 2024. “Brasil precisa desenvolver inteligência artificial militar e importar não é opção, diz analista”. *Sputnik*, April 11. <https://noticiabrasil.net.br/20240411/brasil-precisa-desenvolver-inteligencia-artificial-militar-e-importar-nao-e-opcao-diz-analista-34032454.html>
- Susnea, Elena and Ionuț-Cosmin, Buta. 2021. “Artificial intelligence in hybrid warfare: a literature review and classification”. *Strategies XXI* 17 (1): Proceedings of the 17th International Scientific Conference Strategies XXI.
- Topychkanov, Petr, ed. 2020. *The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Strategic Stability and Nuclear Risk*, Volume III: South Asian Perspectives. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).
- UNESCO. 2021. *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Vincent, Brandi. 2024. “Why the Pentagon Didn’t Request Higher Funding for AI in Fiscal 2025.” *DefenseScoop*, March 11.
- Walsh, Matthew; Worrell, Clarence and Scanlon, Thomas. 2024. *Toward the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Advanced Persistent Threat Detection*. Carnegie Mellon University.
- Woolley, Samuel and Philip Howard. 2018. *Computational Propaganda: Political Parties, Politicians, and Political Manipulation on Social Media*. Oxford University Press.
- Xinhua. 2025. Gastos em pesquisa e desenvolvimento da China registram

rápido crescimento em 2024. *Xinhua*, January 23.

Zequim, Eduarda and Ribeiro, Douglas. 2022. “O papel da inteligência artificial na segurança cibernética: o uso de sistemas inteligentes em benefício da segurança dos dados das empresas”. *Revista Interface Tecnológica* 19 (1): 21–33.

Zia, Haleema. 2021. “The Evolution of Artificial Intelligence: Implications for Cybersecurity and Hybrid Warfare”. *Pakistan Journal of Terrorism Research* 3 (1): 1–28.

ABSTRACT

This article critically analyzes the absence of a National Defense chapter in the Brazilian Artificial Intelligence Strategy (EBIA). It identifies and discusses significant strategic vulnerabilities that this omission poses to national sovereignty, particularly given the current geopolitical landscape and increasing AI militarization. Serious implications of lacking technological autonomy in military AI are explored, considering dynamic contemporary contexts and emerging hybrid threats. The study proposes an integrated, pragmatic model, aligned with public policies, for effectively incorporating AI into Brazil's defense doctrine. This model encompasses autonomous technological development, highly specialized human resource training, and a robust military innovation ecosystem. Conclusions emphasize EBIA's pressing reformulation need, warning of increasing strategic vulnerability in an international scenario where AI is indispensable for state security and autonomy.

KEYWORDS

Artificial Intelligence; National Defense; Brazilian Artificial Intelligence Strategy.

Received on February 17, 2025

Accepted on June 16, 2026

BRICS AND THE MULTIPLOIDIZATION OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE: NAVIGATING POST-HEGEMONIC PATHWAYS

Nehme Al Khawly¹

Amir Reza Emami²

Introduction

The global geopolitical landscape is experiencing profound transformations driven by the shifting dynamics of international power relations. Historically characterized by unipolarity under U.S. dominance, the contemporary international order increasingly gravitates towards multipolarity (Ashford and Cooper 2023; Geeraerts 2011: 60). This transition is significantly influenced by the BRICS countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—collectively representing an ascending force that contests traditional hegemonic frameworks, significantly influencing this shift (Butler 2018, 18; Armijo 2007, 9)³. The emergence of the BRICS symbolizes a distinctive form of South-South cooperation and represents a deliberate effort by states of the Global South to reshape global governance towards a post-hegemonic orientation⁴.

1 Notre Dame University-Louaize, Zouk Mosbeh, Lebanon. E-mail: nehme.alkhawly@ndu.edu.lb. ORCID: 0000-0002-2221-8532.

2 Universidade de Yazd, Yazd, Iran. E-mail: amirreza.emami1993@outlook.com. ORCID: 0000-0002-6466-1700.

3 This study focuses on the post-hegemonic transformation of global politics, rather than the counter-hegemonic aspect. This transition from a unipolar to a multipolar order does not imply the total cessation of US influence. Instead, the US's status as the sole superpower post-Cold War has been contested, and its capabilities and power have diminished; however, it remains a dominant force. For further reading, see Mir Hosseini et al. (2021).

4 However, it should be emphasized that the BRICS, as it is, is not a cohesive historical alliance opposing US hegemony. Some scholars argue that the BRICS initiatives may not foster genuine South-South cooperation, but instead perpetuate existing inequalities among emerging nations. Despite these perspectives, the BRICS plays a vital role in shaping global governance frameworks and facilitating international development. For more information, see Juncal

Despite extensive studies on the advent of multipolarity and its impact on global governance (Garzón 2017; Efstathopoulos 2016; Shaw et al. 2009), a significant knowledge gap remains about the specific policies and methods employed by the BRICS to counter American hegemony effectively. Particularly understudied is the nuanced interplay between economic dynamism, military capabilities, institutional frameworks, and cultural influence within the BRICS context and their cumulative effect on global multiploidization.

Addressing this gap, the current research seeks to comprehensively evaluate the role of the BRICS alliance in facilitating the multiploidization of global governance. This study's central research question is: "How does the BRICS alliance contribute to the multiploidization of global governance?". While the term multipolarity traditionally refers to the distribution of power among multiple sovereign actors in the international system, multiploidization refers to a deeper transformation: not only the diffusion of power, but also the emergence of parallel governance architectures, alternative norms, and Southern-led institutional innovations that challenge hegemonic universality. As used in this paper, multiploidization captures the qualitative reordering of global governance, whereby actors from the Global South—especially the BRICS—no longer merely participate in existing institutions but actively reshape their design and legitimacy. It is both a descriptive and analytical term that highlights a world no longer centered on a single pole or logic of governance, but characterized by plural nodes of agency, sovereignty, and normative authority (Gürçan 2019; Kiely 2015; Quiliconi and Kingah 2016). This paper analyzes the strategic implications of South-South cooperation and elucidates the broader shifts in international power dynamics resulting from the decline of U.S. dominance⁵.

In evaluating the role of the BRICS, this study distinguishes between two causal pathways: (1) the direct erosion of U.S. hegemony through deliberate institutional, economic, and geopolitical countermeasures; and

(2018), Gu et al. (2016).

5 This interpretation aligns with Barry Buzan's recent reflections on the BRICS as an expression of "deep pluralism"—a diplomatic formation that, while too heterogeneous to form a tightly integrated bloc, nonetheless plays a pivotal role in transitioning from a Western-centric order to one marked by a more diffuse distribution of wealth, knowledge, and governance authority. As Buzan argues, the BRICS aggregates shared dissatisfaction with the overextension of U.S. financial dominance and the disproportionate influence of the U.S. and Europe in global intergovernmental institutions. Michael Cox similarly notes that, despite internal divergence, the BRICS increasingly possesses global legitimacy as a Southern-led platform for post-hegemonic governance. These views underscore the importance of analyzing the BRICS not as a coherent bloc, but as a functional coalition engaging in strategic, pluralist alternatives to Western-dominated global structures (Buzan 2025; Cox 2025).

(2) the strategic expansion of the BRICS influence into global governance spaces weakened by declining Western legitimacy. While these dynamics are interrelated, this distinction clarifies the mechanisms by which the BRICS contributes to multiploidization. In some cases—such as promoting de-dollarization or building parallel development institutions—the BRICS acts as a direct challenger. In others—such as filling gaps in global infrastructure finance or public health governance—it acts as an opportunistic system-builder in a shifting international order.

While studies such as Bastanifar et al (2025) and Jacobs & Van Rossem (2014) examine economic and geopolitical factors, their analyses often focus on selected dimensions or pairwise comparisons rather than systematically integrating economic, military, institutional, and cultural (soft power) dimensions. Previous work, such as that of Moch (2024) and empirical comparisons such as those of Cogent Social Sciences, has relied primarily on comparative measures or empirical data on economic and military capabilities. These studies often provide quantitative comparative analyses, without deeply examining the strategic interactions between these diverse dimensions or their cumulative geopolitical implications. Previous research has primarily emphasized the BRICS as emerging economies challenging economic dominance or compared them with traditional power groups (G7). While geopolitics is addressed, an explicit and detailed examination of the direct role of the BRICS in shaping a post-hegemonic global governance system is less of a central analytical issue. Our research explicitly highlights the transition from unipolar (US-dominated) to multipolar (post-hegemonic) governance and elaborates on how the BRICS are strategically creating alternative governance structures (such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the New Development Bank, initiatives such as de-dollarization) to advance a South-centric multipolar order. This explicit and apparent shift in global governance systems represents a distinct contribution and innovation.

The novelty of the present research, therefore, lies in the integrated geopolitical-economic assessment (economic, military, institutional, cultural) that provides a comprehensive strategic analytical framework that considers cumulative geopolitical implications and highlights an explicit analysis of the BRICS role in actively shaping a post-hegemonic global governance architecture.

Methodologically, the study employs a comparative analytical framework, drawing from primary and secondary data sources. It assesses the relative influence of the BRICS in economic dynamism, military power, institutional capacity, and cultural (soft power) influence. This multidimensional approach allows for a robust evaluation of how the

BRICS collectively disrupt traditional hierarchies and construct alternative governance frameworks, such as promoting de-dollarization and establishing the New Development Bank. Ultimately, the study argues that BRICS' active participation in global governance signifies a pivotal transformation from a U.S.-led unipolar system towards a more diversified, multipolar international order, fundamentally reshaping the architecture of 21st-century global governance.

The Geopolitical-Economic Interplay: The U.S. vs. the BRICS

Murray (2012) identifies six elements of economic dynamism: military power, territorial dominance and control over natural resources, demographic power, institutional capacity, and global culture, which are essential for distinguishing and determining polar power. Brady (2017) emphasizes the military, financial, and scientific ambitions in polar regions that have the potential to transform global power dynamics. Dodds and Powell (2013) emphasize the necessity of a comprehensive understanding of identity politics, governance, and security in these regions. The collective analysis of these works illustrates the intricate dynamics of polar power, integrating cultural, military, and economic dimensions within global politics (Murray and Brown 2012; Murray 2012; Brady 2017; Dodds and Powell 2013). This study examines the rising influence of the BRICS through a three-dimensional framework encompassing economic dynamism, military strength, institutional capacity, and cultural influence, drawing on scholarly consensus and a review of primary and secondary sources. From a geopolitical and economic perspective, these three features are significant indicators of global hegemony. The dominance of these determinants, specifically by a single nation, corresponds to a unipolar international order. Conversely, in numerous cases, a scenario in which other nations, especially the BRICS, disrupt this power monopoly would indicate a shift toward a multipolar order. A unipolar tendency in global politics characterized the 1990s. In contrast, the 2000s were characterized by a multipolarization of world politics, during which southern rivals increasingly challenged the global hegemony of the United States.

This paper operationalizes multiploidization by examining three interrelated characteristics of the BRICS countries' collective contribution to global governance: the extent of this contribution, economic dynamism, military capability, and institutional-cultural influence. Indicators include GDP and trade volume (economic agency), defense spending and regional

military presence (strategic autonomy), and participation in multilateral institutions, development banks, and soft power rankings (institutional diversification). When these efforts shift authority and legitimacy away from U.S.-centric models toward Southern-designed alternatives, they are interpreted as evidence of multiploidization in action.

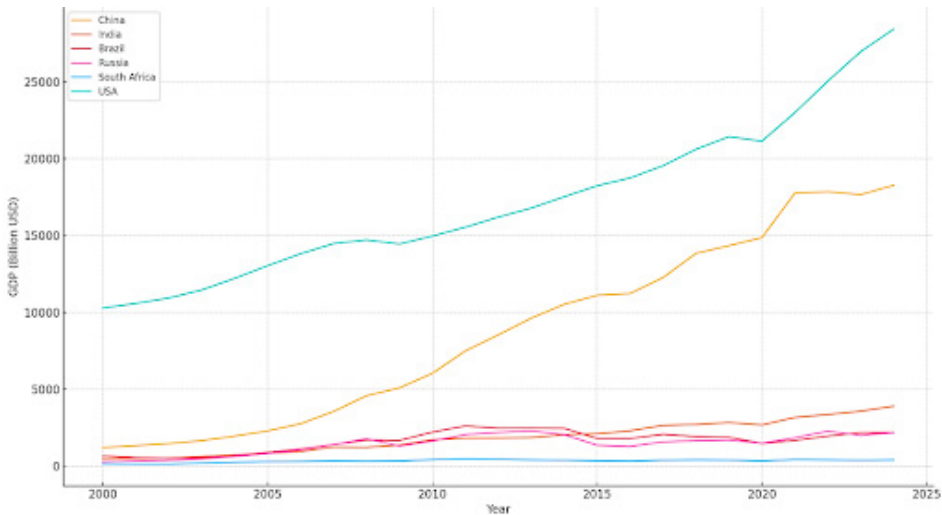
Economic Power

Economic power is defined as the capacity to influence decision-making and control resources. This complex notion significantly shapes the capabilities and choices of individuals, corporations, and nations within the context of the global landscape (Safuiddin 2021). The United States, historically the sole dominant economic power, has seen its position challenged by China's economic development over the past two decades. This shift has altered America's status, particularly as it previously provided financial assistance to war-torn nations following World War II. Evidence suggests that China has significantly challenged the United States in the economic sphere, as evidenced by the ongoing trade and economic conflict between the two nations. In the Global South, China's accumulation of over \$2 trillion in reserves and the surge in global lending notably diminishes US financial leverage by decreasing its dependence on Western institutions, such as the IMF and the dollar-centric system (Dutkiewicz et al. 2020). When it comes to international investment in the Global South, China and the US are competitors. According to Stuenkel (2016) and MacDonald and Lemco (2011), China's lending to Latin America exceeds that of the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank put together. The US dollar's dominance in international finance has been significantly weakened since the euro's introduction in 1999, as well as other attempts by Eurasian nations to substitute gold or other currencies for the US dollar. The US's position as the world's leading and most dynamic manufacturing hub has been eroded due to the 2008 financial crisis and the over-financialization of the US economy.

In addition to damaging the US economy's international standing, rising unemployment and inequality have harmed the country's political climate by encouraging bigotry and xenophobia (Edelman 2019; Ivanova 2019; Milberg and Winkler 2009). Economic power is influenced by various factors, with GDP being the most significant, as it provides a more accurate representation of national economic strength (Greenaway-McGrevy 2011). However, other research suggests that it has significant limitations as an indicator of national economic power and well-being (DeLeon and Boris

2010; Lawn 2007). This element is considered a key measure and criterion for assessing the economic power of nations, as it serves as the primary variable in macroeconomic analysis and evaluations. It is the most frequently utilized indicator by economists to gauge societal well-being and facilitate comparisons among different societies (Mir Hosseini 2021, 78). China's GDP remains lower than that of the United States despite being the highest among the BRICS nations. The United States has surpassed each of the BRICS nations. Russia and Brazil are closely matched, while India's GDP per capita is relatively strong among the BRICS nations.

Figure 1: GDP (current US\$) - United States, China, Russian Federation, India, Brazil, South Africa



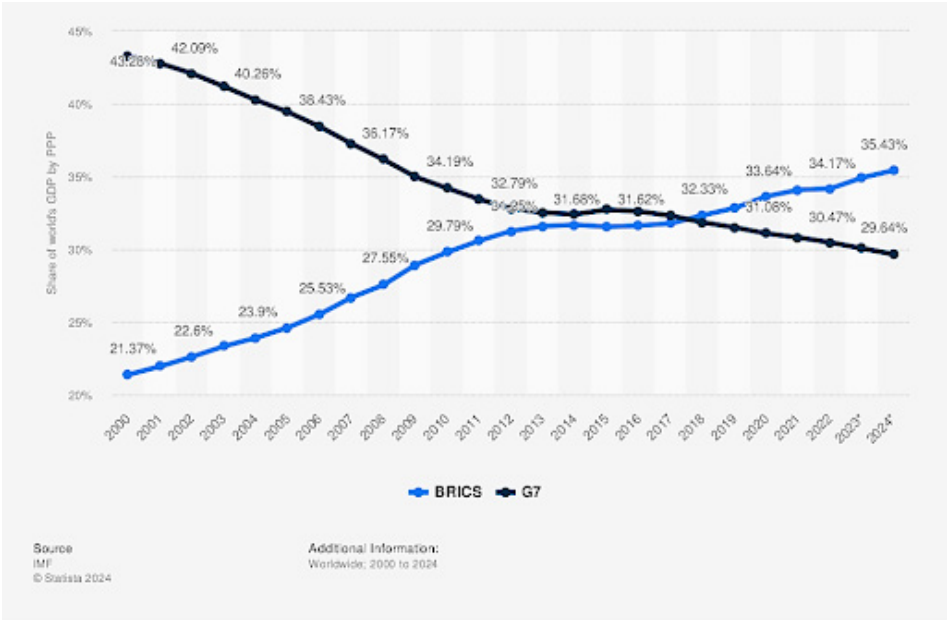
Source: www.data.worldbank.org.

In 2023, China had the highest GDP among the BRICS nations, totaling US\$17.84 trillion, whereas the other member countries each have GDPs below US\$4 trillion. China has consistently been the largest economy within the bloc, and its rapid growth ranks second globally, following the United States. Some analysts predict that India may surpass the United States by mid-century; however, China's GDP is anticipated to exceed that of the United States by the end of the 2020s, positioning it as the largest economy globally. Experts predict that India's growth rate will match that of China and is likely to surpass it in the next decade (Christensen and Xing 2016; Hopewell 2016; Kiely 2015). The BRICS group functions as more than a mere trade or economic bloc; it established the New Development Bank (NDB) in 2014

to invest in renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure globally. The NDB symbolizes evolutionary innovation in global governance, responding to systemic gaps left by traditional Western-led institutions. Its membership expansion, including countries beyond the BRICS core, underscores its growing geopolitical importance and role in advancing a multipolar order—what Noroozi calls “polyplidity”—in global economic governance (Noroozi 2024). The Shanghai-based multilateral development lender has recently funded a variety of projects, including updates to cargo rail systems in South Africa and enhancements to liquefied natural gas transportation capacity in China. It often finances development initiatives based on local currencies, which many anticipate may eventually contest the dominance of the U.S. dollar in the global economy. Despite the strained or superficial relationships among its members in the 20th century, their current initiatives have significantly enhanced their global influence. In 2024, the BRICS group recorded a GDP of approximately \$26.95 trillion, which is marginally higher than that of the United States (World Bank n.d.a).

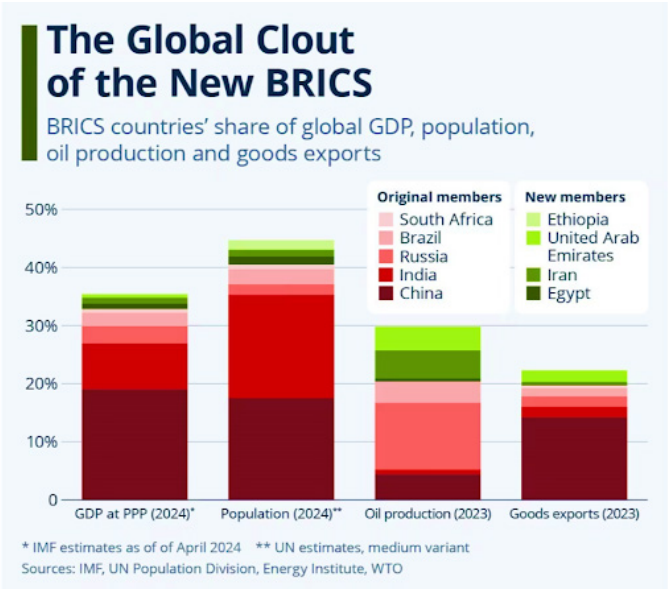
Analysis of the shares of the United States and the BRICS nations reveals a decline in the United States’ share of global commerce and output, decreasing from 50% in 1945 to 25% in 2020. The percentage of US dollars among global currencies declined from 66.9% in 2005 to 61% in 2020. China and India now account for 25% of the global GDP, while the BRIC countries collectively represent 20% of the world’s output. By 2024, the share of the Group of 7 nations—comprising the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Canada—in global GDP was approximately 30%. Collectively, the BRICS nations represented 35 percent of global GDP. According to the purchasing power parity (PPP) measure, the BRICS nations surpassed the G7 nations in total GDP proportion in 2018. According to purchasing power parity, the BRICS economies are expected to represent 37.3% of global GDP by 2024. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reports that China accounted for 19.05%, whereas India contributed 8.23%. The European Union and the United States each represented approximately 14.5% of the global economy simultaneously (World Economic Forum 2025). The BRICS nations have experienced an increase in strength, particularly at the regional level (Cochrane and Zaidan 2024), while the traditional great powers, represented by the G7, have witnessed a decline in their global influence in recent years.

Figure 2: Share of BRICS and G7 countries in total gross domestic product (GDP) in purchasing power parity (PPP) from 2000 to 2024



Source: International Monetary Fund (IMF)

Figure 3: The Global Clout of the New BRICS



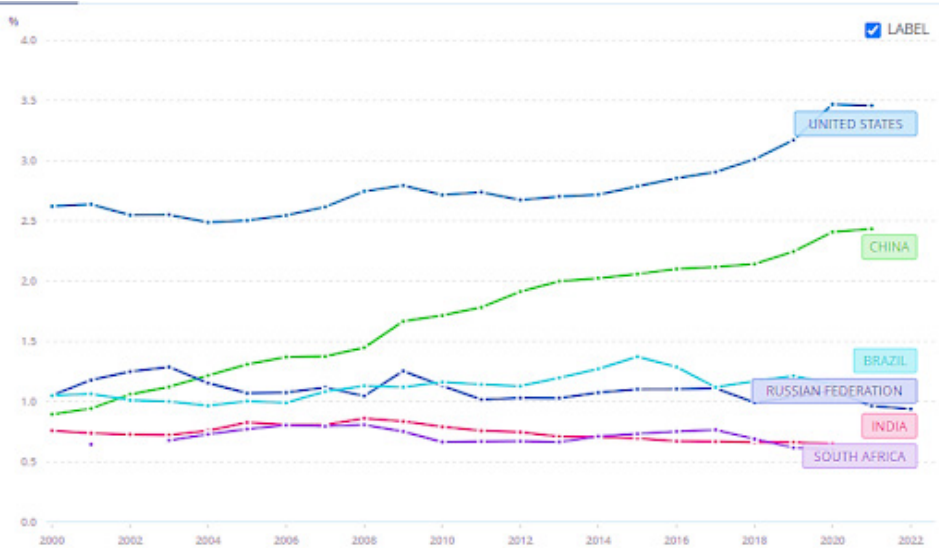
Source: www.weforum.org.

Furthermore, the BRICS bloc is increasingly establishing itself as a significant economic entity in commodities trading. Let us examine oil. An analysis conducted by S&P Global (Griffin 2024) indicates that the inclusion of Iran, the UAE, and potentially Saudi Arabia in the BRICS group could result in the collective control of nearly 50% of global oil output and an estimated 35% of total oil consumption. The inclusion of Saudi Arabia would enhance the BRICS group's status as a significant force in the commodities market, according to the paper. The BRICS nations, due to their large populations, possess a significant workforce and consumer base. The International Labour Organisation projects that the labor force participation rate in the bloc will reach 60.6% in 2024, corresponding to 1.5 billion individuals. Men's participation stands at 73.9%, while women's is at 47.4%, indicating a significant gender disparity in participation rates.

Moreover, participation in the unofficial economy of BRICS nations is significantly elevated. Recent estimates indicate that approximately 934.4 million individuals in BRICS countries are employed in the informal sector, with a significant majority located in India. A 2023 report by the International Labour Organization stated that informal work is widespread in certain BRICS nations, with productivity improvements associated with shifts towards formal employment and enhanced working conditions. The unemployment rate in the BRICS nations stands at 5.3%, encompassing a total of 84.7 million individuals (World Economic Forum 2025).

Another important concept that has gained special importance in today's economy is the "Research and Development" sector. The data presented in the tables and graphs below indicates that China is closely approaching the United States; analysts forecast that China will ultimately surpass the United States in this aspect. The percentage of GDP allocated to R&D spending in the United States increased from 2.62% in 2000 to 3.46% in 2022. China's performance increased from 0.9% in 2000 to 2.43% in 2022 (World Bank n.d.b).

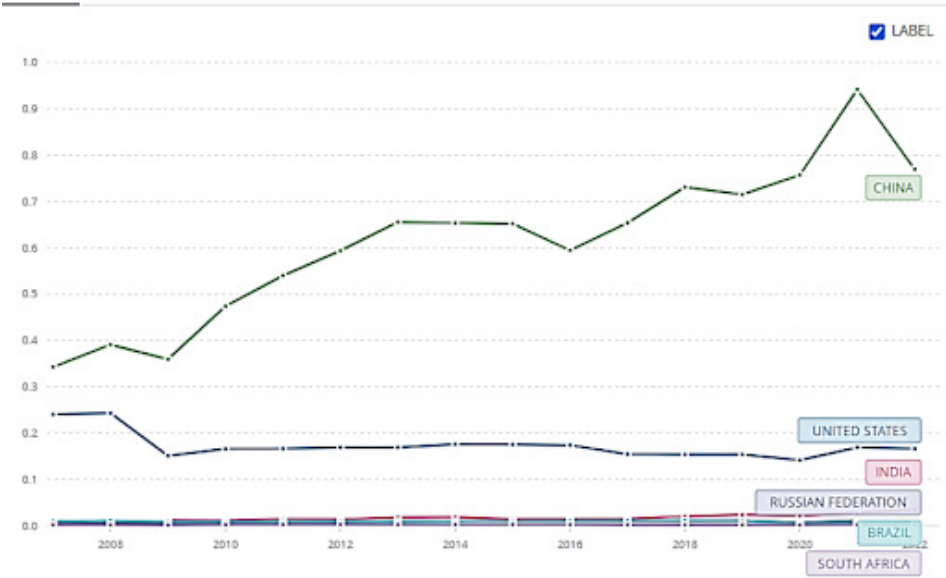
Figure 4: Research and development spending (% of GDP) - United States and BRICS countries from 2000 to 2022



Source: www.data.worldbank.org.

It should also be noted that in the performance of high-tech exports, China had reached 23% in 2022 from 30% of manufacturing exports in 2007. This is while the United States reached 18% in 2022, with the same percentage in the same year. According to the figures, China's high-tech exports in 2007 amounted to \$342.57 billion, which reached \$769.7 billion in 2022. The United States also exported high-tech products worth \$240.51 billion in 2007, which reached \$166.44 billion in 2022. Other BRICS countries do not have a powerful position in this field, but this cannot be said about India. India's high-tech exports in 2010 were \$11.22 billion, which is expected to increase to \$35.22 billion in 2022 (World Bank n.d.c).

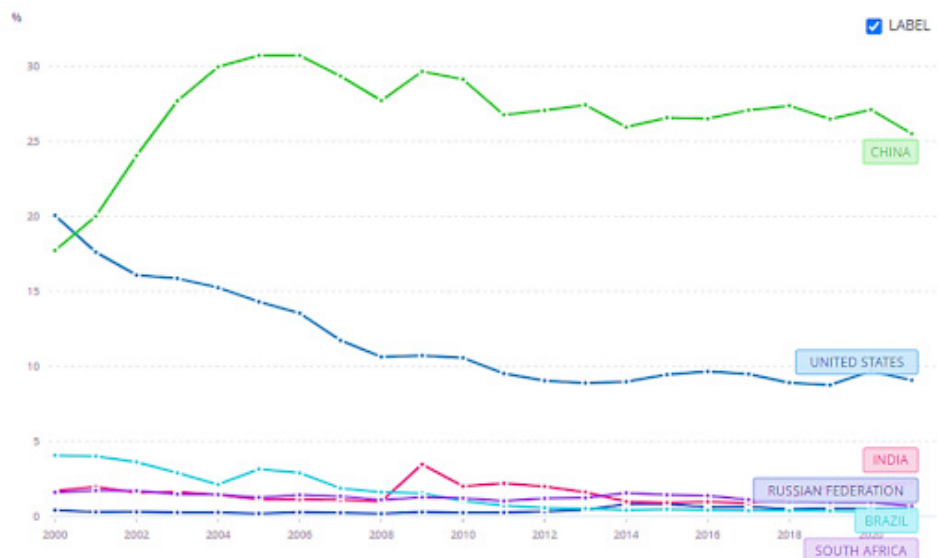
Figure 5: High-tech exports (% of manufacturing exports) - United States, China, Russian Federation, India, Brazil, South africa from 2007 to 2022



Source: www.data.worldbank.org.

The export of ICT items from the US experienced a significant decline in technological competitiveness, decreasing from 20.08% in 2000 to 9.1% in 2022. Since that time, China has experienced significant economic growth, exceeding the US economy with a share of approximately 25.5% in 2022 (World Bank n.d.c, n.d.d, n.d.e), despite having a smaller proportion of ICT goods exports compared to the US in 2000 (17.7%).

Figure 6: ICT goods exports (% of total goods exports) - United States, China, Russian Federation, India, Brazil, South Africa from 2000 to 2021



Source: www.data.worldbank.org.

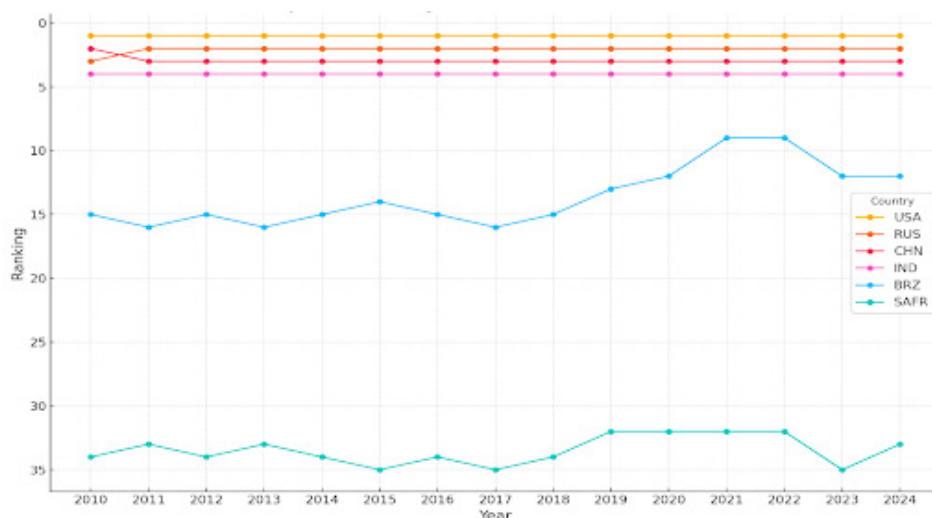
While the United States remains the top destination for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) worldwide, the BRICS nations have experienced a notable increase in this flow in recent years. For twelve consecutive years, the United States has ranked highest among countries attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). US investment in China is expected to be \$126.1 billion in 2022. Chinese corporations invested \$215 billion, whereas US businesses spent roughly \$515 billion in BRICS nations, excluding China. As of 2021, India had invested \$14 billion, ranking it third among the BRICS countries in terms of investments in the United States. Brazilian investments have also surged dramatically; the proportion of US investments rose by almost 50% between 2016 and 2021. However, Russia's overall direct investment in the United States has decreased by 10 percent over the past five years to approximately \$4 billion. From \$84 billion to \$355 billion, BRICS foreign direct investment flows almost doubled between 2001 and 2021. From 11 percent in 2001 to 22 percent in 2021, the BRICS' share of worldwide foreign direct investment inflows also doubled. Despite the global downturn, BRICS nations continued to attract significant foreign direct investment in 2019.

To understand how the Global South has evolved since the turn of the century, we must examine the performance of the BRICS countries in terms of foreign investment. Despite economic disparities, BRICS nations are translating their economic growth into enhanced geopolitical and institutional capabilities. This, however, does not diminish the significance of BRICS growth in global industry and infrastructure development, where they have outperformed the US economy. In the realm of international trade, BRICS has finally matched the United States, as the disparity in foreign direct investment (FDI) share between BRICS and the US is rapidly diminishing. World Bank data indicate that China has surpassed the United States in selected indicators of high-technology and ICT-goods exports, while the performance of the other BRICS countries remains uneven (World Bank n.d.c, n.d.d, n.d.e).

Military Power

In this section, the present article focuses on data from the reputable website “Global Firepower”. The sources of military power and the indicators on which this institute has obtained results are more than 50 factors, the most important of which include; human resources, financial costs of military forces, enemies and support, logistical power, naval power (number of aircraft carriers, submarines, etc.), land (tanks, advanced armored weapons, etc.), air (number and type of advanced jets, helicopters, etc.), access to natural resources and geographical factors and defense budget. According to the 2024 index rating, the United States ranks as the strongest military power globally, followed by Russia, China, and India (GFP 2024). Brazil, as a member of the BRICS, ranks among the top 15 military powers globally; South Africa, although ranked lower than other nations, remains part of this group. The United States continues to emerge as the leading military power. In 2024, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported that the United States accounted for \$997 billion in military expenditure, representing over 37% of total global military spending for that year. The United States allocates 3.4 percent of its GDP to military expenditure, positioning it below Saudi Arabia, Israel, Algeria, and Russia in terms of military spending as a percentage of GDP. China ranks second in military expenditure at \$314 billion, followed by Russia in third with \$149 billion, Germany in fourth with \$88.5 billion, and India in fifth with \$86.1 billion (Liang et al. 2025). Figure 7 illustrates the significant military capabilities of the BRICS nations and the United States.

Figure 7: Military Power Rankings of the USA and BRICS (2010-2024)

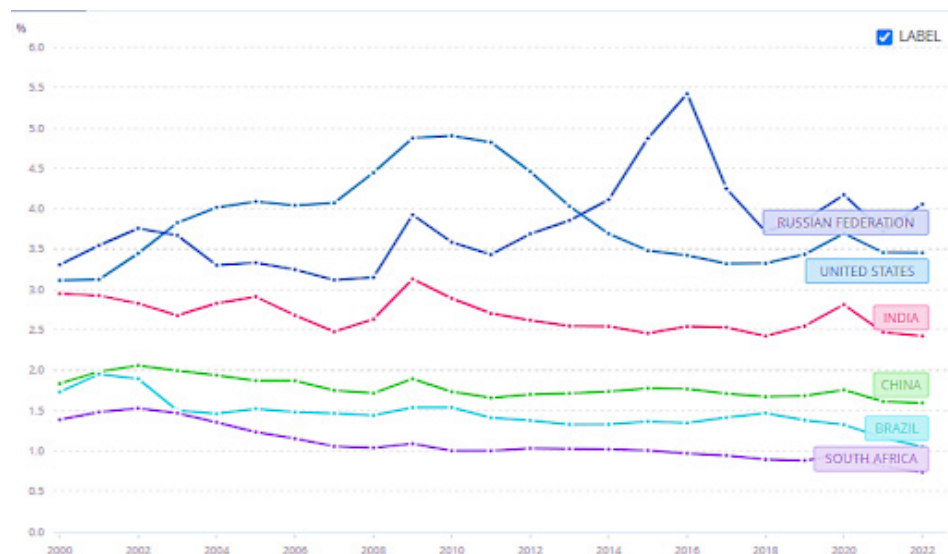


Source: globalfirepower.com.

Through the control of natural resources and the escalation of religious and ethnic tensions in the South, the United States has used its military might in direct and indirect ways to limit possible competitors and hinder their progress. With the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States pursued its hegemonic ambitions at a cost of an estimated \$4.4 trillion. Golub (2010) argues that the US interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, and the South China Sea were ultimately unsuccessful. Among countries that spend a portion of their GDP on defense, the US ranks second, just behind Russia. Russia has increased its military spending as a percentage of GDP, which is hardly surprising given recent events in Syria and Ukraine. India's military spending as a proportion of GDP fell sharply between 2005 and 2015, overtaking China in the process. While the collective investments of BRICS nations in strategic deterrence and regional defense alliances indicate an increasing capacity for coordinated opposition to unilateral US interventionism, these countries do not individually match US capabilities (Cochrane and Zaidan 2024; Brown 2012). China accounts for over 6 percent of the global arms trade, positioning it as the third-largest exporter of weapons worldwide. Russia has emerged as the second-largest arms supplier globally, surpassing the United States in terms of military spending (UPI 2016). Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia, 2014–2016 invasion of Ukraine, and 2022 invasion of Ukraine all show how a Cold War-style setting can

derail US-centric security worries. A primary symptom of the US military's deteriorating capability is the growing influence of Russia and Iran in Syria. The United States' military might was severely weakened in 2015 due to the Russian-Nordic war in the Baltic Sea and China's threat to American military supremacy in the South China Sea. US leaders openly acknowledge the decline in US military deterrence. Deputy Secretary of Defense Bob Work asserts that actions by Eurasian rivals, which seek to restrict US access to operational theaters and limit freedom of maneuver, are leading to a decline in broad operational and technical dominance and an inadequate demonstration of deterrence by the United States (US Department of Defense 2017).

Figure 8: Global Military spending of the United States and BRICS as a percentage of GDP between 2000 and 2022



Source: www.data.worldbank.org.

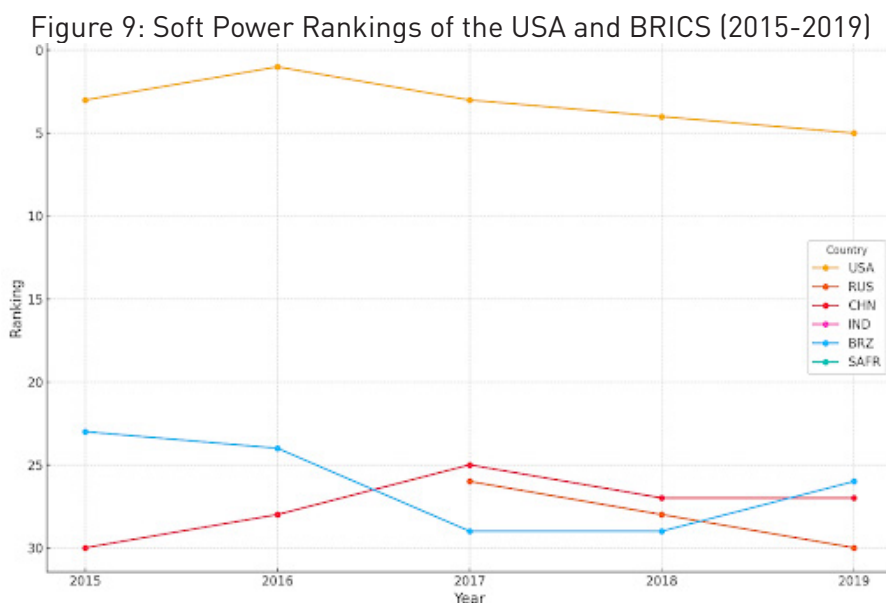
The Role of Institutional Capacity and Cultural Soft Power in Shaping International Politics

Hopewell (2021) and Fukuyama (2013) both acknowledge the general trend of the United States' institutional authority dwindling. For a long time, the United States maintained its hegemonic position by controlling major global governance institutions. These include the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization (NATO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Economic Forum. The United States' refusal to join the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court, along with its violation of the UN Charter during the 2003 Iraq war, has caused significant discontent within the global community (Singh 2012). Following the Trump administration's demand for renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Donald Trump's rise to power accelerated the decline of US institutional power. China, the world's second-largest economy, has risen to become the third-largest contributor to the International Monetary Fund, following Japan and the United States. The United States' failure to ensure unilateralism within the UN, coupled with the calls for UN reform from the BRICS, highlights the emergence of post-hegemonic regionalism as demonstrated by entities such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Union, the Alianza Bolivariana para Los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA), and the Union of South American Nations (UNASur). According to Bagley and Defort (2015) and Muhr (2013), regionalism has added a new dimension to South-South collaboration by creating stable channels for various groups to participate, such as social movements, alternative media, anti-corporate development firms, independent pharmaceutical industries, and development banks. Concentrated on a security-focused framework designed to avert US interventionism in the region, post-hegemonic Eurasian regionalism is a key concept. Key events in Eurasian regionalism include joint military exercises, commercial groups, universities, and research networks (Song 2016; Aris 2011). According to research by Quiliconi and Kingah (2016), DeConing (2015), and Kiely (2015), the BRICS effort is a symptom of the US's declining hegemonic institutional authority, as it seeks to establish an independent development bank, contingency fund, and credit rating agency. Improving connectivity and economic cooperation across Eurasia is the goal of China's new Silk Road Initiative, a massive development plan. Similar to the Marshall Plan, which helped rebuild Europe after World War II, the project was formally inaugurated in 2013. Curran (2016), Shen (2016), and Tiezzi (2014) all agree that China's international standing is rising as a result of the Silk Road Initiative's appealing long-term policy goals and focus on infrastructure development.

When it comes to international culture, the United States is unrivaled. Numerous well-known schools, media outlets, artists, and film productions call it home. Approximately forty-three million immigrants reside in the United States. Individuals seeking improved living conditions often favor

this location (Brown 2012). Cultural influence represents the area where potential adversaries of US power exhibit their weakest capabilities. However, each year, the Soft Power Research Center publishes a report in the form of a magazine that examines the ranking of countries in soft power and the factors that influence it. Two relevant components of the index are the Culture and Education sub-indices. The Culture sub-index measures the quality, international reach, and appeal of a country's cultural production, including both high and popular culture, whereas the Education sub-index assesses university quality, the ability to attract international students, and contributions to academic research publishing (McClory 2019, 28, 60–61). This paper investigates and evaluates the soft power of the BRICS nations and the United States, utilizing data from this center. The center's annual report indicates a decline in United States soft power, resulting in a loss of position from 2015 to 2019. China seeks to enhance its position by increasing its cultural output. India and South Africa are excluded from this list because their assessments are based on 30 dimensions.



Source: www.softpower30.com.

Interconnected Dimensions of the BRICS Power: Toward a Coherent Strategic Postured

The BRICS alliance increasingly illustrates the interaction among military, economic, and institutional capacities, contributing to a broader post-hegemonic strategic orientation. The economic growth of the BRICS nations, particularly China and India, has enhanced their trade and investment influence, enabling them to establish new governance institutions such as the New Development Bank (NDB), support South-South infrastructure initiatives, and promote de-dollarization. These projects integrate economic power with institutional influence, thereby promoting an environment that critically examines Western-dominated institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF (Quiliconi and Kingah 2016; Noroozi 2024).

Moreover, strengthening economic capabilities has facilitated military modernization, especially in China and Russia. China's defense spending, backed by its growing GDP and technological base, has increased its naval footprint in the Indo-Pacific, while Russia's military assertiveness in Ukraine and Syria reveals a desire to counterbalance NATO and U.S. interventionism (Cochrane and Zaidan, 2024; Liang et al. 2025). These developments have geopolitical significance beyond mere military strength — they demonstrate the strategic autonomy of BRICS members and help protect the sovereignty of new regional financial and security initiatives such as the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (Aris 2011; DeConing 2015).

Institutional innovations further strengthen soft power. For instance, China's Belt and Road Initiative and Brazil's regional integration efforts serve as economic outreach and tools of diplomatic influence and cultural projection (Curran 2016; Juncal 2018). These endeavors combine infrastructure development with public diplomacy, enhancing the global perception of the BRICS as legitimate leaders in a multipolar world.

This integrated strategy—leveraging economic gains to bolster military capacity, while embedding within institutional and cultural frameworks—marks a shift from isolated state power toward collective, multi-domain influence. The convergence of these dimensions reveals that the BRICS is not merely a grouping of rising powers, but a coordinated platform strategically constructing alternatives to the U.S.-led global governance (Stuenkel 2015; Kiely 2015). These developments illustrate a dual causal logic at the heart of BRICS-led multiploidization. While the BRICS alliance sometimes operates in reaction to declining Western influence, in other instances it directly challenges hegemonic norms and structures. The table below summarizes these two intertwined pathways.

Table 1: Dual Causal Pathways in BRICS-led Multiploidization

Causal Mechanism	Definition	BRICS Strategy or Example	Effect on Global Governance
Direct Challenge	BRICS acts to weaken or bypass hegemonic institutions and norms	Creation of NDB and CRA; promotion of de-dollarization; SCO security bloc	Undermines Western institutional centrality and financial monopoly
Strategic Expansion	BRICS fills governance gaps created by U.S. retreat or institutional fatigue	Belt and Road Initiative; vaccine diplomacy; South – South development forums	Builds new legitimacy structures; increases Southern leadership

Source: Authors.

Geopolitical Assessment: The Rise of the BRICS and Multiploidization

The complex political and historical settings that descriptive statistics alone cannot portray go beyond mere numerical representation when it comes to the multipolarization of international politics and the emergence of the South. This section will review the results of the comparative analysis in light of significant political and historical events that have occurred since the 2000s.

Many in the Global South consider the 1980s to have been a decade of lost opportunities. The decade that followed was just as dull for the South, which is still reeling from the social and economic effects of neoliberal restructuring. When it came to addressing their urgent economic and security concerns, important nations in the Global South began to express their worries about the demise of the US-centered global order and the neoliberal framework in the 2000s, marking a turning point for them (Kiely 2015: 54). The fight of the Global South against the unipolar world order was waged on two fronts. Prominent nations are aiming to be more involved and have a greater say in the global governance system that the US leads. On the other hand, Quiliconi and Kingah (2016) and DeConning et al. (2015) sought to address the world system’s unipolar tendencies by creating global governance institutions. This

two-sided rivalry has reached a turning point with the formation of the BRICS. While the BRICS is often criticized for lacking ideological or geopolitical unity, it is more accurate to view it as a strategic coordination platform rather than a tightly integrated bloc. Its coherence lies not in military alliances or uniform economic policies, but in shared interests: resisting Western hegemony, demanding reforms in global institutions, and building parallel frameworks for financial and development cooperation (Kiely 2015; Stuenkel 2016). This functional coherence—issue-based and goal-oriented—enables BRICS to act collectively in areas like the creation of the New Development Bank, the promotion of multipolar diplomacy at the UN, and opposition to unilateral interventions (Quiliconi and Kingah 2016). Even where bilateral tensions exist, such as between India and China, the forum remains a strategic space for dialogue, pragmatism, and joint policy signaling, especially in response to perceived Western overreach. This flexible, pluralist model allows BRICS to function effectively in a post-hegemonic world where coalition-building often outweighs rigid alignment.

After the financial crisis of 2008, O'Neill revised his predictions and predicted that China would overtake the US in economic strength by 2027, followed by Brazil in 2029, Russia in 2037, and India in 2027 (Kiely 2015: 57). The BRICS organization was formalized and its first summit convened in response to the financial crisis of 2008 (Cooper 2016: 79). The meeting covered a wide range of topics, including important issues such as social justice, sustainable development, the US economy, and the global crisis. The summit demonstrated that the Global South must be included in addressing the 2008 financial crisis, as its resolution is too significant to be solely managed by the G8 nations. The BRIC summit underscored the importance of international law and multilateralism within the UN, advocating for Brazil and India to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council (DeConning et al. 2015: 23; Kiely 2015: 49).

A more multipolar world and a more democratic international order were the goals of the 2010 Brazil summit, the second of its kind. This shift in the global economic center of gravity has moved east and south, as acknowledged in an OECD study (Kiely 2015: 10). With South Africa's inclusion in China's 2011 third summit, the group was rebranded from BRIC to BRICS; today, its members account for 43% of the world's population. As a worldwide forum for collaboration and discourse, the BRICS was reaffirmed at its 2012 meeting in India. It reaffirmed its support for global harmony, multipolarity, development, and the principles of international law. Cooper (2016), DeConing et al. (2015), and Kiely (2015) all pointed out that the global financial system needs to be reformed and made more democratic, with the

creation of a new development bank. The primary objective of the upcoming fifth BRICS meeting in South Africa was to create a new development bank. Two other councils were formed: the Think Tank Council and the BRICS Business Council. The BRICS Bank, Women's Forum, and Trade Union Forum were all created at the 2014 BRICS summit.

At the summit in Russia in 2015, a \$100 billion fund was established as a contingency reserve to increase liquidity in the event of potential balance of payments problems. This summit marked a turning point in the BRICS' post-hegemonic trajectory, timed to coincide with the summits of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. A multipolar framework for international cooperation in IT is essential, according to BRICS. With the eighth summit, India played host. The establishment of a global credit rating agency by the BRICS nations signifies a shift towards the democratization of the international financial system (Cooper 2016; DeConing et al. 2015; Kiely 2015). In 2017, China hosted the ninth BRICS summit. The summit expressed support for development and multilateralism, collaboration with Emerging Market Developing Countries (EMDCs), the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB), engagement in Public Private Partnerships (PPP), the contingency reserve arrangement (CRA), the development of a BRICS economic partnership strategy, and the enhancement of political and security cooperation. These systems provide alternative sources of legitimacy and credit conditionality, thereby deliberately undermining the institutional authority of the U.S. and its allies while addressing gaps in global finance (DeConing 2015; Kiely 2015).

The 10th BRICS summit took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2018. The summit's notable achievements included support for the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, BRICS collaboration with underdeveloped nations and emerging markets, and the establishment of the BRICS Energy Research Engagement Platform. The 11th BRICS summit, held in Brazil in 2019, focused on enhancing collaboration in science, technology, and innovation while addressing transnational crime, including organized crime, money laundering, and drug trafficking. The 12th BRICS Summit in 2020 was convened virtually, highlighting the importance of multilateralism and the central coordinating role of the United Nations in global affairs. The 13th BRICS Annual Summit 2021 was conducted electronically.

By demanding more representation from developing nations at the IMF and a more flexible system of equal participation between creditors and debtors, BRICS has pushed for a more democratic approach to global governance. These reform efforts failed; thus, a new development bank, a credit rating agency, and conditional reserve systems were established (Quiliconi et

al. 2016: 40). To help finance infrastructure and development projects, the BRICS Development Bank was established with an initial capital of \$50 billion, with each member contributing \$10 billion. The BRICS countries can better prepare for the potential balance of payments issues and maintain sufficient liquidity with the assistance of the contingency reserve system. Within the framework of the contingency reserve, 41% of the resources come from China, while 18% each comes from Brazil, India, and Russia. South Africa holds a 5% share. The credit rating agency aims to challenge the Big Three's supremacy, as noted by Quiliconi and Kingah (2016: 249). For the BRICS, the main issue with these rating agencies is that they often serve the interests of Northern bloc companies' long-term goals, which is counterproductive. By creating a single bond market and making it easier for the BRICS countries to invest in each other, this project aims to enhance the attractiveness of bonds as an investment option by providing authorities and investors with a better understanding of the risks involved (DeWet 2017).

The United States is seeing its hegemony challenged by a shifting global power dynamic. However, it has a long way to go before it forms a cohesive power bloc. This is why strategic variances across the BRICS are worth looking at, even if cooperation has dominated over national differences. South-South collaboration follows the same rule. China, India, and Japan's territorial dispute in the South China Sea is a prime illustration of this. Conflicts along the Sino-Indian border, India's worries about Chinese dominance in the Indian Ocean, and China's policies that discourage Chinese investment in India's economy are all factors that could impede the post-hegemonic governance movement in the South. Even if it is important not to ignore the low-intensity hegemonic rivalry among Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, Latin America is also not as contentious as Asia (Cooper 2016: 24; Cheru 2011: 47). A UN Security Council resolution decrying an alleged chemical assault in Syria was met with silence from China, despite a Russian veto, highlighting the differences among the BRICS members. However, during NATO's intervention in Libya, the BRICS nations' united resistance to US dominance and Northern interventionism was plain to see. On March 17, 2011, South Africa supported UN Resolution 1973, which paved the way for action. Because other BRICS members stayed out of it, NATO was able to play catch-up. Members of the BRICS group began to voice their disapproval of NATO's role in the UN following the UN's ruling a few months later (DeConing 2015: 37). Additionally, it was agreed that Iran's right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and the belief that only communication could help resolve the Iranian nuclear dilemma.

Furthermore, adding to this convergence is the BRICS backing

of Palestine's UN membership and Russia during the Ukraine crisis. Importantly, BRICS's collective backing for Syria helped to prevent Northern forces from intervening militarily (Otero and Gürcan 2016; Duggan 2015). It was a significant development. This critical perspective suggests that the BRICS may form a logical political alliance.

Conclusion

Along with the strategic shortcomings of Southern rivals and the waning US hegemony, the efforts of the BRICS nations to both challenge the current hegemonic order and create new international frameworks that counter US-led hegemonic institutions are seen as contributing to the concept of post-hegemony. Rival governing bodies, such as the IMF and the World Bank, are targets for the BRICS Development Bank Foundation. The document discusses the dominance of the US dollar in international trade, suggests the establishment of a sovereign wealth fund that operates independently, and advocates for the creation of a credit rating agency. Furthermore, BRICS stresses that the UN and the International Monetary Fund require extensive reforms.

There is clear evidence across multiple disciplines that the United States is losing its global dominance. The United States' hegemony in international politics and economics has been eroded as the global production and export hub has moved to the South. The US financial dominance has been more precarious since the 2008 financial crisis, which had a significant impact on the US economy. The growing influx of foreign investment and development loans from BRICS nations to the Global South has contributed to the US's decline. There has been a marked decline in the United States' economic dominance, partly due to China's expansion and the fact that the US now has the highest GDP per capita. Second, even though the United States still has the most significant military force in the world, its capacity to deter other countries has dramatically declined. The United States military deterrence is inadequate in light of Russia's aggressive behavior in Ukraine and Syria and China's persistent pushback in the South China Sea. When measured against GDP, Russia's military spending is now higher than that of America's, and the two countries together pose a formidable threat to Washington's hegemony in the international arms trade. Despite their proven ability to impact international economic frameworks and create a more pluralistic global order, the BRICS nations still fall short in military capability. This must be acknowledged. Institutional competency and worldwide cultural effect are the

third and fourth factors that are putting the US global hegemony to the test. The rise of new institutions in the Global South, a weakening commitment to global governance, and the decline of hegemonic international institutions all point to a gradual erosion of US institutional authority despite the significant impact of US culture on cultures around the world. Particularly in the context of NAFTA, the hegemonic sovereignty crisis is on full display. In the 1990s, NAFTA exemplified the pinnacle of integration with global capitalism. The US president officially acknowledged it as a major trade failure in 2017. The United States' institutional supremacy has suffered a significant setback with the demise of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the emergence of post-hegemonic and Latin American regionalisms, such as ALBA and Unasur. The emergence of post-hegemonic Eurasian regionalism, such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and China's Silk Road Initiative, has also considerably reduced US hegemony.

Therefore, the backdrop created by the 2008 financial crisis and the weakening of global hegemonic control is beneficial to post-hegemonic enterprises. There is now a multipolar shift in international relations, mainly due to the decline of US global hegemony following major historical events. An example of the world South's view of multiploidization is the rise of BRICS as an actor and architect in the post-hegemonic international system, which entails not just a growth in influence but also a fundamental reorganization of world governance. Notable Southern states, especially those involved in the BRICS alliance, have been at the forefront of a new post-hegemonic movement in the South of the world. One notable consequence of this post-hegemonic era is the shift from North-led to South-South coalitions in international cooperation endeavors. On the one hand, the BRICS countries are actively working to dismantle existing hegemonic global governance systems; on the other hand, they are seeking new forms of global governance that would have less sway over the US. Indicators of the BRICS countries' attempts to change the current framework of global hegemonic governance include their growing engagement and reform demands inside the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the United Nations. Aspirations for autonomous sovereignty are reflected in the proposal for an alternative development bank and the challenge to US dollar global hegemony. According to the BRICS' double-edged sword, the multipolarization of global governance is both a purposeful rearrangement and a reactive response to the decline of hegemony. Although they benefit from the United States' decline, the BRICS nations are more concerned with contributing to the demise of hegemonic institutions and norms.

In the end, BRICS is cohesive not because its members have a common geopolitical identity but because their strategic goals are functionally aligned. A versatile yet determined pursuit of post-hegemonic sovereignty is evident in the group's dual-track strategy, which entails collaborating with hegemonic institutions while simultaneously developing autonomous mechanisms. Several constraints hinder the BRICS effort from evolving into a historically unified group that challenges US dominance despite its geopolitical significance. South-South trade is still in its early stages of development. It faces significant inequalities, with different strategic viewpoints on several problems, which contributes to its continued reliance on the US economy and other constraints.

References

- Aris, S. 2011. *Eurasian Regionalism – The Shanghai Cooperation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Armijo, L.E. 2007. "The BRICs countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) as analytical category: Mirage or insight?". *Asian Perspective* 31 (4): 7–42. <https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2007.0001>
- Ashford, E. and E. Cooper. 2023. "Yes, the world is multipolar, and that is not bad news for the United States". *Foreign Policy*, October 5. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/10/05/usa-china-multipolar-bipolar-unipolar/>.
- Bagley, B.M. and M. Defort. 2015. *Decline of the U.S. Hegemony? A Challenge of ALBA and a New Latin American Integration of the 21st Century*. Lexington Books.
- Bastanifar, I., K.H. Khan, and H. Koch. 2025. "Understanding BRICSIZATION through an economic geopolitical model". *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity* 11 (1): 100440. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joitmc.2024.100440>
- Brady, A. M. 2017. *China as a Polar Great Power*. Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, S.S. 2012. *The Future of US Global Power: Delusions of Decline*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Butler, S. 2018. "Gemeinschaft as the lynchpin of multilateralism: World order and the challenge of multipolarity". *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 29 (1): 17–34. <https://doi.org/10.1353/isia.2018.0005>
- Buzan, Barry. 2025. "Tim Dunne wanted my and Mick Cox's take on the BRICS. Here's mine." LinkedIn post. <https://www.linkedin.com/>

- posts/barry-buzan-17324530b_tim-dunne-wanted-my-and-mick-coxs-take-on-activity-7324456756644925440-zrtm?utm_source=li_share&utm_content=feedcontent&utm_medium=g_dt_web&utm_campaign=copy
- Cheru, F. 2011. "South–South cooperation: What prospects for a new Bandung consensus?" In *South–South Cooperation: Africa on the Centre Stage*, edited by R. Modi. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Christensen, S.F. and L. Xing. 2016. "The emerging powers and the emerging world order: Back to the future?" In *Emerging Societies: Global Responses*, edited by S.F. Christensen and L. Xing. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cochrane, L. and E. Zaidan. 2024. "Shifting global dynamics: An empirical analysis of BRICS+ expansion and its economic, trade, and military implications in the context of the G7". *Cogent Social Sciences* 10 (1): 2333422. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2333422>
- Cooper, A.F. 2016. *The BRICS: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Cox, Michael. 2025. Comment on Barry Buzan, "Tim Dunne wanted my and Mick Cox's take on the BRICS. Here's mine." LinkedIn. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/barry-buzan-17324530b_tim-dunne-wanted-my-and-mick-coxs-take-on-activity-7324456756644925440-zrtm?utm_source=li_share&utm_content=feedcontent&utm_medium=g_dt_web&utm_campaign=copy
- Curran, E. 2016. "China's Marshall Plan". *Bloomberg*, August 8. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-08-07/china-s-marshall-plan>.
- DeConing, C. 2015. "BRICS and coexistence". In *The BRICS and Coexistence: An Alternative Vision of World Order*, edited by C. DeConing, T. Mandrup, and L. Odgaard. Routledge.
- DeConing, C., T. Mandrup, and L. Odgaard. 2015. "Introduction". In *The BRICS and Coexistence: An Alternative Vision of World Order*, edited by C. DeConing, T. Mandrup, and L. Odgaard. Routledge.
- DeLeon, E. and E.T. Boris. 2010. *The State of Society: Measuring Economic Success and Human Well-Being*. Urban Institute, NJ.
- DeWet, A.S. 2017. "BRICS keen on own rating agency". *IOL*, April 10. https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/economy/brics-keen-on-own-rating-agency-8576544#google_vignette.
- Dodds, K. and R. Powell. 2013. "Polar geopolitics: New researchers on the polar regions". *The Polar Journal* 3 (1): 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2013.809920>

- Dutkiewicz, P., T. Casier, and J.A. Scholte. 2020. *Hegemony and World Order*. Routledge.
- Duggan, N. 2015. "BRICS and the evolution of a new agenda within global governance". In *The European Union and the BRICS*, edited by M. Rewizorski. Springer.
- Edelman, M. 2021. "Hollowed out Heartland, USA: How capital sacrificed communities and paved the way for authoritarian populism". *Journal of Rural Studies* 82: 505–517. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.10.045>
- Efstathopoulos, C. 2016. "Reformist multipolarity and global trade governance in an era of systemic power redistribution". *Global Journal of Emerging Market Economies* 8 (1): 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974910115613695>.
- Fukuyama, F. 2013. "The decay of American political institutions". *The American Interest* 9 (3): 6–19.
- Geeraerts, G. 2011. "China, the EU, and the new multipolarity". *European Review* 19 (1): 57–67. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798710000335>
- Garzón, J.F. 2017. "Multipolarity and the future of economic regionalism". *International Theory* 9 (1): 101–135. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971916000191>
- Global Firepower (GFP). 2024. "Countries ranked by military strength". *Global Firepower Index*. Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://www.globalfirepower.com/>.
- Golub, P.S. 2010. *Power, Profit and Prestige: A History of American Imperial Expansion*. Pluto Press.
- Greenaway-McGrevy, R. 2011. "Is GDP or GDI a better measure of output? A statistical approach". BEA Working Papers, February. <https://www.bea.gov/research/papers/2011/gdp-or-gdi-better-measure-output-statistical-approach>.
- Griffin, R. 2024. "BRICS expansion could see more downstream oil investment: Analyst". *S&P Global*, February 1. <https://www.spglobal.com/commodity-insights/en/news-research/latest-news/crude-oil/020124-brics-expansion-could-see-more-downstream-oil-investment-analyst>.
- Gu, J., R. Carey, A. Shankland, and A. Chenoy. 2016. "Introduction: International development, South-South cooperation and the rising powers". In *The BRICS in International Development*, Palgrave Macmillan.

- Gürcan, E.C. 2019. *Multiploidization, South-South Cooperation and the Rise of Post-Hegemonic Governance*. Routledge.
- Hopewell, K. 2021. "Trump & trade: The crisis in the multilateral trading system". *New Political Economy* 26 (2): 271–282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2020.1841135>
- Hopewell, K. 2016. *Breaking the WTO: How Emerging Powers Disrupted the Neoliberal Project*. Stanford University Press.
- Ivanova, M.N. 2019. "Inequality, financialization, and the US current account deficit". *Industrial and Corporate Change* 28 (4): 707–724. <https://doi.org/10.1093/icc/dtzo05>
- International Monetary Fund. 2022. World Economic Outlook Database.
- Jacobs, L.M. and R. Van Rossem 2014. "The BRIC phantom: A comparative analysis of the BRICs as a category of rising powers". *Journal of Policy Modeling* 36 (S1): S47–S66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpolmod.2013.10.008>
- Juncal, S.E. 2018. "The BRICS bloc: An instrument for the development of emerging countries?". *Journal of Critical Economics* 25: 105–120.
- Kiely, R. 2015. *The BRICs, US 'Decline' and Global Transformations*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lawn, P. 2007. "What value is Gross Domestic Product as a macroeconomic indicator of national income, well-being, and environmental stress?". *International Journal of Ecological Economics & Statistics* 8 (7): 22–43.
- Liang, X., N. Tian, D. Lopes da Silva, L. Scarazzato, Z. Karim, and J. Guiberteau Ricard. 2025. Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2024. *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)*. <https://doi.org/10.55163/AVEC8366>
- MacDonald, S.B. and J. Lemco. 2011. *Asia's Rise in the 21st Century*. Praeger.
- McClory, J. 2019. "The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power". *Portland Communications and USC Center on Public Diplomacy*. <https://portland-communications.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2019-1.pdf>.
- Milberg, W. and D. Winkler. 2009. Financialization and the dynamics of offshoring in the US. SCEPA Working Paper 2009-5. Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis (SCEPA).
- Mir Hosseini, S.M., A. R. Emami, and F. Zare. 2021. "The United States: the position and power of the hegemon". *American Strategic Studies* 1 (2): 63–91. <https://doi.org/10.27834743/ASS.2018.1026>
- Moch, E. 2024. "The economic and geopolitical significance of the BRICS

- nations: A comparative analysis of their global influence in the 21st century". *East African Journal of Business and Economics* 7 (2): 86–100. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajbe.7.2.2310>
- Muhr, T. 2013. *Counter-Globalization and Socialism in the 21st Century: The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America*. Routledge.
- Murray, D. 2012. Introduction. In *Multipolarity in the 21st Century: A New World Order*, edited by D. Murray and D. Brown. Routledge.
- Murray, D. and D. Brown. 2012. *Multipolarity in the 21st Century: A New World Order*. Routledge.
- Murray, R.W. 2012. "Arctic politics in the emerging multipolar system: Challenges and consequences". *The Polar Journal* 2 (1): 7–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2012.679554>
- Noroozi, H. 2024. "New Development Bank of BRICS; Contemplation on institutional rationality and functional attractiveness". *Journal of Countries Studies* 2 (2): 299–329. <https://doi.org/10.22059/jcountst.2024.371704.1110>
- Otero, G. and E.C. Gürcan. 2016. "The Arab Spring and the Syrian refugee crisis". *The Monitor*, Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, 225: 16.
- Quiliconi, C. and S. Kingah. 2016. "Conclusions: Leadership of the BRICS and implications for the European Union". In *Global and Regional Leadership of BRICS Countries*, edited by C. Quiliconi and S. Kingah. Springer.
- Quiliconi, C., S. Zwartjes, and G. Papagnau. 2016. "BRICS: Leadership in the making". In *Global and Regional Leadership of BRICS Countries*, edited by C. Quiliconi and S. Kingah. Springer.
- Safiuddin, M. 2021. Management & control of economic power. *Insights into Economics and Management* 12.
- Shaw, T.M., A.F. Cooper. and G.T. Chin. 2009. "Emerging powers and Africa: Implications for/from global governance?". *Politikon* 36 (1): 27–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589340903155385>
- Shen, S. 2016. "How China's 'Belt and Road' compares to the Marshall Plan". *The Diplomat*, February 6. Available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2016/02/how-chinas-belt-and-road-compares-to-the-marshall-plan/>.
- Singh, R. 2012. "The United States: The eagle untamed". In *Multipolarity in the 21st Century: A New World Order*, edited by D. Murray and D. Brown. Routledge.
- Song, W. 2016. *China's Approach to Central Asia: The Shanghai Co-operation*

Organization. Routledge.

Stuenkel, O. 2015. *The BRICS and the Future of Global Order*. Lexington Books.

Stuenkel, O. 2016. *Post-Western World: How Emerging Powers Are Remaking Global Order*. Polity Press.

Tiezzi, S. 2014. "The new Silk Road: China's Marshall Plan?". *The Diplomat*, November 6. <http://thediplomat.com/2014/11/the-new-silk-road-chinas-marshall-plan/>.

UPI. 2016. "World's top 5 arms exporters". *UPI*, February 6. http://www.upi.com/News_Photos/Features/Worlds-Top-5-arms-exporters/3105/.

US Department of Defense. 2017. "Defense innovation maintains military overmatch against adversaries". *U.S. Department of Defense*, February 6. <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1172099/defense-innovation-maintains-military-overmatch-against-adversaries/>.

World Bank. n.d.a. "GDP (Current US\$)." *World Development Indicators*. Accessed Feb 20, 2025. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>.

World Bank. n.d.b. "Research and Development Expenditure (% of GDP)." *World Development Indicators*. Accessed Feb 20, 2025. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS>.

World Bank. n.d.c. "High-Technology Exports (% of Manufactured Exports)." *World Development Indicators*. Accessed July 20, 2026. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/TX.VAL.TECH.MF.ZS>.

World Bank. n.d.d. "High-Technology Exports (Current US\$)." *World Development Indicators*. Accessed Feb 20, 2025. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/TX.VAL.TECH.CD>.

World Bank. n.d.e. "ICT Goods Exports (% of Total Goods Exports)." *World Development Indicators*. Accessed Feb 20, 2025. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/TX.VAL.ICTG.ZS.UN>.

World Economic Forum. 2025. BRICS summit and the geopolitics of the bloc. Accessed April 29, 2025. https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/11/brics-summit-geopolitics-bloc-international/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

ABSTRACT

As global governance transitions from U.S.-led unipolarity to multipolarity, the BRICS nations—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—play a significant role. This study examines “multiploidization,” highlighting the decentralization of institutional control, standard diversification, and economic empowerment beyond traditional centers. This analysis employs geopolitical-economic frameworks to examine BRICS’ influence in institutional-cultural, military, and economic domains, highlighting strategies to contest existing hegemonies and fill vacuums created by Western withdrawal. Through de-dollarization and institutional innovation (e.g., New Development Bank), the BRICS promotes a pluralistic, inclusive, post-hegemonic order, indicating a significant historical transition towards equitable global power distribution notwithstanding internal disparities.

KEYWORDS

BRICS, Global South, Multiploidization.

Received on June 18, 2025

Accepted on May 23, 2026

THE BRICS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: A LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE

Brice Tseen Fu Lee¹

Juan Pablo Sims²

Yun-Tso Lee³

Introduction

BRICS' expansion into Southeast Asia marks an important development in global economic governance, opening new channels for economic cooperation and multilateral engagement. Indonesia's full membership, alongside Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia as partner nations, signals a shift in the region's economic orientation toward diversified partnerships beyond the traditional Western-led financial structures (Norman 2024; Strangio 2025; Lee, Sims, et al. 2025). From a liberal perspective, the BRICS enhances regional stability and prosperity by promoting trade, investment, and financial flows, strengthening institutional linkages, and advocating for global governance reforms that benefit Southeast Asian economies (Lee and Sims 2024a; Y. Lissovolik and Vinokurov 2019).

This paper draws on liberal institutionalism, which views international institutions as mechanisms that facilitate cooperation by reducing uncertainty, lowering transaction costs, expanding information flows, and creating expectations of repeated interaction (R. Keohane and Nye 1977; R. O. Keohane 1984; Ikenberry 2011; R. Keohane 1984). From this perspective, the BRICS can be understood as an institutional platform through which Southeast Asian states diversify partnerships, deepen economic interdependence, and seek greater representation in global economic governance. Liberalism is useful

1 Fudan University, Shanghai, China and Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. E-mail: briceetseenfu@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0001-9763-0700.

2 Universidad del Desarrollo, Santiago, Chile. E-mail: jsims@udd.cl. ORCID: 0000-0002-9772-5563.

3 Universidad del Desarrollo, Santiago, Chile. E-mail: ylee@udd.cl.

here because it explains why states may seek additional institutions rather than rely only on bilateral power relations. For Southeast Asian states, the BRICS offers another diplomatic and economic table where they can engage not only China, but also India, Brazil, Russia, South Africa, and other emerging economies. This wider institutional setting can improve bargaining capacity, reduce dependence on any single partner, and create more opportunities for cooperation in trade, finance, infrastructure, and development.

Economic growth and interdependence have long been recognized as stabilizing forces in international relations, reducing the likelihood of conflict and fostering mutual growth through trade and investment (R. Keohane and Nye 1977; Que et al. 2020). The BRICS, as an emerging economic bloc, has deepened Southeast Asia's integration into a broader global economic network by facilitating capital flows and strengthening cross-border investment. The increasing volume of trade between the BRICS economies and the ASEAN states reflects this trend, with China and India playing particularly prominent roles in expanding market access for Southeast Asian exports (Armijo and Roberts 2014). The presence of Brazil and South Africa further diversifies trade relations, offering alternative sources of raw materials and expanding consumer markets for Southeast Asian products (Armijo and Roberts 2014; Dergachev 2021). Indonesia's decision to become a full BRICS member reinforces its strategy of economic diversification, ensuring access to new investment sources and reducing dependence on any single economic power (Strangio 2025; Lee, Kornphetcharat, et al. 2025). The participation of Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia as partner nations signals their interest in the BRICS as a supplementary platform for economic cooperation (Norman 2024).

BRICS' institutional development provides additional financing channels for Southeast Asian nations, particularly through the New Development Bank (Callaghan and Hubbard 2016; Mazenda and Ncwadi 2016). These institutions offer financing mechanisms that differ from the conditional lending practices of traditional Bretton Woods institutions, allowing for greater flexibility in economic policy implementation. The NDB, in particular, aligns with Southeast Asian states development goals by financing large-scale infrastructure projects in transport, energy, and digital connectivity (NDB, n.d.b). As Southeast Asian economies seek to enhance regional economic integration, the growing institutional linkages between the BRICS and Southeast Asia contribute to a more resilient financial landscape. The expansion of the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement further strengthens financial stability by providing liquidity support to member and potentially partner nations during periods of economic volatility (Mazenda

and Ncwadi 2016). Institutional engagement between the BRICS member states and ASEAN-led frameworks, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, facilitates policy coordination and strengthens economic governance (Guo 2021; Park et al. 2021). These linkages reflect a shared commitment to fostering inclusive and sustainable economic development.

Multilateral cooperation is also a core principle of the BRICS, with its expansion into Southeast Asia reinforcing the region's role in shaping global governance reforms (Duggan et al. 2022; Creutz 2023a). The inclusion of Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia in the BRICS enhances their collective influence in international institutions, particularly in advocating for greater representation of emerging economies in decision-making processes. The BRICS has repeatedly called for reforms of the IMF and World Bank to better reflect contemporary economic realities, particularly through greater representation for emerging markets and developing countries as this position broadly aligns with long-standing East Asian concerns about the unequal governance of the international financial architecture, although Southeast Asian states do not necessarily approach this agenda through BRICS alone (Bond 2020; Lee and Sims 2024b; Mielniczuk 2013; Ayodele 2025). Through BRICS, Southeast Asian economies gain access to diplomatic channels that amplify their voice in global trade negotiations and economic policymaking (Lee and Sims 2024a). The bloc's commitment to South-South cooperation also creates space for exchanges in technology, investment, and development policy.

As BRICS continues to expand its reach, its role in Southeast Asia will likely grow in significance. The economic potential fostered by the BRICS could potentially provide new trade and investment opportunities for the region, while institutional engagement strengthens financial stability and development cooperation (Bryndin 2022). Multilateral collaboration within the BRICS could enhance the diplomatic influence of Southeast Asian nations in shaping global economic governance. Indonesia's full membership and the participation of Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia as partner nations underscore the region's recognition of the BRICS as a valuable platform for economic growth, institutional development, and global governance reform (Hooijmaaijers 2021; Strangio 2025). Through its engagement with the BRICS, Southeast Asia strengthens its position in an increasingly multipolar economic landscape, ensuring continued development and prosperity allowing states to better hedge in an era of multipolarity (Sims and Lee 2025; Kuik 2016, 2021).

This paper therefore asks: How does engagement with BRICS expand

the economic and institutional options available to Southeast Asian states, and what opportunities and constraints does this create for ASEAN's autonomy, cohesion, and role in global governance?

BRICS' Economic Role in Southeast Asia

As Indonesia assumes its full BRICS membership and Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia join as partner nations, their participation highlights the economic appeal of the BRICS as an alternative or complementary platform for regional growth. Unlike some Western-led economic structures that impose conditionalities or austerity measures on economic cooperation, the BRICS presents itself as a more flexible, development-driven alternative that aligns with Southeast Asian nations' aspirations for greater autonomy in economic policymaking (Lee and Sims 2024a; Abdenur 2014; Petras and Brill 1986; Frangakis 2015). While BRICS' presence in Southeast Asia is often viewed as a counterweight to Western institutions, its actual economic impact depends on the degree to which it fosters trade, investment, infrastructure development, and technological innovation (Mazenda and Ncwadi 2016; Kutu and Ngalawa 2017; Y. D. Lissovlik 2023). The growing potential economic impact between the BRICS nations and the Southeast Asian nations raises important questions about the benefits and potential risks associated with deeper engagement.

Trade and Investment Flows: BRICS as an Economic Partner for Southeast Asia

Over the past few years, trade between the BRICS nations and the Southeast Asian states has grown substantially, with China and India playing dominant roles in shaping the region's trade flows. China has been ASEAN's largest trading partner for over a decade, with bilateral trade exceeding \$975 billion in 2022, a figure that surpasses ASEAN's trade with the European Union and the United States (ASEAN Stats 2023; L. Chen et al. 2024). India, while a smaller player in absolute trade volume, has strengthened economic ties with Southeast Asia through the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement and various bilateral trade pacts (Yoo and Kim 2016; Banik and Kim 2024). Brazil, Russia, and South Africa contribute to Southeast Asian trade by supplying commodities, energy resources, and raw materials, diversifying ASEAN's import sources (ASEAN Stats 2023; Korolev 2024;

Silva Araújo et al. 2025).

The BRICS member states have also increased their foreign direct investment in Southeast Asia, particularly in manufacturing, energy, and digital sectors (ASEAN Stats n.d.). Chinese investments under the Belt and Road Initiative have transformed regional infrastructure, while Indian enterprises have focused on IT services, pharmaceuticals, and startups in markets such as Vietnam and Indonesia (ASEAN Stats n.d.; Gong 2019; Sims et al. 2023; Lee et al. 2026). Brazil's growing agribusiness ties with Southeast Asia, especially in palm oil imports and soy exports, signal an expanding trade relationship (ASEAN Stats 2023). Russian investments, while less pronounced, have been concentrated in defense, energy, and mining projects, particularly in Vietnam and Thailand (ASEAN Stats n.d.).

The increasing trade volume and investment flows between the BRICS and ASEAN nations underscore the potential for Southeast Asia to leverage BRICS as an alternative economic partner. From a liberal perspective, these trade and investment linkages are important because economic interdependence can create incentives for continued cooperation, policy coordination, and institutional engagement (R. Keohane and Nye 1977). However, concerns have been raised about the degree of economic dependence on China (Lau and Po Lee 2008; Ting 2016). While the BRICS promotes a multipolar global economy, its internal economic asymmetry where China accounts for the largest share of BRICS trade raises questions about whether BRICS fosters genuine multipolarity or merely serves as an extension of China's economic reach.

Furthermore, some critics argue that while BRICS member state investments contribute to economic growth, they often lack the governance standards, transparency, and environmental safeguards imposed by Western institutions (Li 2019; Hooijmaaijers 2021). Compared with Western-led development finance institutions, the New Development Bank offers a less intrusive financing model centered on borrower ownership, national development priorities, and the use of country systems (NDB n.d.b). This means that NDB lending is generally less associated with macroeconomic policy conditionalities than IMF- or World Bank-style lending, although the Bank still maintains environmental and social safeguards for its projects (Güngen 2023; Wang 2019; Cooper 2017; Biglaiser and McGauvran 2022; Cormier and Manger 2022; NDB, n.d.b). This raises concerns about whether ASEAN economies benefit from BRICS engagement in a way that is truly sustainable or whether they risk over-reliance on BRICS capital without addressing regulatory gaps.

Infrastructure Development: The Role of AIIB, NDB, and BRI in ASEAN

Infrastructure financing is one of the tools of BRICS member states' economic engagement with Southeast Asia. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, although not a BRICS institution, is China-led and serves as a major lender for Southeast Asian infrastructure projects (Callaghan and Hubbard 2016; Cammack 2020; Creutz 2023b). Since its establishment, AIIB has funded over \$5 billion in infrastructure projects across ASEAN, with investments targeting transport, energy, and water management systems (AIIB, n.d.). The AIIB's emphasis on infrastructure aligns with ASEAN's Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, which seeks to improve regional connectivity and reduce infrastructure gaps. It is worth noting that the AIIB is included here not as a formal BRICS mechanism, but as part of the wider China-centered financing ecosystem that shapes how BRICS' economic presence is perceived in Southeast Asia. From a liberal institutionalist perspective, this is important because institutions can place asymmetric relationships within broader settings of repeated interaction, negotiation, and bargaining. The BRICS therefore gives Southeast Asian states another multilateral table through which to engage China's economic influence, rather than relying only on bilateral negotiations over infrastructure finance.

The New Development Bank, founded by the BRICS members, has played a more limited role in Southeast Asia compared to AIIB but has expanded its funding scope following the inclusion of new members (Ocran 2024). Indonesia's entry into the BRICS opens the door for better NDB funding, which could complement Indonesia's infrastructure push, particularly in renewable energy and smart city initiatives. Also, it is important to note that any UN member state can apply for NDB funding but BRICS member states have voting rights hence it is more advantageous for Indonesia. The NDB provides loans with less stringent conditionalities compared to the World Bank or IMF, which appeals to governments seeking greater control over economic policies. In liberal institutionalist terms, the NDB illustrates how new multilateral institutions can widen the range of cooperation available to developing states, even when those institutions remain shaped by asymmetries among their members (R. O. Keohane 1984; Wang 2019; Cooper 2017).

Meanwhile, the Belt and Road Initiative remains the most visible infrastructure project in the region. BRI investments in ports, highways, and railways have transformed logistics networks across Southeast Asia, with major projects including the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway

in Indonesia, the East Coast Rail Link in Malaysia, and deep-sea ports in Myanmar and Vietnam (Purba and Purba 2020; Jaipragas 2019; Huyen and Thang 2020). While BRI projects have accelerated economic growth, created jobs, and improved infrastructure quality, they have also been criticized for opaque loan terms, debt sustainability risks, and political dependencies. This is significant because the BRI is not institutionally a BRICS project. Rather, it is relevant because China's dominant position within the BRICS allows its broader infrastructure diplomacy to shape how Southeast Asian states perceive the BRICS-linked development finance. Liberal institutionalism helps explain why this is significant: BRICS creates another forum where Southeast Asian states can engage China within a wider institutional setting, compare financing options, and preserve greater bargaining autonomy.

From a liberal institutionalist perspective, the BRICS is significant because it provides another multilateral setting through which Southeast Asian states can engage major emerging economies, including China, India, Brazil, Russia, and South Africa. Liberalism emphasizes the role of institutions in reducing dependence on bilateral power relations, creating repeated interactions, and widening opportunities for cooperation. This is especially important in relation to China, given its central role in the AIIB and BRI, but the value of the BRICS is not limited to China alone. Rather than negotiating infrastructure finance only through one-to-one channels with Beijing, ASEAN states may use BRICS-related forums to place China within a broader institutional environment involving other emerging economies. This wider setting may help them compare financing options, attract alternative partners, facilitate trade, and preserve greater policy autonomy. As a result, closer engagement with the BRICS may indirectly create pathways for deeper economic and institutional ties with China while also widening ASEAN's engagement with other major Global South economies.

Digital Economy and Innovation: The Future of BRICS-ASEAN Technological Cooperation

Outside of traditional trade and infrastructure, the BRICS has expanded its engagement with Southeast Asia in the digital economy, technology transfer, and innovation ecosystems. The China-ASEAN Digital Silk Road has facilitated cooperation in 5G technology, e-commerce, and artificial intelligence, with Chinese tech giants like Huawei and Alibaba investing in regional cloud computing infrastructure (Huadong 2018; Hussain et al. 2024). The Digital Silk Road is relevant here because China's central role within the

BRICS allows its digital infrastructure diplomacy to shape Southeast Asian perceptions of the BRICS-linked technological cooperation. India's IT and software expertise have also positioned it as a key digital partner for ASEAN, with Indian firms contributing to fintech, cybersecurity, and digital payments expansion in Indonesia and Vietnam (Arora et al. 2001).

The role of the BRICS economies in smart cities and digital governance is also growing, with China and India especially active in technology-driven urban development, digital services, and innovation cooperation (Crompton et al. 2021; Kusumastuti and Rouli 2021). NDB financing for digital infrastructure projects could potentially aim to improve connectivity, e-governance, and digital inclusivity, particularly in rural and underserved areas (NDB 2026, n.d.a). Despite these advancements, Southeast Asian nations must carefully navigate their digital cooperation with the BRICS, as technological integration can raise cybersecurity risks, data sovereignty concerns, and intellectual property issues. The geopolitical tensions surrounding China's technological dominance and concerns over digital surveillance have led some ASEAN nations to diversify their digital partnerships, balancing BRICS involvement with collaborations with Japan, South Korea, and the United States. While BRICS economies, particularly China and India, offer affordable digital infrastructure solutions, questions remain about technology standards, regulatory laws, and digital governance. ASEAN nations must evaluate whether BRICS supported technological engagement fosters true innovation capacity or reinforces digital dependency on a few dominant players within the BRICS bloc.

ASEAN's Digital Economy Framework Agreement is important in this context because it provides a regional institutional response to external digital engagement (DEFA 2023; Lee, Dinh, et al. 2025). From a liberal institutionalist perspective, DEFA shows how ASEAN can use rules, standards, and regional coordination to manage digital cooperation with BRICS economies while preserving regulatory autonomy. By developing common approaches to digital trade, data governance, cybersecurity, interoperability, and digital inclusion, ASEAN can engage China, India, and other BRICS economies without becoming dependent on any single external provider. In this sense, DEFA strengthens ASEAN's ability to benefit from BRICS-linked digital infrastructure while ensuring that digital transformation remains anchored in ASEAN-led governance rather than external technological dominance.

The BRICS and Multilateralism in Southeast Asia

ASEAN, historically characterized by its non-interference principle and consensus-based decision-making, has primarily engaged with Western-led, East Asian, and ASEAN-led financial institutions and economic frameworks (Ramcharan 2000). The increasing role of the BRICS presents both opportunities and challenges to ASEAN's institutional structure, diplomatic norms, and global governance strategy. Liberal institutionalism helps explain why ASEAN states may value the BRICS not simply as a counterweight to Western institutions, but as an additional institutional arena that can expand bargaining options while preserving engagement with existing regional frameworks (Ikenberry 2011; R. Keohane 1984; Acharya 2004). While the BRICS offers an alternative multilateral pathway that aligns with Southeast Asian states' aspirations for greater representation in international institutions, its compatibility with ASEAN-led mechanisms remains debated (Suoneto and Lee 2024; Lee, Sims, et al. 2025). Proponents argue that the BRICS strengthens ASEAN's strategic autonomy and bargaining power in global institutions, while critics warn that BRICS' economic and political asymmetries especially China's dominant role may disrupt ASEAN's internal balance and long-standing diplomatic approach (Suoneto and Lee 2024; Norman 2024; Strangio 2025).

This is why the BRICS is important for Southeast Asian multilateralism. Liberal institutionalism emphasizes that institutions can reduce uncertainty, create repeated interactions, widen diplomatic access, and give smaller and middle powers more channels to negotiate with larger states. The BRICS can therefore be understood as a supplementary platform that allows Southeast Asian states to engage China, India, Brazil, and other major emerging economies in a broader institutional setting rather than through isolated bilateral relationships. In this sense, the BRICS supports a liberal view of multilateralism by expanding the number of arenas through which cooperation, bargaining, and policy coordination can take place.

Collaboration with ASEAN: BRICS and the ASEAN Model of Multilateralism

ASEAN's multilateralism is rooted in non-interference, sovereignty, and consensus-based decision-making. This model has allowed ASEAN to maintain stability and avoid direct confrontations between member states (Ramcharan 2000). However, it has also been criticized for limiting rapid decision-making, delaying policy implementation, and preventing strong institutional integration (Jones 2010). The BRICS, in contrast, promotes a

more state-driven, flexible form of multilateral cooperation, where economic engagements and strategic partnerships are often shaped by national interests rather than institutional mandates (Hooijmaaijers 2021; Lee and Sims 2024a; Y. D. Lissovolik 2023; Armijo and Roberts 2014). The BRICS, therefore, sits uneasily within ASEAN's multilateral model. Its emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference aligns with ASEAN's diplomatic traditions, but its preference for flexible, state-to-state engagement may weaken ASEAN's collective role if cooperation proceeds mainly through bilateral channels rather than ASEAN-led mechanisms.

On one hand, the BRICS appears broadly compatible with ASEAN's principle of non-interference. Its development-finance model, particularly through the New Development Bank, is often presented as less conditionality-heavy than IMF- or World Bank-style lending, especially in relation to macroeconomic reform, governance, human rights, and environmental standards (Chew 1994; Rodan 2009; Ikenberry 2011; Biglaiser and McGauvran 2022; Cormier and Manger 2022). This hands-off approach aligns with ASEAN's preference for sovereignty in decision-making, making the BRICS states an attractive partner or alternative for Southeast Asian states seeking financial autonomy.

However, skeptics argue that BRICS' internal power dynamics particularly China's economic and political dominance may challenge ASEAN's diplomatic independence (Castro 2017; Lee, Bettani, Sims, et al. 2024; Lee, Bettani, and Sims 2024; Lukin and Xuesong 2019). While BRICS does not enforce direct political interventions, its economic influence, investment patterns, and security considerations could indirectly shape ASEAN members' policies. If BRICS engagement in Southeast Asia primarily serves China's economic interests rather than collective decision-making, it could create tensions within ASEAN's multilateral framework (Beeson and Zeng 2018; Lukin and Xuesong 2019).

Moreover, ASEAN's institutionalized consensus-based decision-making may not align easily with BRICS' looser and more informal mode of cooperation. The BRICS formally operates through consensus, but its loose institutional structure allows members to pursue bilateral and minilateral arrangements outside the bloc's collective framework. This raises questions about whether ASEAN, as a collective entity, can negotiate with the BRICS effectively or whether individual ASEAN states will engage with the BRICS on separate, bilateral terms, potentially weakening ASEAN's cohesion.

Ultimately, the key issue is not whether the BRICS is compatible with ASEAN's non-interference norm. It largely is. The deeper question is whether the BRICS engagement strengthens ASEAN's collective bargaining

position or encourages fragmented bilateral relationships between individual Southeast Asian states and larger BRICS powers, especially China.

Institutional Synergies: the BRICS and ASEAN-led Mechanisms

The BRICS and ASEAN interact through several overlapping regional platforms that create opportunities for institutional networking, trade coordination, and economic cooperation. These include the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, ASEAN+3, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (ASEAN 2021; Soesastro 1995; Armstrong and Drysdale 2022; Park et al. 2021). Each of these frameworks presents opportunities for the ASEAN-BRICS engagement, but also raises challenges regarding institutional coordination and economic governance. Their value lies less in creating a formal ASEAN-BRICS mechanism and more in expanding the number of institutional spaces where Southeast Asian states can interact with the BRICS economies.

RCEP, the world's largest free trade agreement, includes China and Indonesia as BRICS members, alongside Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam as BRICS partner countries (X. Chen et al. 2023; Armstrong and Drysdale 2022; Wu 2020). With Indonesia's full membership in BRICS and Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia as partner nations, RCEP provides a platform where BRICS-linked economies and ASEAN states can deepen trade coordination, strengthen regulatory linkages, and build wider economic networks. This could lead to greater economic integration, reduced trade barriers, and harmonized regulatory frameworks between ASEAN and the BRICS economies. However, the challenge lies in ensuring that the BRICS engagement in RCEP does not undermine ASEAN's leadership in setting trade norms and policies. Given China's strong economic influence in RCEP, some ASEAN members may fear that BRICS involvement could tilt economic rules in favor of Chinese-led frameworks rather than ASEAN-led ones.

The ASEAN+3 mechanism, which includes China, Japan, and South Korea, also creates another space where ASEAN states interact with a major BRICS economy, particularly in discussions on regional financial stability and monetary policy coordination (Stubbs 2002; Hund 2003). The Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization, a currency swap arrangement designed to protect ASEAN economies from financial crises, could benefit from potentially working with the BRICS' Contingent Reserve Arrangement, providing an alternative to IMF emergency funding (Mazenda and Ncwadi 2016).

APEC serves as another multilateral platform where several BRICS-

linked and ASEAN economies interact (Soesastro 1995). APEC's emphasis on economic liberalization and free-market policies could complement BRICS' development finance strategies, particularly in digital trade, sustainable development, and infrastructure investment. Yet, APEC's alignment with Western trade norms may create ideological differences with BRICS, which favors a more state-driven, development-focused economic model (Wigell 2016). This ideological divergence raises concerns about whether ASEAN should deepen its engagement with the BRICS within APEC structures or maintain a balance between the Western and the BRICS supported economic governance models.

At the same time, liberal institutionalism suggests that overlapping institutions can expand state choice rather than simply produce dependency. By engaging the BRICS alongside ASEAN-led mechanisms such as RCEP, ASEAN+3, and APEC, Southeast Asian states may strengthen their ability to negotiate across multiple platforms. This reflects a liberal understanding of institutions as tools for cooperation, information-sharing, and repeated engagement. Such institutional plurality can facilitate trade, reduce overdependence on one framework, and give ASEAN states more room to bargain with larger economies.

Institutional synergies between BRICS and ASEAN-led mechanisms could provide Southeast Asian economies with expanded economic choices, diversified financial support, and alternative trade arrangements. They could also strengthen the global profile of both BRICS and ASEAN by creating broader channels for cooperation between Southeast Asia and major emerging economies. However, ASEAN must carefully navigate these engagements to avoid institutional fragmentation, economic dependency, and geopolitical alignments that compromise regional stability.

Reforming Global Governance: BRICS, ASEAN and International Institutions

One of BRICS' primary objectives is to reform Western dominance in global governance institutions, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and World Trade Organization (WTO) (Bond 2020; Güven 2017; Helleiner 1992). BRICS nations have consistently advocated for greater representation of developing economies in decision-making processes, a goal that aligns with some Southeast Asian states' interest for a more inclusive global economic order. This reflects a reformist rather than purely revisionist reading of the BRICS: from a liberal internationalist perspective, the demand

for greater representation does not necessarily reject multilateral order, but seeks to adjust its rules and distribution of voice (Ikenberry 2011; Güven 2017; Vestergaard and Wade 2013).

This reformist position also extends to the United Nations, particularly the Security Council (Orakhelashvili 2005; Gould and Rablen 2016). For many developing states, the Security Council remains an unequal institution because permanent membership and veto power continue to reflect the distribution of power after 1945 rather than contemporary political and economic realities. From a liberal internationalist perspective, this is significant because the legitimacy of multilateral institutions depends not only on rules, but also on fair representation and meaningful participation. BRICS' support for a more representative international order therefore resonates with Southeast Asian concerns about voice and fairness in global governance, even if ASEAN states differ in how directly they support specific proposals for Security Council reform.

In the IMF and World Bank, the BRICS has called for reforms to voting rights, lending conditions, and financial governance, arguing that current structures disproportionately favor Western economies (Vestergaard and Wade 2013; Aleksia and Bakhtiar 2023; Ayodele 2025). ASEAN states, which have often criticized IMF structural adjustment programs for imposing rigid economic conditions, could benefit from BRICS' advocacy for more flexible lending terms and diversified funding sources (Greenaway and Morrissey 1993; Harrigan and Mosley 1991). The New Development Bank offers Southeast Asian nations an alternative to traditional Western-led financial institutions, reducing reliance on loans that come with stringent policy prescriptions.

However, the BRICS' approach to global governance reform is not without challenges. Some ASEAN states may question whether the BRICS genuinely represents the interests of developing nations or primarily serves the geopolitical ambitions of its larger members, particularly China and India (Y. D. Lissovnikov 2023; Suoneto and Lee 2024; Norman 2024). While the BRICS advocates for multipolarity in global governance, critics argue that its internal power dynamics reflect a similar concentration of influence, with China playing a dominant economic role within the bloc (Roberts 2019).

In the WTO, the BRICS members have generally presented themselves as defenders of a rules-based multilateral trading system that protects the interests of developing countries, including through special and differential treatment and opposition to unilateral or protectionist trade measures (Fernández and Rodríguez 2026). This broadly overlaps with ASEAN's support for trade liberalization, tariff reduction, and an open, rules-

based trading order (Sally 2004). However, the BRICS should not be treated as a fully coherent trade coalition. Its members retain distinct national trade interests and often pursue separate trade policies, meaning that the BRICS may not always function as a consistent advocate for Southeast Asian priorities in global trade negotiations.

BRICS' engagement in global governance reform presents both opportunities and dilemmas for ASEAN states. For some Southeast Asian states, the BRICS offers an additional platform to raise concerns about unequal representation, rigid lending practices, and the continued dominance of advanced economies in global financial governance. This connects directly to liberal institutionalism, which does not treat institutions as neutral spaces, but as a platform where rules, voice, and representation can be contested and revised through multilateral engagement. In this sense, BRICS may allow Southeast Asian states to participate in wider debates over the reform of the UN, IMF, World Bank, and WTO, while also strengthening their bargaining position within the existing international order. However, ASEAN must ensure that its interests are not overshadowed by the larger strategic ambitions of the BRICS members. Engagement with the BRICS could strengthen ASEAN's global influence, but only if ASEAN maintains its independent voice, institutional unity, and strategic flexibility in international economic governance.

Challenges and Limitations of the BRICS Engagement in Southeast Asia

From a liberal institutionalist perspective, these challenges show that institutional alternatives are not automatically beneficial. The BRICS may widen ASEAN's options, but its value depends on whether cooperation is transparent, predictable, and supportive of ASEAN's collective autonomy rather than new forms of dependence. The rise of BRICS as an economic partner to ASEAN states raises questions about governance models, the preservation of ASEAN's autonomy, and the internal diversity of the BRICS itself (Suoneto and Lee 2024; Norman 2024; Porca-Konjikusic et al. 2024). While some view the BRICS as a necessary counterweight to Western-led financial institutions, others argue that its long-term role in the region remains uncertain due to inconsistent policy priorities, economic asymmetries, and potential sovereignty concerns (Beeson and Zeng 2018; Lukin and Xuesong 2019; Suoneto and Lee 2024). The ability of ASEAN states to effectively navigate the BRICS engagement will determine whether this partnership

enhances regional economic stability or introduces new complexities that ASEAN must manage.

Competing Narratives: BRICS vs. Western-led Economic Governance

The first limitation concerns the tension between flexibility and accountability. The BRICS presents itself as an alternative to Western-led economic governance by offering development finance with fewer macroeconomic policy conditions. This appeals to governments seeking greater policy autonomy. However, from a liberal institutionalist perspective, the value of an institution depends not only on flexibility, but also on transparency, rules, monitoring, and predictable governance. The question, therefore, is whether the BRICS supported development finance can provide autonomy without weakening accountability.

The IMF and World Bank have historically played a dominant role in shaping the economic policies of Southeast Asian nations, particularly during financial crises such as the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis (Chung 2021; Güven 2017; Biglaiser and McGauvran 2022; Harrigan and Mosley 1991; Vestergaard and Wade 2013). While these institutions have been criticized for imposing rigid neoliberal conditions including fiscal austerity, structural reforms, and deregulation, supporters argue that their long-term economic stabilization efforts have contributed to financial resilience and institutional development (IMF 1998; Petras and Brill 1986; Frangakis 2015). These conditions often prioritize investor confidence over domestic economic stability, leading to social inequality, economic vulnerability, and reduced policy flexibility for recipient states.

The BRICS, through institutions like the NDB, could offer a different model. This institution can provide loans and investment without imposing many policy conditions that require structural reforms (Creutz 2023b, 2023a; De Jonge 2017). This appeals to many ASEAN governments seeking greater policy control over their economies, particularly in infrastructure development and digital transformation. However, this less conditional financing model raises concerns about transparency, governance accountability, and the long-term sustainability of projects. Critics argue that the BRICS' emphasis on state-driven economic partnerships, rather than institutionalized governance frameworks, could create challenges in ensuring financial accountability and preventing debt dependency (Behuria 2018; Shaikh and Chen 2021).

A key debate in this competition between economic governance

models revolves around debt sustainability and strategic dependencies. Western-led institutions, despite their rigid conditionalities, often have clear guidelines on debt risk management, while newer development finance institutions are still being assessed in terms of transparency, safeguards, and long-term governance effectiveness (Lai et al. 2020; Petras and Brill 1986; Frangakis 2015). While ASEAN states have largely exercised caution in their engagements with BRICS financing, the question remains whether BRICS-backed projects will create long-term economic resilience or introduce new financial vulnerabilities for the region. This means that BRICS does not automatically solve the problems associated with Western-led finance. It changes the terms of institutional engagement, but ASEAN states still need strong domestic and regional mechanisms to assess debt risks, project quality, and long-term development outcomes.

Despite these narratives, Southeast Asian nations are not seeking to replace one model with another. Instead, many ASEAN states are balancing or hedging their engagements with both the BRICS and Western-led institutions, strategically diversifying their financial partnerships to maximize economic benefits while minimizing risks.

ASEAN Autonomy: Balancing BRICS Engagement Without Undermining Regional Sovereignty

The second limitation concerns ASEAN's ability to preserve collective agency. Liberal institutionalism assumes that institutions can help smaller and middle powers strengthen their bargaining position, but this depends on whether they act collectively or separately. For ASEAN, the risk is that BRICS engagement may occur mainly through bilateral channels, especially where China is involved, rather than through ASEAN-led mechanisms. This could give individual states more flexibility in the short term, but weaken ASEAN's collective influence over time.

One of ASEAN's strengths, at least in some areas, is its ability to negotiate collectively as a bloc, ensuring that economic engagements align with regional priorities rather than being dictated by external powers (Jones 2010; Arnakim and Mat 2021). The concern with BRICS' involvement is whether its engagements will primarily occur through bilateral agreements rather than ASEAN-led frameworks. While some Western economic partnerships engage ASEAN as a collective entity, the BRICS interactions have largely been shaped by state-to-state agreements, particularly those involving China. This bilateral engagement approach could weaken ASEAN's ability to present a

unified economic strategy and may lead to fragmentation in regional policy coordination.

The issue of economic sovereignty is also closely tied to debt diplomacy and financial dependencies. While the BRICS presents itself as an alternative to Western-led institutions, concerns remain about how much leverage the BRICS members, especially China gain over ASEAN states through infrastructure financing, trade policies, and technological investments (Lai et al. 2020; Shaikh and Chen 2021). Some analysts argue that ASEAN states must ensure that BRICS engagement enhances economic agency rather than creating new dependencies (To and Acuña 2019).

There is also the issue of political alignment. ASEAN has long sought to preserve strategic autonomy and avoid direct entanglement in major-power rivalries (Jones 2010). The BRICS, however, has been increasingly perceived as an emerging counterweight to Western institutions, particularly in global governance debates (Abdenur 2014). If BRICS positions itself as an overtly anti-Western economic bloc, ASEAN states may find themselves pressured to take sides in global economic governance, potentially disrupting their strategic balancing between China, the United States, and other global players.

To maintain regional autonomy, ASEAN states must ensure that BRICS engagement is structured through ASEAN-led frameworks, rather than being dictated by external economic players. ASEAN's task is therefore to turn BRICS engagement into a source of collective bargaining power rather than fragmented bilateral dependence. This requires stronger regional coordination, clearer standards for development finance, and ASEAN-led mechanisms that allow member states to engage the BRICS without weakening ASEAN centrality.

Internal BRICS Diversity: Diverging Interests in Southeast Asia

Another significant limitation of BRICS engagement in Southeast Asia is the diversity of economic and strategic priorities within the BRICS itself. While BRICS positions itself as a collective political-economy grouping, its members do not always share a unified vision for engagement in Southeast Asia. The economic asymmetries and geopolitical tensions within the BRICS raise questions about its long-term cohesion and ability to function as a reliable economic partner for ASEAN states.

China is by far the most dominant economic player within the BRICS, accounting for the majority of BRICS' trade and investment flows with Southeast Asia (ASEAN Stats, n.d., 2023; Gong 2019; Ting 2016). However,

India's approach to regional economic engagement differs significantly from China's, with New Delhi often prioritizing bilateral trade agreements, strategic partnerships, and technology-driven cooperation over large-scale infrastructure financing (ASEAN Stats 2023; Banik and Kim 2024). Russia, meanwhile, remains focused on energy and defense-related investments, while Brazil and South Africa have limited direct economic influence in Southeast Asia (ASEAN Stats 2023). This uneven level of engagement among BRICS members raises questions about whether ASEAN states can expect a truly collective BRICS economic strategy, or whether their interactions will be primarily driven by China and India's individual priorities.

Moreover, internal BRICS tensions such as China-India border disputes, Russia's geopolitical isolation, and Brazil's fluctuating foreign policy direction add further complexity to BRICS' ability to operate as a cohesive bloc (Nuruzzaman 2022; Diko and Sempijja 2021; Silva Araújo et al. 2025; Stephen 2012). ASEAN states may find that their engagements with BRICS do not lead to long-term institutional stability, as shifting political priorities among BRICS members could lead to policy inconsistencies and fluctuating economic commitments.

For ASEAN, this raises the question of whether BRICS can truly serve as a stable, long-term multilateral partner, or whether ASEAN states will need to engage with the BRICS selectively, prioritizing specific bilateral partnerships rather than relying on the BRICS as a unified entity. This is also a liberal institutionalist problem. Institutions are most useful when they generate predictable commitments among diverse members. If the BRICS remains too internally uneven, ASEAN states may treat it less as a coherent multilateral partner and more as a loose platform for selective engagement with individual powers.

Conclusion

The paper has argued that BRICS' relevance to Southeast Asia can be understood through a liberal institutionalist lens: its importance lies in the additional channels of cooperation, financing, and representation it may provide. The engagement of the BRICS in Southeast Asia, marked by Indonesia's full membership and Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia's status as partner nations, reflects the bloc's expanding economic and geopolitical influence in the region. From a liberal institutionalist perspective, the significance of the BRICS lies in its ability to expand the institutional choices available to Southeast Asian states. Liberalism highlights the role

of institutions in promoting cooperation, reducing dependence on bilateral power relations, and creating repeated opportunities for negotiation. The BRICS, therefore, gives ASEAN states additional platforms to engage major emerging economies, including China, while maintaining their participation in ASEAN-led and Western-led frameworks. BRICS presents itself as an alternative platform for development financing, trade expansion, and global governance reform, offering ASEAN states new opportunities for economic diversification and strategic autonomy. However, its engagement also raises critical challenges related to governance models, regional sovereignty, and internal cohesion that will shape its long-term role in Southeast Asia.

One of the most significant debates surrounding the BRICS is how it competes with and complements Western-led economic governance structures such as the IMF, World Bank, and ADB. While the BRICS offers alternative financing mechanisms through institutions like the New Development Bank, concerns persist over financial transparency, debt sustainability, and governance accountability. BRICS' state-driven approach to development finance, which largely avoids conditionalities, appeals to ASEAN states seeking greater economic autonomy. However, the long-term effects of BRICS-funded projects remain uncertain, particularly in terms of infrastructure debt, economic dependencies, and regulatory oversight. ASEAN states must carefully balance engagement with the BRICS and traditional financial institutions to maximize benefits while avoiding excessive reliance on any single economic model.

ASEAN's autonomy and regional coherence face new pressures as BRICS deepens its footprint in Southeast Asia. Unlike traditional economic partnerships, which recognize ASEAN as a collective entity, the BRICS' engagement has largely occurred through bilateral agreements, particularly with China taking a dominant role. While BRICS' non-interference principle aligns with ASEAN's diplomatic traditions, concerns remain about whether its financial influence could undermine ASEAN's regional decision-making processes and institutional unity. ASEAN must ensure that the BRICS engagement strengthens regional integration rather than leading to fragmentation through uncoordinated bilateral deals.

Furthermore, BRICS is not a monolithic bloc, and its internal diversity presents another key challenge for its engagement in Southeast Asia. The economic asymmetry between China and other BRICS members, combined with competing strategic priorities between India, Russia, Brazil, and South Africa, raises questions about BRICS' long-term cohesion and reliability as a unified multilateral partner. While China remains the primary driver of BRICS-ASEAN economic ties, India's selective engagement, Russia's energy-

focused approach, and Brazil and South Africa's limited regional influence suggest that ASEAN states may need to engage with BRICS through targeted bilateral interactions rather than relying on it as a cohesive economic bloc.

Outside of economic partnerships, BRICS' role in global governance reform is another factor shaping its engagement with Southeast Asia. By advocating for greater representation of developing economies in the IMF, World Bank, and WTO, BRICS aligns with ASEAN's aspirations for a more inclusive and multipolar global economic order. However, the extent to which the BRICS can effectively challenge Western-dominated institutions without becoming an alternative power bloc dominated by China and India remains a key concern. ASEAN states must engage with the BRICS in a way that enhances their collective influence in global governance without being drawn into geopolitical rivalries between major global powers.

Ultimately, the success of the BRICS in Southeast Asia will depend on how well ASEAN states navigate these opportunities and challenges. If managed strategically, the BRICS can serve as a complementary economic partner, providing financing options, trade diversification, and diplomatic leverage in global institutions. However, if ASEAN states fail to establish transparent, rules-based mechanisms for engagement, the BRICS could introduce new economic dependencies and weaken ASEAN's collective bargaining power. The challenge for ASEAN is to ensure that its engagement with the BRICS remains institutionally structured, financially sustainable, and politically neutral, allowing the region to maximize economic benefits without compromising its long-term strategic autonomy.

As the BRICS continues to evolve, its influence in Southeast Asia will likely grow, shaping the region's economic landscape and geopolitical positioning. However, ASEAN states must remain proactive in shaping this partnership on their own terms, leveraging the BRICS for economic development while maintaining regional coherence, institutional independence, and diversified global partnerships. The future of the BRICS in Southeast Asia is not predetermined; it will be defined by the strategic choices made by ASEAN states in managing their engagement with this emerging economic bloc.

References

- Abdenur, Adriana Erthal. 2014. "China and the BRICS Development Bank: Legitimacy and Multilateralism in South-South Cooperation." *IDS Bulletin* 45 (4): 85–101. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1759-5436.12095>.

- Acharya, Amitav. 2004. "How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism." *International Organization* 58 (02): 02. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818304582024>.
- AIIB. n.d. *AIIB Indonesia Project List*. https://www.aiib.org/en/projects/list/year/All/member/Indonesia/sector/All/financing_type/All/status/Proposed.
- Aleksia, Casandra, and Arief Rizky Bakhtiar. 2023. "BRICS as New Alternatives in Reforming International Financial Institutions and Economic Partnerships." *Insignia: Journal of International Relations* 10 (2): 128. <https://doi.org/10.20884/1.ins.2023.10.2.9135>.
- Armijo, Leslie Elliott, and Cynthia Roberts. 2014. "The Emerging Powers and Global Governance: Why the BRICS Matter." In *Handbook of Emerging Economies*, edited by Robert E. Looney. Routledge.
- Armstrong, Shiro, and Peter Drysdale. 2022. "The Economic Cooperation Potential of East Asia's RCEP Agreement." *East Asian Economic Review* 26 (1): 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.11644/KIEP.EAER.2022.26.1.403>.
- Arnakim, Lili Yulyadi, and Siti Mariam Mat. 2021. "MALAYSIA DAN ASEAN: KEPENTINGAN DAN PENDEKATAN MALAYSIA TERHADAP ASEAN, 1967-2017." *SEJARAH* 30 (2): 116–35. <https://doi.org/10.22452/sejarah.vol30no2.7>.
- Arora, Ashish, V. S. Arunachalam, Jai Asundi, and Ronald Fernandes. 2001. "The Indian Software Services Industry." *Research Policy* 30 (8): 1267–87. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333\(00\)00148-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333(00)00148-7).
- ASEAN. 2021. *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement to Enter into Force on 1 January 2022*. <https://asean.org/regional-comprehensive-economic-partnership-rcep-to-enter-into-force-on-1-january-2022/>.
- ASEAN Stats. 2023. *ASEAN Trade in Goods (IMTS) Dashboard*. <https://data.aseanstats.org/dashboard/imts.hs2>.
- ASEAN Stats. n.d. *Flows of Inward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into AMS by Source Country (in Million US\$)*. <https://data.aseanstats.org/fdi-by-hosts-and-source-inward>.
- Ayodele, Odilile. 2025. "The Emerging BRICS Financial Architecture: A Catalyst for Global Governance Reform?" *Politikon*, 1–20.
- Banik, Nilanjan, and Misu Kim. 2024. "India–ASEAN Trade Relations: Examining the Trends and Identifying the Potential." *Global Business Review* 25 (2_suppl): S59–77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972150920953546>.

- Beeson, Mark, and Jinghan Zeng. 2018. "The BRICS and Global Governance: China's Contradictory Role." *Third World Quarterly* 39 (10): 1962–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1438186>.
- Behuria, Ashok K. 2018. "How Sri Lanka Walked into a Debt Trap, and the Way Out." *Strategic Analysis* 42 (2): 168–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2018.1439327>.
- Biglaiser, Glen, and Ronald J. McGauvran. 2022. "The Effects of IMF Loan Conditions on Poverty in the Developing World." *Journal of International Relations and Development* 25 (3): 806–33. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-022-00263-1>.
- Bond, Patrick. 2020. "BRICS Banking and the Demise of Alternatives to the IMF and World Bank." In *International Development Assistance and the BRICS*, edited by Jose A. Puppim De Oliveira and Yijia Jing. Governing China in the 21st Century. Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9644-2_8.
- Bryndin, Evgeniy. 2022. "Transition of Countries to Currency and Trade Sustainable International Cooperation on the BRICS Platform." *Resources and Environmental Economics* 4 (2): 367–71. <https://doi.org/10.25082/REE.2022.02.003>.
- Callaghan, Mike, and Paul Hubbard. 2016. "The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: Multilateralism on the Silk Road." *China Economic Journal* 9 (2): 116–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17538963.2016.1162970>.
- Cammack, Paul. 2020. "Reproduction Versus Transformation: The Case of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank." *Global Society* 34 (3): 409–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2020.1739634>.
- Castro, Renato Cruz De. 2017. "The 12 July 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration's (PCA) Award: The Philippines' Lawfare versus China's Realpolitik in the South China Sea Dispute." *International Journal of China Studies* 8 (3): 347–72.
- Chen, Lurong, Aladdin D. Rillo, Yuanita Suhud, and Michelle Chandra Kasih. 2024. "Further ASEAN–China Cooperation for Joint Prosperity: Envisioning ACFTA 3.0 in the Digital Era." In *Further ASEAN–China Cooperation for Joint Prosperity: Envisioning the ACFTA 3.0*, edited by Lurong Chen and Aladdin D. Rillo. https://www.eria.org/uploads/Further-ASEAN-China-Cooperation-for-Joint-Prosperity-rev_.pdf#page=14.
- Chen, Xiaoqiang, Lihua Yuan, and Changqing Song. 2023. "Investigating Merchandise Trade Structure in the RCEP Region from the Perspective of Regional Integration." *Journal of Geographical Sciences* 33 (6): 1185–

204. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11442-023-2125-7>.
- Chew, Melanie. 1994. "Human Rights in Singapore: Perceptions and Problems." *Asian Survey* 34 (11): 933–48. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645345>.
- Chung, Kee Hoon. 2021. "Towards Rule-Based Institutions and Economic Growth in Asia? Evidence from the Asian Financial Crisis 1997–1998." *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 6 (3): 274–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891120962575>.
- Cooper, Andrew F. 2017. "The BRICS ' New Development Bank: Shifting from Material Leverage to Innovative Capacity." *Global Policy* 8 (3): 275–84. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12458>.
- Cormier, Ben, and Mark S. Manger. 2022. "Power, Ideas, and World Bank Conditionality." *The Review of International Organizations* 17 (3): 397–425. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-021-09427-z>.
- Creutz, Katja. 2023a. "Multilateral Development Banks as Agents of Connectivity: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)." *East Asia* 40 (3): 335–56. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-023-09408-6>.
- Creutz, Katja. 2023b. "The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Rights Protection: Revisionist or Just Another Kid on the Block?" *The International Journal of Human Rights* 27 (7): 1107–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2022.2033727>.
- Crumpton, Charles David, Supawatanakorn Wongthanavas, Peerasit Kamnuansilpa, John Draper, and Eva Bialobrzeski. 2021. "Assessing the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) via the Quintuple Helix Innovation Framework, with Special Regard to Smart City Discourse, Civil Participation, and Environmental Performance." *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development* 13 (1): 97–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19463138.2020.1827411>.
- De Jonge, Alice. 2017. "Perspectives on the Emerging Role of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank." *International Affairs* 93 (5): 1061–84. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix156>.
- DEFA, ASEAN. 2023. "Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA): ASEAN to Leap Forward Its Digital Economy and Unlock US\$2 Tn by 2030." In ASEAN. <https://asean.org/asean-defa-study-projects-digital-economy-leap-to-us2tn-by-2030/>.
- Dergachev, A. L. 2021. "The Mineral Resource Sectors of BRICS Countries: Mutual Supplies and Regulation of the Global Market of Mineral Raw Materials." *Moscow University Geology Bulletin* 76 (5): 471–81. <https://doi.org/10.3103/S0145875221050070>.
- Diko, Nqophisa, and Norman Sempijja. 2021. "Does Participation in BRICS

- Foster South-South Cooperation? Brazil, South Africa, and the Global South." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 39 (1): 151–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2020.1837746>.
- Duggan, Niall, Bas Hooijmaaijers, Marek Rewizorski, and Ekaterina Arapova. 2022. "Introduction: 'The BRICS, Global Governance, and Challenges for South–South Cooperation in a Post-Western World.'" *International Political Science Review* 43 (4): 469–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512111052211>.
- Fernández, Marta, and Maria Elena Rodriguez. 2026. "BRICS and the Global South: Anticipating the Steps of the Global North." *E-International Relations*. <https://www.e-ir.info/2026/02/20/brics-and-the-global-south-anticipating-the-steps-of-the-global-north/>.
- Frangakis, Marica. 2015. "Public Debt Crisis, Austerity and Deflation: The Case of Greece." *Review of Keynesian Economics* 3 (3): 295–313. <https://doi.org/10.4337/roke.2015.03.02>.
- Gong, Xue. 2019. "The Belt & Road Initiative and China's Influence in Southeast Asia." *The Pacific Review* 32 (4): 635–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2018.1513950>.
- Gould, Matthew, and Matthew D. Rablen. 2016. "Equitable Representation in Councils: Theory and an Application to the United Nations Security Council." *Public Choice* 169 (1–2): 19–51. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-016-0368-x>.
- Greenaway, David, and Oliver Morrissey. 1993. "Structural Adjustment and Liberalisation in Developing Countries: What Lessons Have We Learned?" *Kyklos* 46 (2): 241–61. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6435.1993.tb02423.x>.
- Güngen, Ali Rıza. 2023. "New Multilateral Development Banks and Green Lending: Approaching Scalar Complexities in the Global South." *Development and Change* 54 (2): 251–79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12755>.
- Guo, Yanjun. 2021. "The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in the Asia-Pacific Cooperation Process." *East Asian Policy* 13 (04): 33–45. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S1793930521000271>.
- Güven, Ali Burak. 2017. "Defending Supremacy: How the IMF and the World Bank Navigate the Challenge of Rising Powers." *International Affairs* 93 (5): 1149–66. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix167>.
- Harrigan, Jane, and Paul Mosley. 1991. "Evaluating the Impact of World Bank Structural Adjustment Lending: 1980–87." *Journal of Development Studies* 27 (3): 63–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220389108422204>.
- Helleiner, G. K. 1992. "The IMF, the World Bank and Africa's Adjustment

- and External Debt Problems: An Unofficial View." *World Development* 20 (6): 779–92. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(92\)90051-V](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(92)90051-V).
- Hooijmaaijers, Bas. 2021. "China, the BRICS, and the Limitations of Reshaping Global Economic Governance." *The Pacific Review* 34 (1): 29–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2019.1649298>.
- Huadong, Guo. 2018. "Steps to the Digital Silk Road." *Nature* 554 (7690): 25–27. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-018-01303-y>.
- Hund, Markus. 2003. "ASEAN Plus Three: Towards a New Age of Pan-East Asian Regionalism? A Skeptic's Appraisal." *The Pacific Review* 16 (3): 383–417. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951274032000085644>.
- Hussain, Fakhar, Zakar Hussain, Muhammad Ikramullah Khan, and Ali Imran. 2024. "The Digital Rise and Its Economic Implications for China through the Digital Silk Road under the Belt and Road Initiative." *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 9 (2): 238–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911231174731>.
- Huyen, Pham Thi Thu, and Ngo Tuan Thang. 2020. "China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Challenges and Opportunities for Vietnam." In *Critical Reflections on China's Belt & Road Initiative*, edited by Alan Chong and Quang Minh Pham. Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2098-9_13.
- Ikenberry, G. John. 2011. *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7rjt2>.
- IMF. 1998. *Indonesia IMF Letter of Intent*. <https://www.imf.org/external/np/loi/1113a98.htm>.
- Jaipragas, Bhavan. 2019. "Malaysia's ECRL: US\$20 Billion Rail Deal Still 'Being Negotiated', Says Mahathir Mohamad." *South China Morning Post*, February 1. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2184735/malysias-ecrl-us20-billion-rail-deal-still-being-negotiated-says>.
- Jones, Lee. 2010. "ASEAN's Unchanged Melody? The Theory and Practice of 'Non-Interference' in Southeast Asia." *The Pacific Review* 23 (4): 479–502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2010.495996>.
- Keohane, Robert. 1984. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*.
- Keohane, Robert, and Joseph Nye. 1977. *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*.
- Keohane, Robert O. 1984. "After Hegemony: Transatlantic Economic Relations in the next Decade." *The International Spectator* 19 (1): 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013758X.1984.10555555>.

- doi.org/10.1080/03932728408456529.
- Korolev, Alexander S. 2024. "Russia-ASEAN Relations— Strategic Partnership or Strategic Illusion?" *Russia in Global Affairs* 22 (3): 159–78. <https://doi.org/10.31278/1810-6374-2024-22-3-159-178>.
- Kuik, Cheng-Chwee. 2016. "How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN States' Alignment Behavior towards China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 25 (100): 500–514. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2015.1132714>.
- Kuik, Cheng-Chwee. 2021. "Getting Hedging Right: A Small-State Perspective." *China International Strategy Review* 3 (2): 300–315. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-021-00089-5>.
- Kusumastuti, R. D., and J. Rouli. 2021. "Smart City Implementation and Citizen Engagement in Indonesia." *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 940 (1): 012076. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/940/1/012076>.
- Kutu, Adebayo Augustine, and Harold Ngalawa. 2017. "Monetary Policy and Industrial Output in the BRICS Countries: A Markov-Switching Model." *Folia Oeconomica Stetinensia* 17 (2): 35–55. <https://doi.org/10.1515/fofi-2017-0017>.
- Lai, Karen P. Y., Shaun Lin, and James D. Sidaway. 2020. "Financing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Research Agendas beyond the 'Debt-Trap' Discourse." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 61 (2): 109–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2020.1726787>.
- Lau, Evan, and Koon Po Lee. 2008. "Interdependence of Income between China and ASEAN-5 Countries." *Journal of Chinese Economic and Foreign Trade Studies* 1 (2): 148–61. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17544400810884718>.
- Lee, Brice Tseen Fu, Ignacio Vicuña Betancourt, Juan Pablo Sims, Linh Dieu Dinh, and Yun-Tso Lee. 2026. "China's BRI and the EU's Global Gateway in Southeast Asia: Conditional Engagement Versus Non-Interference." *China Report* 62 (1): 33–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00094455251392166>.
- Lee, Brice Tseen Fu, Salman Ali Bettani, and Juan Pablo Sims. 2024. "Rise of China: Harmony or Hegemony?" *Chinese Political Science Review*, ahead of print. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-024-00253-3>.
- Lee, Brice Tseen Fu, Salman Ali Bettani, Juan Pablo Sims, and Yun-Tso Lee. 2024. "Southeast Asia as a Latent Kingmaker in the US-China Rivalry." *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations* 10 (1).
- Lee, Brice Tseen Fu, Linh Dieu Dinh, Juan Pablo Sims, and Salman Ali Bettani. 2025. "ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA): Implications for Digital Trade and Regional Economic Integration."

- Journal of Strategic and Global Studies* 8 (1). <https://doi.org/10.7454/jsgs.v8i1.1166>.
- Lee, Brice Tseen Fu, Kotchaphop Kornphetcharat, and Juan Pablo Sims. 2025. "Indonesia in BRICS: A Realist Perspective." *Journal of Strategic and Global Studies* 8 (2): 6.
- Lee, Brice Tseen Fu, and Juan Pablo Sims. 2024a. "Legitimacy through Diversity: China's Leadership in the BRICS+ Expansion for Global Balance." *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, ahead of print. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-024-00411-6>.
- Lee, Brice Tseen Fu, and Juan Pablo Sims. 2024b. "The BRICS+ Expansion, Global Trade Dynamics, and the Dedollarization Phenomenon." *Unnes Political Science Journal* 8 (1).
- Lee, Brice Tseen Fu, Juan Pablo Sims, and Yun-Tso Lee. 2025. "BRICS Expansion: Threat or Opportunity for ASEAN?" *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, April 11, 09749284251328226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09749284251328226>.
- Li, Li. 2019. "BRICS: A Limited Role in Transforming the World." *Strategic Analysis* 43 (6): 499–508. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2019.1677017>.
- Lissovlik, Ya D. 2023. "BRICS-Plus: The New Force in Global Governance." *Journal of International Analytics* 14 (1): 138–48. <https://doi.org/10.46272/2587-8476-2023-14-1-138-148>.
- Lissovlik, Yaroslav, and Evgeny Vinokurov. 2019. "Extending BRICS to BRICS+: The Potential for Development Finance, Connectivity and Financial Stability." *Area Development and Policy* 4 (2): 117–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2018.1535246>.
- Lukin, Alexander, and Fan Xuesong. 2019. "What Is BRICS for China?" *Strategic Analysis* 43 (6): 620–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2019.1669896>.
- Mazenda, Adrino, and Ronney Ncwadi. 2016. "The Rise of BRICS Development Finance Institutions: A Comprehensive Look into the New Development Bank and the Contingency Reserve Arrangement." *AFRICAN EAST-ASIAN AFFAIRS* 0 (3). <https://doi.org/10.7552/0-3-178>.
- Mielniczuk, Fabiano. 2013. "brics in the Contemporary World: Changing Identities, Converging Interests." *Third World Quarterly* 34 (6): 1075–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.802506>.
- NDB. 2026. *New Development Bank and Shanghai Rural Commercial Bank Signed Loan Agreement for Greener Shanghai Project*. <https://www.ndb.int/news/new-development-bank-and-shanghai-rural-commercial->

- bank-signed-loan-agreement-for-greener-shanghai-project/.
- NDB. n.d.a. *Development Impact for Our Member Countries*. <https://www.ndb.int/projects/>.
- NDB. n.d.b. *NDB's General Strategy: 2017 – 2021*. <https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NDB-Strategy-Final.pdf>.
- Norman, Izzah Aqilah. 2024. "Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand Become Partner Countries of BRICS." *Channel News Asia*, October 24. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/malaysia-indonesia-vietnam-thailand-brics-asean-global-south-russia-china-4699841>.
- Nuruzzaman, Mohammed. 2022. "Conflicts, Strategic Divergences and the Survival of Economic Groupings: Will China–India Rivalry Make BRICS Obsolete?" *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 7 (4): 1025–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911221108800>.
- Ocran, Matthew Kofi. 2024. "The New Development Bank." In *Perspectives on Development Banks in Africa*. Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-59511-0_17.
- Orakhelashvili, A. 2005. "The Impact of Peremptory Norms on the Interpretation and Application of United Nations Security Council Resolutions." *European Journal of International Law* 16 (1): 59–88. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chl103>.
- Park, Cyn-Young, Peter A. Petri, and Michael G. Plummer. 2021. "The Economics of Conflict and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific: RCEP, CPTPP and the US-China Trade War." *East Asian Economic Review* 25 (3): 233–72. <https://doi.org/10.11644/KIEP.EAER.2021.25.3.397>.
- Petras, James, and Howard Brill. 1986. "The IMF, Austerity and the State in Latin America." *Third World Quarterly* 8 (2): 425–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436598608419907>.
- Porca-Konjikusic, Sanela, Paul L. Hudson Jr, and Lodha Jain Harshi. 2024. "Global Economic Integration: How Do ASEAN and BRICS Organizations Contribute to the Process?" *BRICS Journal of Economics* 5 (2): 155–68.
- Purba, Aleksander, and John Tampil Purba. 2020. "Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Rail Transportation Project: Facts and Challenges." *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering* 918 (1): 012034. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1757-899X/918/1/012034>.
- Que, Chengyu, Fan Zhang, Junru Zhang, and Zhaoyong Zhang. 2020. "Trade Interdependence and Comparative Advantage Between China and Countries Along the Belt and Road." In *China's Rise and Internationalization*. WORLD SCIENTIFIC. https://doi.org/10.1142/9789811212239_0003.

- Ramcharan, Robin. 2000. "ASEAN and Non-Interference: A Principle Maintained." *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 60–88.
- Roberts, Cynthia. 2019. "The BRICS in the Era of Renewed Great Power Competition." *Strategic Analysis* 43 (6): 469–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2019.1672930>.
- Rodan, Garry. 2009. "Accountability and Authoritarianism: Human Rights in Malaysia and Singapore." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 39 (2): 180–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472330902723782>.
- Sally, Razeen. 2004. *Southeast Asia in the WTO*. no. 5. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Shaikh, Rizwan, and Chien-Kai Chen. 2021. "China's Debt Trap in Pakistan? A Case Study of the CPEC Project." *South Asia Research* 41 (3): 399–414. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02627280211040650>.
- Silva Araújo, Letícia, Lucas Milanez De Lima Almeida, and Alexandre Cesar Cunha Leite. 2025. "Trade Relations between Brazil and Asean: An Analysis through the Lenses of Dependency and Deindustrialization." *Problemas Del Desarrollo. Revista Latinoamericana de Economía* 56 (222): 27–58. <https://doi.org/10.22201/iiiec.20078951e.2025.222.70341>.
- Sims, Juan Pablo, and Brice Tseen Fu Lee. 2025. "Hedging under Hegemony: Domestic Pathways to Autonomy in Latin America." *Frontiers in Political Science* 7 (October): 1658413. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2025.1658413>.
- Sims, Juan Pablo, Yun-Tso Lee, and Brice Tseen Fu Lee. 2023. "New Chinese Economic Policy to Latin America? A QCA Approach to the Belt and Road Initiative." *Chinese Political Science Review*, ahead of print, July. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-023-00244-w>.
- Soesastro, Hadi. 1995. "ASEAN and APEC: Do Concentric Circles Work?" *The Pacific Review* 8 (3): 475–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512749508719151>.
- Stephen, Matthew D. 2012. "Rising Regional Powers and International Institutions: The Foreign Policy Orientations of India, Brazil and South Africa." *Global Society* 26 (3): 3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2012.682277>.
- Strangio, Sebastian. 2025. "Indonesia Officially Becomes First Southeast Asian Member of BRICS." *The Diplomat*, January 8. <https://thediplomat.com/2025/01/indonesia-officially-becomes-first-southeast-asian-member-of-brics/>.
- Stubbs, Richard. 2002. "ASEAN Plus Three: Emerging East Asian Regionalism?" *Asian Survey* 42 (3): 440–55. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2002.42.3.440>.

- Suoneto, Noto, and Brice Tseen Fu Lee. 2024. "Asean Won't Become Obsolete Just Because a Few Members Join Brics." *South China Morning Post*, November 4. <https://www.scmp.com/opinion/asia-opinion/article/3284952/asean-wont-become-obsolete-just-because-few-members-join-brics>.
- Ting, Wai. 2016. "Increasing Economic Interdependence between China and ASEAN and Its Implications." *Journal of ASEAN Studies* 4 (2): 127–41.
- To, Emma Miriam Yin-Hang, and Rodrigo Acuña. 2019. "China and Venezuela: South-South Cooperation or Rearticulated Dependency?" *Latin American Perspectives* 46 (2): 126–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X18813574>.
- Vestergaard, Jakob, and Robert H. Wade. 2013. "Protecting Power: How Western States Retain The Dominant Voice in The World Bank's Governance." *World Development* 46 (June): 153–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2013.01.031>.
- Wang, Hongying. 2019. "The New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: China's Ambiguous Approach to Global Financial Governance." *Development and Change* 50 (1): 221–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12473>.
- Wigell, Mikael. 2016. "Conceptualizing Regional Powers' Geoeconomic Strategies: Neo-Imperialism, Neo-Mercantilism, Hegemony, and Liberal Institutionalism." *Asia Europe Journal* 14 (2): 135–51. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-015-0442-x>.
- Wu, Chien-Huei. 2020. "ASEAN at the Crossroads: Trap and Track between CPTPP and RCEP." *Journal of International Economic Law* 23 (1): 97–117. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jiel/jgz032>.
- Yoo, In Tae, and Inkyoung Kim. 2016. "Free Trade Agreements for the Environment? Regional Economic Integration and Environmental Cooperation in East Asia." *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 16 (5): 721–38. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10784-015-9291-8>.

ABSTRACT

The expansion of the BRICS into Southeast Asia, with Indonesia as a full member and Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia as partner nations, presents new opportunities for economic growth, institutional cooperation, and global governance reform. This paper examines how the BRICS may potentially complement ASEAN's regional frameworks, provides alternative financial mechanisms, and enhances Southeast Asia's role in multilateral diplomacy. While challenges such as governance transparency, debt sustainability, and intra-BRICS asymmetries persist, ASEAN's engagement with the BRICS offers a pathway toward a more inclusive global economic order. Strategic institutional alignment will determine whether the BRICS strengthens ASEAN's economic autonomy or introduces new dependencies.

KEYWORDS

BRICS, Southeast Asia, Liberalism, ASEAN, Multilateralism

Received on February 7, 2025

Accepted on May 23, 2026

IRAN'S DRIVING DETERMINANTS OF ENLARGEMENT TOWARDS AFRICA: CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA, SENEGAL AND GHANA

Nazrin Alizada¹

Damla Kocatepe²

Introduction

The concept of the “Third World”, coined by Alfred Sauvy during the ‘Cold War’, initially defined ideological neutrality and a non-systemic stance, but over time it became synonymous with economic backwardness. The African continent, as one of the geographies where this transformation is most clearly reflected, became a focal point for foreign powers’ efforts to gain influence via religious, cultural, and economic means. In line with the foreign policy understanding shaped after the Islamic Revolution, Iran has deepened its relations with this continent by using religious values as a foreign policy instrument in Africa. In this context, Iran uses Shiism as both a cultural and ideological tool and tries to build an ‘anti-imperialist solidarity’ through its religious identity.

Iran’s presence in Africa is not purely cultural or humanitarian; on the contrary, it has been shaped as part of an ideologically based foreign policy strategy. This strategy instrumentalizes Shiism through sectarian expansionism and aims to create anti-Western blocs and balance the influence of actors such as the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia in the region. This country’s policy of expansion through religion and culture, in interaction with different socio-religious structures in Africa, has the potential to create a significant

¹ Hatay Mustafa Kemal University, Hatay, Turkey. E-mail: nazrin.alizada@mku.edu.tr . ORCID: 0000-0002-6874-7712 .

² Kafkas University, Kars, Turkey. E-mail: dml.sahinn@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0002-1564-3995.

break in the geopolitical balances of the continent. In this perspective, the main hypothesis of the article is that Iran pursues a soft power strategy in Africa through religious discourse and sectarian identity, and that it constructs this strategy to legitimize its anti-Western discourse at the global level and avoid Western sanctions on one hand, and to gain long-term political influence in the African continent on the other.

Additionally, the case study method was preferred in this study, whereby Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana were taken as case examples, and the analysis process was structured in accordance with this methodological framework. The choice of these three African countries was based on the predominantly Shiite population residing in these countries. Because while Nigeria is an African country with the highest number of Shiite Muslims, the Shiite density in Senegal is medium and the lowest in Ghana. For this reason, the scope and limitations of the study were determined by the sociocultural instruments of Iran's expansion policy, especially religion and education, and the application area was determined with three African countries.

The academic literature on Iran's Africa policy has shown a remarkable increase in recent years in terms of both quality and quantity. This literature analyses Iran's strategic engagements, religious and economic instruments, regional rivalries and soft power strategies on the continent from a multidimensional perspective. Countries such as South Africa, Nigeria and Tanzania have featured prominently in the analyses of Iran's strategic enlargement in Sub-Saharan Africa (Kohnert 2024; Lefebvre 2019; Lob 2016). The engagements conducted through these countries are considered as part of Iran's quest for legitimacy at the global level, beyond its efforts to establish bilateral relations. Iran-Africa trade relations are mostly analysed within the framework of South-South cooperation and economic dependency theories (Lob and Yilmazkuday 2025). These studies show that Iran positions Africa as a strategic alternative, especially in an economic environment shaped by sanctions. Similarly, Iranian researchers also emphasize the need to develop economic relations with Africa and the importance of energy, infrastructure and trade in this context (Asgar Khani and Arghavani Pirsalami 2011). From a security perspective, Iran's engagement in Africa is not confined to the economy; it is also a reflection of regional rivalry. The ramifications of the Iran-Israel rivalry in the Red Sea and East Africa are evaluated within this framework (Bazoobandi and Talebian 2024). The basis of Iran's soft power strategies in Africa is religious diplomacy and sectarian identity (Karaoğlu 2022; Rigiderakhshan 2022). Moreover, Iran's attempts to rebuild its image in the African public opinion are also evaluated within the framework of cultural diplomacy and 'smart security' concepts (Karami 2024). Historically, the

Ahmadinejad era (2005-2013) is seen as a turning point in Iran's policy towards Africa, with increased diplomatic visits and cooperation agreements during this period (Şeker 2017). This study, on the other hand, aims to contribute to the literature by analyzing Iran's Africa policy through a combined historical, religious, economic, and strategic lens, using three selected case countries, Senegal, Nigeria, and Ghana, as focal points for the analysis. Therefore, since Iran's expansion efforts have not been analysed simultaneously in the context of the three countries, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature.

This article consists of four main parts. In the first part, the historical development of the concept of Third World/underdevelopment and Iran's approach to this concept will be discussed in a theoretical framework. In the second part, the historical background of Iran-Africa relations will be analysed and the differences in the African policies of the politicians who came to power after the revolution will be revealed. In the third part, the geopolitical, economic and religious contexts of Africa's relevance in Iran's foreign policy will be assessed. In the last part, Iran's use of soft power elements will be explained through case studies of Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana. This structure aims to provide a comprehensive analysis by combining both the theoretical and practical dimensions of the study.

Theoretical Framework

The term "Third World" is used by many to refer to developing countries, such as poor states in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania. But when the term was coined in the 1950s, there was no connection to poverty. In his theory of the "Three Worlds", the French scholar and public figure Alfred Sauvy, who explained it in 1952, emphasized the *Tiers Etat* (Third State) of French society before the Revolution of 1789, which at that time consisted of people who lacked privileges, and then categorized the countries of the world according to their participation in the Cold War (Sofjan 2023).

Accordingly, the First World countries were the capitalist countries, the Second World was represented by the socialist bloc, and the Third World were the nation states that did not directly participate in the bloc conflict. This means that this theory was part of the Three-World model used during the Cold War, and marginalization of those who were deemed unimportant. So, at the time, the Third World was simply used to refer to a country that was not considered capitalist or communist. In other words, in these years, the Third World was also a generalized name for countries that had just emerged from the grip of life-isolationism and had not yet completed their development.

Over the years, the term “Third World” has lost its original meaning and has come to be used to describe countries experiencing significant levels of economic underdevelopment. From this point of view, it would be appropriate to briefly discuss underdevelopment.

Being underdeveloped does not actually mean the absence of improvement. Underdevelopment, which is the concept that brings inequality to the forefront, Rodney explained by linking it to higher productivity of a certain segment of society (Rodney 2011, 13-14). As such, underdevelopment is a tool for developing a critical perspective on the conditions that lead to imbalance in a positive and negative production environment. Underdevelopment therefore strives to explain situations that emphasize historical, socio-political and economic contingencies that give one country or region an unfair advantage over another when compared to other ones. Especially concrete examples of this concept, which is directly related to third world countries, can be found in the African continent (Maoism.ru 2018).

Under the influence of religious ideals, Iran embarked on a dramatic shift in its foreign policy after the Islamic Revolution, preferring to develop relations with underdeveloped Third World countries that aim to challenge the established order and challenge the status quo. These developments became prominent in the rhetoric of the leaders, especially during the Ahmadinejad era, with a greater focus on Third World countries (Arghavani Pirsalami 2013, 83) and during the Reisi administration, this was concretized through diplomatic contacts. Based on the Third World theory, Iran has attempted to foster its ties with the countries in the region, especially using the language factor among sociocultural values and controlled Shiism among religious phenomena as a political tool.

By using the sociocultural method, Iran is trying to spread its cultural heritage among African countries, to ensure that its language is learned, and most importantly, to deal with them in the direction of its own strategy. In this context, Iran can convert the states that are described as Third-World countries through opening strategic, and cultural Iranian centers, providing language education in schools operating in Africa, granting scholarships to African students and providing opportunities to receive education in Iranian universities (Abdullah 2016). On this axis, it can be said that Iran's attitude is strong in Nigeria, Cameroon in West Africa, Uganda in East Africa, and some South African countries by means of the support of below:

- Embassies
- Iranian Cultural Centers
- Iranian Language Centers

- Revolutionary Guards
- Institutions operating in different fields (Sadeghi and Hajimineh 2019, 223).

In addition, Iran's cultural presence in Africa illustrates itself mostly in West Africa and to a lesser extent in East and South Africa. When evaluated based on these countries the Islamic Movement Party of Nigeria, led by Ibrahim al-Zakzaky, has a great role in the spread of Iranian culture, especially in Nigeria (Lewis 2020, 3). At the same time, within the framework of the strategy implemented by the Iranian Cultural Centers operating here, cooperation with Nigerian TV channels has facilitated the influence of other African countries through them. As a result of the cooperation of the Iranian Cultural Centers with the Al-Africa Islam TV channel in Nigeria, a Quran contest broadcasted in Nigeria was organized in 19 African countries too (AhlulBeyt News Agency 2016).

Besides, Iran is trying to attract people to its side by opening language centers in many African countries and teaching Islamic values and the Persian language. An example of this can be cited in the epitome of Senegal. During the official meeting of Iran's Ambassador to Senegal Einollah Gavgavi and the Minister of Higher Education and Research of Senegal in Dakar, the idea of establishing a Persian language course in higher education institutions in Senegal was proposed by Iran. Senegalese officials also expressed that they welcome this idea and stated that they believe that the realization of this proposal, considering the common points, will positively affect Iran-Senegal relations (Ministry of Education 2016).

Taking advantage of the language factor as well as the dysfunctionality of broadcast channels in the context of sociocultural values, Iran follows the model of the pro-Iranian Hispan TV channel broadcasting in Spanish. (Bouvier 2024) Therefore, in 2017, the channel launched the "Hausa TV" program (Mehr News Agency 2017) broadcasting to more than 50 million Hausa speakers specially in Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana and other African countries. Despite being published in a broadly spoken African language, it is largely uninterested in African affairs, focusing instead on the challenge of the "Axis of Resistance" versus Israel and the role of Shia Islam in Africa.

On the other hand, in trying to turn Shiism into a political tool under its control, this state took advantage of the fact that Shiites were already oppressed by the majority Sunni Muslims and that Africans were more inclined to religious defence than their crucial concerns. Even the major Western countries are aware of this fact and have figured out that they cannot do it without the axis of faith in the political calculus in Africa. So, they have a certain discomfort with the instrumentalization of Islam. But

they must also refrain from any action that could provoke the anger of the Muslim community, which is now a substantial driving force in many African countries (Camara 2021). And this imposes limitations on their activities in the region. Realizing this, Iran utilizes the religious factor more effectively to create an anti-Western front consisting of African states and to establish partnerships that will strengthen its position within the “Axis of Resistance”. In this regard, Iran takes advantage of two elements in the regions where it has interests to turn Shi’ism into the dominant sect.

The first of these is the use of Taqiyya for Ahl al-Bait by hiding their identity (Demir 2018). The second is the introduction of development and humanitarian aid projects to get into the hearts and minds of people, as Christian missionaries did in poor countries (Awad 2019, 1). Iran utilizes the second element more effectively in its foreign policy activities in the African continent. Although the countries that settled here have rich wealth, they are just as unequipped and financially inadequate in terms of putting them into operation.

Historical Background of Iran-Africa Relations

Although the African continent was not a distinctive region that paid attention to Iranian foreign policy, it has emerged as a region where Iran has been trying to expand its sphere of influence since the 21st century. In fact, the roots of relations between Iran and the African continent go back to ancient times. While looking at history, it is seen that cooperation for commercial purposes came to the fore in relations that went back to the imperial period. People of Persian origin immigrated to East Africa in the 16th century, and during the Pahlavi period, economic relations were developed mostly with South African countries (Chimarizeni 2017, 39). Essentially, Reza Shah Pahlavi remained in exile in South Africa from 1941 to 1946, and bilateral relations were sustained during the reign of his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (Fakude 2016, 4). However, bilateral relations were tried to be developed in different periods, after the Islamic Revolution, Iran broke all ties with apartheid South Africa and commenced to impose sanctions, and with this, Africa was thrown into the background in Iranian foreign policy. Only towards the end of the 20th century, the course of international relations began to change, and after the collapse of the apartheid regime, Iran again brought its relations with the African continent to the fore. On this axis, economic relations started to evolve, and South Africa imported almost 65-90% of its oil needs from Iran (Onderco 2016, 256). In parallel with this, the current religious leader Ali Khamenei, who was the president during the reign of Ayatollah Khomeini,

visited African countries, including Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Angola, in 1986 (Keynoush 2021, 35), and made various agreements, especially on the development of infrastructure. However, Iran's interest in Africa emerged at a declining level during the reign of Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was elected President after Khomeini's death. Because during this period, Rafsanjani only visited Senegal in 1991. Like Rafsanjani's government, interest in Africa decreased relatively during the period of Mohammed Khatami, who was elected President after Rafsanjani. Especially during the Khatami period, which was called the new era of the external policy of Iran (Kaya and Şartepe 2016, 4), the discourse of exporting the revolution was moved away, as Iran was focusing on softening its relations with the West. The fact that Africa received the attention that it deserves in Iranian politics began with the reign of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was elected President in 2005. Ahmadinejad tried to keep relations with Africa at the highest level by adopting the "axis of resistance" discourse formulated by Ali Khamenei. Thereupon, Mahmud Ahmadinejad, in a speech in New York, underlined that "Iran does not have any limitations or obstacles to the development of its ties with African countries" (Warner 2011) and expressed that Iran is willing to enlarge and strengthen its relations with Africa in 2008. In addition, especially South African countries have taken a stand in favor of developing economic relations with Iran, and providing the domestic economic needs played a major role in this. Although there was a decrease in the course of relations with Africa during the period of Hassan Rouhani, who took the presidency after Ahmadinejad, he underlined that there are no barriers to the development of bilateral relations between African countries and Iran, in the meeting held with the King of Lesotho and the President of Zimbabwe in 2017 (Middle East Monitor 2016).

The official meetings between Iran and African states did not finish, and in October 2017, the President of Tanzania met with Rouhani during his visit to Iran. While emphasizing the economic cooperation between the two countries, the President of Tanzania mentioned that "Tanzania plays a transit country role for Iran in providing access to East Africa" (Tasnimnews 2017). Upon this, Rouhani stated that "Iranian companies are ready to enter development projects covering the whole of Africa, including Tanzania (ISNA 2017). Such official visits were made regularly between the parties, and this is accepted as evidence that Africa has not lost its importance in Iran's foreign policy, on the contrary, it is trying to be more prominent. This is supported by the statement made by President Ebrahim Raisi, who took office in 2021. While emphasizing the need to expand relations with non-Western countries, Raisi underlined that Africa would play a central role in this axis and signaled that Iran would seriously activate all its capacities for cooperation with

African countries (Naeni 2021). By taking a step that had not been taken for 11 years, Raisi visited three African countries (Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe) in July 2023. During this visit, 21 agreements were signed in various fields, including oil, telecommunications, and information technologies, and the African continent was seen as an important region of opportunity (Naeni 2023). During Raisi's term, Iran aimed to increase its trade and economic relations with Africa to weaken Western influence and mitigate Western sanctions (Karr et al. 2024). Masoud Pezeshkian, who took office in July 2024, expressed his desire to strengthen relations with African countries in his message titled "*My Message to the New World*", using the term "Global South." (Daressalam 2024) The energy, economy, and trade relations initiated with many African countries during Raisi's presidency are expected to continue under Pezeshkian (Movahed 2025), who seeks to open a new window of diplomacy with the West (Slavin 2024). The Third Iran-Africa Conference on Economic Cooperation in April 2025 in Tehran with the participation of President Pezeshkian is a visible sign of this. The conference was attended by more than 20 ministers, 14 deputy ministers and senior officials from various countries of the African continent (Etemad Online 2025).

The Prominence of Africa in Iranian Foreign Policy

While researching Iran's foreign strategy, firstly it would be appropriate to focus on the priorities or targets determined by this country within the framework of its external policy. In this axis the objectives adopted by Iran are as follows (Clawson 1994, 42):

- Being self-sufficient in the field of economy, policy, and military.
- To take advantage of the deterrence policy by eliminating the elements that will pose a risk for Iran.
- To direct attention to the out of the border rather than the internal issues, in line with the success of the revolution.
- Effectively taking control of regions where it has its own interests (for example, Africa).
- To provide Iran as a regional power through realizing these goals.

In the context of the objectives, the reason why Iran attaches importance to Africa should be categorized under four main headings. This includes issues such as the fulfillment of needs covering the economic, political, military, and religious spheres. If examined in more detail, it is possible to list them as follows:

Economic Dimension

Iran seeks to capitalize on Africa's natural resources by investing in the exploration of uranium reserves. The country aims to achieve significant gains by highlighting Africa's potential and deploying financial assets (Shahvar 2020, 60) to support Iranian companies in projects such as energy pipelines, telecommunications, dam construction, and silage production. Additionally, Africa, with its abundant raw materials for food and industrial production, offers a lucrative market for Iranian products (African Natural Resources Center 2016, 4).

Political Engagement

Iran aims to solidify its influence in Africa by securing the support of both African states and multinational corporations operating on the continent. However, Iran faces opposition from Israel, which seeks to maintain control over its activities in the region. Another key reason for Iran's interest in Africa is its desire to garner support from various African countries in resisting the sanctions imposed by the U.S. and Western states due to its nuclear program (Chimarizeni 2017, 38). Iran has successfully gained such support from African nations like Gabon, which, despite its observer status at the United Nations, opposed sanctions against Iran. Furthermore, Iran leveraged its energy reserves as a political tool, offering oil to African nations at discounted prices in exchange for political backing. Kenya, for example, also supported Iran, motivated by its own ambitions to develop a nuclear power plant within the next decade (McAnenny 2014). In this context, Kenya seeks to benefit from Iran's expertise to help achieve this goal.

Strategic Objectives

To advance its strategic ambitions in the region, Iran is targeting the establishment of military bases in Africa. However, this ambition faces several challenges. To strengthen its influence, Iran is deepening its ties with Eritrea, utilizing Iranian tankers and military ships, and enhancing its naval presence at Eritrean ports such as Massawa and Assab (Stratfor.com 2012). Eritrean opposition forces have voiced concerns that Iran may be establishing a naval base at the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. In response, Iran clarified that its presence

in the region is linked to potential defense needs in case of future threats. Moreover, Iran is also leveraging other African countries, such as Somalia and Djibouti, for illicit activities (Calabrese 2020). It uses land routes in East Africa, which facilitate the smuggling of weapons, to transport illegal arms to targeted nations. Simultaneously, these routes help Iran circumvent Israeli actions and allow the movement of smuggled goods back to Iran (Mari 2017, 61).

Religious Factors

Africa's predominantly Muslim population—comprising both Sunni and significant Shi'a communities in countries like Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, Uganda, Mali, and Tanzania—makes the continent strategically important for Iran (Shahvar 2020, 60). Even though the overwhelming number of African Muslims are Sunni, the prevalence of Shiism is also noteworthy. Given the contest between Iran and Sunni-led states in the region, this religious outlook is one of the factors that make Africa appealing for Iran. Under Saudi Arabia's leadership, Sunni-majority countries in Africa have adopted a Saudi-centric version of Islam that opposes Iran's approach (AlSaied 2021). Iran, therefore, seeks to strengthen its influence among Shiite segments in Africa, leveraging religious ties to foster support.

As outlined, Africa holds strategic importance for Iran for multiple reasons. To capitalize on this, Iran is pursuing a political manoeuvre to secure its interests on the continent. Specifically, Iran is working to establish a favourable position before a Sunni-led opposition can emerge. Its strategy unfolds in three phases:

- **Phase One:** Developing bilateral relations with African countries.
- **Phase Two:** Advancing the concept of dialogue among divergent civilizations.
- **Phase Three:** Strengthening cooperation to eliminate the “axis of evil” states under U.S. leadership.

These phases align with Iran's broader soft power strategy, which aims to enhance its influence in various regions, including Africa. To achieve its goals, Iran employs various methods, and a comprehensive examination of these strategies is necessary to understand the full scope of its approach on the African continent.

Case Study Applications

When Muslims in Africa are considered in general, it can be said that this region is a place where Muslims live intensely. Most of them in this region also live in Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Congo, and Ghana. It is possible to understand this numerically in more detail from the table below.

Table 1: Number of Muslims/Shia's in Africa³

Country	Total Number of Muslims	Total Number of Shia's
Nigeria	104.700.000	3.000.000-7.000.000
Senegal	15.500.000	1.000.000
Ghana	1.900.000	less than 1.000.000

As it can be seen from the table, the frequency of settlement of the Muslim population in Africa differs from country to country. For this reason, Iran is trying to embody its existence by moving to regions where Muslims live more often and where the Shiite section constitutes a minority among the Sunni section in different ways. In this context, it is worthwhile to examine in detail Iran's utilization of the religious method in three main countries. Nigeria, which has the largest Muslim population, Senegal, which is in the middle segment of the population rankings, and Ghana, which is known for having a much lower than average Shia population.

Nigeria

Nigeria, the most populated country in Africa, is home to many religions, Islam and Christianity are the most widely accepted religions among them. Of these religions, especially the arrival of Islam in Nigeria needs to be emphasized. Because the reason why this religion is the most accepted one in Nigeria is due to its ancient roots. Those who brought Islam to Nigeria in the 9th century were Muslims from Egypt. Throughout the country, this religion expanded through the Fulani Muslims who migrated to Nigeria after the fall of the former Songhai kingdom in the 15th century (Njoku 1995). However, in the 20th century, especially after Nigeria gained independence in 1960, an Islamization program became widespread in the country. And thanks to this program, 100.000 people accepted Islam, (African Studies

³ The table was created by the authors based on information collected from different sources and used in the article.

Centre Leiden 2016) and the importance of Islam in Nigeria increased even more. In addition, it should be emphasized that the Muslim community in Nigeria is also divided into two sects. While almost 60 million of the Muslim community living there belongs to the Sunni sect, there is no clear statistical information about the number of people in the Shiite sect. Some sources claim that there are 4 million Shiite Muslims in Nigeria, and according to some, the number of Muslims is near 10 million (Szrom 2010). Since there is no clear figure, Shiite Muslims are considered as a minority here. For this reason, Iran is trying to be more active in this region, so that the Shiites here are no longer a minority. In this regard, Iran plans to attract the Sunni section of the region to its side. It has resorted to different ways to achieve this desire, and the Islamic Movement Party of Nigeria facilitated its attitude on this field (Elijah et al. 2021, 6). This party is trying to make Islam the dominant religion throughout the country.

Briefly looking at the history of the Islamic Movement Party of Nigeria, one should examine the issues in Nigeria in the 1970s (Onapajo 2017, 82-83). As a matter of fact, the tension between Muslims and Christians living in Nigeria, as well as various Muslim segments, started to increase gradually during these years, and Nigeria turned into a country where Islamist groups were in conflict. From the late 1970s, some Nigerian Muslims began to call for the Islamization of public life more loudly than in the previous two decades (Thurston 2017). On this axis, under the leadership of Ibrahim al-Zakzaky, the Islamic Movement Party has been more active since the 1980s. The main reason for this was the Iranian Islamic revolution that happened in 1979.

Inspired by the Iranian revolution, al-Zakzaky, who is a Sunni, wanted the government to be overthrown in the same way in Nigeria and to establish a system based on Islamic law. In fact, he introduced himself as a Shiite Muslim in his preachings in Northern Nigeria in the 1980s-1990s (Soonest 2019). Therefore, Iran supported the Islamic Movement Party of Nigeria, known as the jihadist party, and through this party, it provided military training to hundreds of Nigerians in the camps in Northern Nigeria, as in the Hezbollah camp (Schoonover 2013). The largest area of activity of this party is in Northern Nigeria. With the support of Iran, although this party wants to turn Shi'ism into the dominant sect in Nigeria, the number of anti-Shiite supporters is increasing in Nigeria. This segment, which describes themselves as anti-Shiite supporters, is a Salafi movement. They are generally representatives of Sunni Islam around the world and find Shi'ism inadequate for Islam.

On this axis, Nigerian Salafists accuse the Shiites of denying the completeness of the Quran, while the Shiites claim that the Nigerian Salafists

are closer to Wahhabis. The emergence of conflicts of opinion because of mutual accusations between different sects causes a civil war in Nigeria. And this is in the interest of Iran. By taking this as a basis and in the name of ending the discrimination against Shiite Muslims, Iran expands its sphere of influence easily in Nigeria. For this, the best method is to attract Sunni Muslims to their side, which is tried to be realized through the planned Shiite institutions. For the establishment of such institutions, Iran wants to establish the Institutional Network of Shiites in Africa. The first step towards this goal was taken on 10th August 2016. Secretary-General Abu Jaafar has taken initiatives such as the establishment of the "Ahl al-Bait African Union", which will become the reference of African Shiites and highlight the values of peace among societies across the continent (Yaymout 2016).

Iran's active use of religion in Nigeria is mainly due to this reason: before the 1990s, most Islamic scholars in Nigeria were unaware of the basic beliefs of Shiism. This is because most religious scholars, especially in Northern Nigeria, were using the Jalaleyni Tafsir. Hence, the Shiites did not have enough adequate sources of information to keep their religious beliefs alive. In this situation, the spread of Shiism in the region was not possible. Therefore, the Iranians took advantage of the lack of knowledge of Islamic scholars in Nigeria and most of West Africa, where scholars limited themselves to the books of the Maliki school of thought (Muhammed and Abdullahi 2019, 37-38).

As it can be understood from the above, Iran has the advantage of religion, which can use it in the following strategy as a political tool. Therefore, it can be included in every region as the protector of the rights of Muslims where Iran has its own interests. All in all, Iran actively uses the religion (Shi'ism) method, which has a wide spectrum, in Nigeria. For this, it does not make any great effort. Iran achieves all this by using Nigerian Shiites, that is, by taking advantage of the country's internal power.

Senegal

There have been economic relations between Iran and Senegal since the period of Reza Shah Pahlavi, and these relations were tried to be continued during the Cold War period. However, due to the political achievements in the African continent, Iran has begun to break off relations with African countries. Thereupon, the Iranian Embassy in Senegal was closed in 1984 due to igniting Islamic propaganda and resumed its activities in 1990 (Leichtman 2009, 324). After that, bilateral relations have ensured more progress, in

which the political changes in the international arena since the 21st century have played a major role. In addition, Iran has made changes in its foreign policy doctrine and has commenced emphasizing the development of bilateral relations with African countries. Since the Ahmadinejad era, the Senegalese government was not indifferent to Iran's making the African issue the focal point of its foreign policy, (Szrom 2010) the establishment of an oil refinery and chemical factory in Senegal, as well as the Khodro automobile factory, and the production of large amounts of cheap oil by Iran can be mentioned as examples of this action. Following this, President Abdoulaye Wade traveled to Tehran twice, in 2006 and 2008, to meet with Khamenei and Ahmadinejad (Rubin 2008, 6).

During this meeting, he made statements that it would be easier to prepare the ground against the great powers, which is a common goal, through the creation of unity between other Islamic countries such as Senegal and Iran. Emphasizing that Senegal sees Iran as an exemplary country facilitated Iran's desire to strengthen its attitude in Senegal based on religion. Because even though Senegal is a 90% Muslim country, Sunnis ruled by Sufi leaders dominate there.

In general, although the Sunni section predominates in Senegal, (Leichtman 2009, 325) the existence of Shi'ism here dates to ancient times. But its institutionalization depends on the Islamic Institute, which was established in Dakar, (Séne 2016, 45) the capital of Senegal, in 1978 with the support of the Lebanese Diaspora. This institute allowed Shiite Islam to become more widespread in Senegal, and thanks to its activities, mosques and madrasas that serve to adopt Shi'ism throughout the country were built and an atmosphere was created there for the Sunni and Shiite populations to share the same environment and to develop themselves in terms of religion. Although all of these are positive developments in Iran's increasing effectiveness in Senegal by using the religious method, relations between these two countries were interrupted in 2011. The main reason was the event that took place in 2010. Even though a peace agreement was signed in Dakar in 2004 between the Senegalese government and the Casamance Democratic Forces Operation, which was established in 1982 to fight against the government for independence, (Foucher 2018, 265) this force continued its separatist activities and in 2010, a bloody incident resulted in the death of Senegalese soldiers.

After this incident, the Senegalese government claimed that it procured the weapons used by the members of the Casamance operation from Iran and took a decision to break off its relations with Iran in 2011 (Aljazeera 2011). But even though Senegal is a country with a population of

15,500.000, this country is the first of the five countries that maintain its weight in Iran's Islamic policy in Africa and where civilians have the most positive thoughts about Iran among African countries. For this reason, it was important for Iran to restore relations even after reaching the breaking point. Based on this, at the 12th Islamic Summit with the theme "*Muslim World: New Challenges and Expanding Opportunities*" in Cairo in 2013, (OIC/SUM 2013) Iran made a statement that it asks for restoring its relations with Senegal. At the same time, the President of Senegal Macky Sall, who took a stand in favor of the restoration of bilateral relations, tried not to make the mistake of his predecessors during the restoration of relations and to attract attention again so that Iran invested in Senegal.

Albeit all the issues that happened between the two countries, Iran does not give up on Senegal and wants to convert most of the Sunni group there to Shi'ism. This is due to the existence of Sunni operations targeting Shi'ism such as Hizb al-Tarqiyya, (Diouf and Leichtman 2009, 243) Mustarshidin, (Diouf and Leichtman 2009, 513) and Jamaat Ibadu Rahman in Senegal. The fact that they continue their discriminatory activities against Shi'ism by taking the Sunni section on their side prevents Iran from using the method of Shi'ism in the axis of its expansion strategy. This could pose a great threat to Iran in the future. Thus, Iran has been in favor of developing high-level relations with the Senegalese government. Accordingly, while receiving the credentials of the new Senegalese ambassador to Tehran, former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani emphasized his readiness to develop relations between the two countries and called for cooperation in the scientific, cultural, technological and academic fields as well as in the field of Islamic sciences. During the meeting, Rouhani described Senegal as a "gateway" for Iran's links with Africa, which was taken as a green light for the development of bilateral relations (Irangov.ir, 2021).

Afterwards Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri, who is in Dakar, the capital of Senegal, to discuss the issues of concern to the Muslim world due to the Gaza issue, met with the President of the National Assembly of the country in 2023. "The attempt to organize the regular meeting of the African Peace and Security Forum is a demonstration of Senegal's endeavors to re-establish Africa's identity and strengthen the independence of all African countries," the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister said, pointing to the deep-rooted ties between the two countries and Iran's capacities in various fields and wishing the continuation of the parliamentary relations between the two sides (Mfa.ir 2023). Bagheri also emphasized the need to develop cooperation among the parliaments of other Muslim countries, which could also be useful in stopping the inhumane actions of the Zionist regime in Gaza (Mfa.ir 2023).

Ghana

After the Islamic revolution, one of the states that Iran wanted to enlarge Islamic propaganda was Ghana, another state in North Africa. Ghana is a country with a population of almost 20 million, where 17.6% of this population is Muslim, especially among Muslims (Index Mundi 2021) where the Sunni section is dominant, but there are also Shiites in the north of the country. In addition to this, Christians and people belonging to other religions also live there. For this reason, this country is a democratic country where people from different religions live together and have a Presidential system. In this context, it is normal to celebrate the holidays of different religions in Ghana. In addition to religious festivals such as Christmas, Boxing Day, and Easter, two new holidays have also been organized since 1995 under the auspices of the national Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu: Eid-al-Adha and Eid-al-Fitr. These two new holidays were also accepted as official days like other festivals (Prempeh 2015). As it can be understood from what has been said above, Islam is one of the common religions in this country, and sectarian divisions exist here as well. Parallel to this, the following question comes to mind: Why did the enlargement of Shi'ism occur in Ghana, which has a Shiite population of almost one million?

Undoubtedly, the Islamic Revolution in 1979, as in other African countries, and the migration of Lebanese Shiites to Ghana in 1980 played a major role in this. Namely, the fact that the Lebanese Shiites, who made their own trade, opened a Shiite school here and commenced to expand Shi'ism throughout Ghana (Shia Africa 2025) This nuance did not escape the attention of Iran and caused Iran's to support them since the end of the 20th century. On this axis, Iran first gained the favor of the internal powers and resorted to divergent ways (education, social, humanitarian, media activities, and proposed projects) to make Shi'ism the dominant ideology in Ghana.

In the axis of educational activities, the main purpose of Iran has been to institutionalize Shiite propaganda in Ghana. For this, the Ahl al-Bait Foundation was first established in Ghana. The primary aim of this foundation was the establishment of the Islamic University of Ghana, which operated as a continuation of the Institute of Islamic Literature, which started its activities in 1986 with 15 students who took the course called Islamic Theology (Mohammed 2017, 11). And, as a result, the beginning of the transformation of this institute into a university was started in 2000, and after all accreditation procedures were accomplished in 2001, it turned into a full-fledged university. The motto of this university is knowledge, belief, and service and while in 2000 there were 35 students, this number increased

to 1800 in 2011. Among the students, the majority are Sunni Muslims. At the same time, a private school named Lady Fatima Girls, which is funded by this university and recognized by the Ghana Education Service, has been established in Ghana. The major mission of this school is to train both Muslim and non-Muslim girls as professional women with the highest levels of education and to provide opportunities for the academic and professional development of poor women in rural communities (School and College Listing 2025).

The second foundation built by Iran in Ghana in the field of education is the Imam Hussein Foundation. This foundation was set on the proposal of the Iranian Embassy and Shiite Ghanaians at the international seminars held on behalf of the Islamic Union in the Kumasi Central Mosque in 1988-1989 (Bompani and Frahm-Arp 2010, 114). At the same time, the al-Kawthar Foundation was created, both foundations are active in the realization of educational and media activities of Iran in Ghana. With their contribution, there are Al-Kawthar and Pen magazines published in English. In addition, the media activities of the Shiites include the programs broadcast on the NET 2 channel every Friday, as well as the creation of websites. Two centers for sewing training, financed directly by the Iranian Embassy within the framework of social and humanitarian aid activities, operate in Kokoda, and Temali, while dispensaries operate in Kwami, Mamobi, and other towns.

On the axis of the proposed projects, Iran-Ghana relations should be reviewed in the aspect of recent times. Because the main goal of new initiatives in recent years is to expand the vision of spreading Shi'ism throughout Ghana. In this regard, bilateral meetings and agreements reached a level of great importance. Parallel to this, a memorandum of understanding of agriculture, tourism, sports, and education was signed between Iran and Ghana in 2013 (Modern Ghana 2013). New arrangements in the field of education were proposed at this time and expressed the idea of opening a Persian language department at the University of Ghana.

Simultaneously, Iran's Ambassador to Ghana, Nosratollah Maleki, made a speech for the Daily Graphic Staff in 2017. He talked about Iran's activities in Ghana and emphasized the quality of the service provided in the context of social and humanitarian aid projects. Expressing the advantages of the Iranian clinic here in the field of health, he underlined that both the economic and political relations between the two countries depend on deep roots (Graphic Online 2017). Such initiatives have continued at the level of high-level representatives, with Iran's former Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian expressing his hope to deepen cordial relations with Ghana in all areas of mutual interest. The 7th Joint Cooperation Commission meeting

was held in Tehran in 2022 with Ghanaian Minister of Culture, Arts and Tourism Mohammad Awal Ibrahim. Amir Abdollahian said that the meeting revealed Iran's pragmatic approach to developing relations and pointed out that a delegation should be sent to Ghana to draw a road map for the relations between the two countries (Tehran Times 2022). As these developments have accelerated, bilateral relations have gained momentum and even the 45th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of Iran was celebrated at the Embassy in Accra in 2024 (Iran Press 2024). All these are accepted as an indication of the current situation between Iran and Ghana which turned into a positive and constructive direction.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Iran's engagement with Africa, particularly after the Islamic Revolution, is not merely a reflection of cultural affinity or humanitarian concern, but rather a deliberate and ideologically driven soft power strategy. By instrumentalizing Shiism as a tool of religious diplomacy, Iran seeks to construct an anti-imperialist solidarity, counterbalance Western and regional rivals such as the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, and establish long-term political influence on the continent. On this axis, Iran wants to embody its presence in different parts of the African continent. As Iran seeks to implement its expansion strategy, especially in Sunni-populated regions of Africa, it plans to pave the way for the spread of Shiism there. This is perceived as the greatest threat to the shield of Sunni states that is planned to be created by Saudi Arabia against Iran.

Accordingly, it supports many opposition groups in Africa and tries to attract them to its side. As detailed in other chapters, the most obvious example of this is the incident in Nigeria. The Islamic Movement Party of Nigeria, which calls for the Islamization of public life, has received support from Iran and has been responsible for the spread of jihadist rhetoric, especially in Northern Nigeria. On the other hand, under the name of religion and educational activities, Iran is also trying to strengthen its hand in some African countries in terms of Islam. The most concrete indicator of this has been Senegal. There are two main reasons behind the choice of this country. The first is that the volatile relations between the two countries have been badly damaged after the Casamance operation, and the second is that Senegal has a majority of Sunni Muslims. The Islamic Institute played an important role in this context and its activities led to the construction of mosques and madrasas across the country, which served to promote the adoption of Shiism. The main purpose of this was to create an environment where

Sunni and Shia populations could be assimilated religiously by being in the same environment. At the same time, Ghana was another African country where Iran tried to institutionalize Shiism under the name of educational propaganda. Especially in Ghana, which is known to have the least Shiite population and needs support, Iran has tried to create an opportunity for the institutionalization of religion-based education by helping to open schools providing primary, secondary and higher education. It can be concluded that the educational activities initiated by Iran in Ghana serve Islamic propaganda in the context of Shiism.

However, the Shi'ism method used by Iran in the axis of this expansion strategy has social, political, and religious effects. In fact, Iran wants to take advantage of all these effects, yet it may have consequences that can affect states in the international arena and even bring them to the brink of war. Because as we know, Shi'ism and Sunnism are two sects of Islam and are generally based on Islamic values. But there are issues that are not mutually accepted among their adherents. This manifests itself in the emergence of adverse reactions and effects in social, political, and religious fields. In social terms, the propaganda of Shi'ism not only causes Muslims to be divided but also causes great powers to discriminate against Muslims. Politically, since it uses religion as a political tool, it is perceived by other states to interfere in their internal affairs. From a religious point of view, Islamic values can be thrown into the background, and Islam can be misinterpreted in the world. For this reason, Iran should halt using a provocative method such as religion as a legitimate political tool in the implementation of the strategy of expansion in Africa to realize its foreign political interests.

References

- Abdullah, M. S. 2016. "Iranian presence in Africa: Motives and objectives". *Rasanah*, October 5. <https://rasanah-iiis.org/english/centre-for-researches-and-studies/iranian-presence-in-africa-motives-and-objectives/>.
- African Natural Resources Center. 2016. *Catalyzing growth and development through effective natural resources management*. https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/anrc/AfDB_ANRC_BROCHURE_en.pdf.
- African Studies Centre Leiden. 2016. *Islam in Nigeria*. <http://www.ascleiden.nl/content/webdossiers/islam-nigeria>.
- AhlulBeyt News Agency. 2016. "Iranian cultural center, Nigerian TV to hold

- Quran competition". *AhlulBeyt News Agency*, August 29. <http://en.abna24.com/service/africa/archive/2016/08/29/775339/story.html>.
- Aljazeera. 2011. "Senegal severs ties with Iran". *Aljazeera*, February 23. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2011/2/23/senegal-severs-ties-with-iran>.
- AlSaied, N. 2021. "Sectarianism and ideology: The cases of Iran and Saudi Arabia". *MEI@75*, August 27. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/sectarianism-and-ideology-cases-iran-and-saudi-arabia>.
- Arghavani Pirsalami, F. 2013. "Third Wordism and Ahmadinejad's Foreign Policy". *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs* 4 (2): 81-109.
- Asgar Khani, A. M., and F. Arghavani Pirsalami. 2011. "Siyasat-e ta'amol-e sazandeh va elzam-e tose'e-ye ravabet-e eqtesadi-ye Iran va Afrika [Constructive interaction policy and the necessity of developing Iran-Africa economic relations]". *Ravabet-e Khareji (Foreign Relations Journal)* 10: 133-160.
- Awad, Z. 2019. "Iran in Deir ez-Zor: Strategy, Expansion, and Opportunities". *The European University Institute Research Project Report* 13.
- Bazoobandi, S. and H. Talebian. 2023. "The Evolvement of Iran-Israel's Rivalry in the Red Sea and Eastern Africa". *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 17 (4): 341-355.
- Bompani, B. and M. Frahm-Arp. 2010. *Development and Politics from below: Exploring Religious Spaces in the African State*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bouvier, E. 2024. "La présence croissante de l'Iran en Afrique". *Les clés du Moyen-Orient*, June 26. <https://www.lesclesdumoyenorient.com/La-presence-croissante-de-l-Iran-en-Afrique.html#nb33>.
- Calabrese, J. 2020. "The Bab el-Mandeb Strait: Regional and great power rivalries on the shores of the Red Sea". *M@75*, January, 29. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/bab-el-mandeb-strait-regional-and-great-power-rivalries-shores-red-sea>.
- Camara, J. B. 2021. "La Religion, Nouvel Outil du Néocolonialisme en Afrique?". *Recherches Internationales* 121: 163-183.
- Chimarizeni, F. 2017. "Iran-Africa Relations: Opportunities and Prospects for Iran". *Brazilian Journal of African Studies* 2 (3): 38-52.
- Clawson, P., ed. 1994. *Iran's Strategic Intentions and Capabilities*. McNair Paper Institute for National Strategic Studies National Defense University.
- Daressalam. 2024. "Piam man bah jacpehan jadid". *Daressalam*, July 12. <https://daressalam.mfa.ir/files/tanzania/newsattachment/2024071511064916645782631.pdf>.

- Demir, H. 2018. "How Iran is Investing in Shi'ism in the Name of Soft Power". *Politics Today*, December 6. <https://politicstoday.org/how-iran-is-investing-in-shiism-in-the-name-of-soft-power/>.
- Diouf, M. and M.A. Leichtman. 2009. *New Perspectives on Islam in Senegal: Conversion, Migration, Wealth, Power, and Femininity*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2009.
- Elijah, N. M. Et al. 2021. "The Shia Sect Question and the Prospect of Nigeria-Iran Bilateral Relations". *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Civic and Political Studies* 16 (2): 1-20.
- Etemad Online. 2025. *Aref: Afrigha dar naghshah-ye rahbordi-ye Iran jaygah-e vizheh darad [Africa has a special place in Iran's strategic roadmap]*. <https://www.etemadonline.com/>.
- Fakude, T. 2016. "The Impact of the South Africa-Iran Relations on the African Union". *Report of Aljazeera Center for Studies*:1-8.
- Foucher, V. 2018. "The Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance: The Illusion of Separatism in Senegal?". In *Secessionism in African Politics: Aspiration, Grievance, Performance, Disenchantment*, edited by L. de Vries et al. Palgrave Macmillan Chem.
- Graphic Online. 2017. "Iran to deepen diplomatic relations with Ghana-Dr. Maleki". *Graphic Online*, January 28. <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/iran-to-deepen-diplomatic-relations-with-ghana-dr-maleki.html>.
- Index Mundi. 2021. "Ghana religions". *Index Mundi*, September 18. <https://www.indexmundi.com/ghana/religions.html>.
- Iran Press. 2024. "Iran embassy in Ghana celebrates victory anniv. of Islamic Revolution". *Iran Press*, February 10. <https://iranpress.com/iran-embassy-in-ghana-celebrates>.
- Irangov.ir. 2021. "Senegal can serve as 'Gateway' for Iran's ties with Africa: President". *Irangov.ir*, February 24. <https://irangov.ir/detail/358997>.
- ISNA. 2017. "Deepening ties with African countries a key principle in Iran's foreign policy". *Iranian Student News Agency*, October 10. <http://en.isna.ir/news/96071910703/Deepening-ties-with-African-countries-a-key-principle-in-Iran-s>.
- Karami, S. 2024. "Kārkard-e Amniyat-e Hūšmand dar Tasvīrsāzi-ye Zehnī-ye Gardeshgarān-e Āfrīqāyī az Īrān". *Do-Faslnameh-ye Elmi-Takhassosi-ye Ravabet-e Asia-Africa, (Journal of Asia-Africa Relations)*, 1(1). https://aarmodares.ac.ir/article_6102_7bec7e63a493e2d61891b1e4051ef75a.pdf

- Karaoğlu, O. 2023. "Dini Diplomasi ve Şiileştirme Bağlamında İran'ın Afrika'daki Faaliyetleri: Fas, Tunus, Cezayir Örneği". *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi* 9 (2): 135-166.
- Karr et al. 2024. "Africa file: Iran pursues economic and military influence". *Institute for the Study of War*, May 2. <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/africa-file-may-2-2024-iran-pursues-economic-and-military-influence>.
- Kaya, S. and Şartepe, Z. 2016. "Contentious Politics in Iran: Factions, Foreign Policy and the Nuclear Deal". *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 14(3): 1-12.
- Keynoush, B. 2021. Revolutionary Iran's Africa policy. *Special Report*.
- Kohnert, D. 2024. "Expanding horizons: Iran's strategic engagements in Sub-Saharan Africa-insights from South Africa, Nigeria, and Tanzania". *Ssrn.com*, August 06. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4917860.
- Lefebvre, J. A. 2019. "Iran's Scramble for Sub-Saharan Africa". *Insight Turkey* 21 (1): 133-150.
- Leichtman, M. A. 2009. "Revolution, Modernity and (Trans) National Shii Islam: Rethinking Religious Conversion in Senegal". *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39 (3): 319-351.
- Lewis, P. M. 2020. "Islam, Protest, and Conflict in Nigeria". *Africa Notes* 10: 1-10.
- Lob, E. 2016. "The Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy and Construction Jihad's Developmental Activities in Sub-Saharan Africa". *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48 (2): 313-338.
- Lob, E. and H. Yilmazkuday. 2025. "A Political Economy Analysis of Changes and Continuities in Iran-Africa Trade Relations: A Case of South-South Dependency?". *Review of Social Economy* 83 (1): 106-143.
- Maosim.ru. 2018. "K voprosu o razlichii trokh mirov". *Maosim.ru*, June 24. <http://maoism.ru/7912>.
- Mari, N. 2017. "Iran in the Face of the International Scramble for Africa". *Journal for Iranian Studies* 2: 56-69.
- McAnenny, A. 2014. "A tutorial overview of Iran's strategic influence in Africa". *Center for Security Policy*. <http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Iran-in-Africa.pdf>.
- Mehr News Agency. "TV channel for Africa". *Mehr News Agency*, October 3. <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/128290/Iran-to-launch-1st-TV-channel-for-Africa>.

- Mfa.ir. 2023. "Iranian deputy FM meets Senegal parliament speaker on Gaza elevation of ties". *Mfa.ir*, November 29. <https://en.mfa.ir/portal/newsview/735050/Iranian-deputy-FM-meets-Senegal-parliament-speaker-on-Gaza-elevation-of-ties>.
- Middle East Monitor. 2016. "Iran's foreign minister begins West Africa tour". *Middle East Monitor*, July 25. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20160725-irans-foreign-minister-begins-west-africa-tour/>.
- Ministry of Education. 2016. "Iran offers Persian language courses in Senegal". *Ministry of Education*, June 18. <http://en.oerp.ir/content/iran-offers-persian-language-courses-senegal>.
- Modern Ghana. 2013. "Ghana, Iran to deepen ties in education, agriculture, tourism, sports". *Modern Ghana*, April 18. <https://www.modernghana.com/news/459171/1/ghana-iran-to-deepen-ties-in-education-agric-touri.html>.
- Mohammed, U. A. 2017. "Review of Economic Relations between Iran and Ghana". *IRAM*: 4-13.
- Movahed, M. 2025. "The future position of Africa in the global economy and Iran-Africa relations in the new era". *Ipis.ir*, March 9. <https://www.ipis.ir/en/subjectview/764212>.
- Muhammed, Ms.s and M.M. Abdullahi. 2019. "The Spread of Shia and Its Activities in Nigeria". *Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 4 (1): 28-41.
- Naeni, A. 2021. "Iran and Africa: Why Tehran will boost its ties with the continent under the Raisi administration". *Middle East Institute*, August 11. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/iran-and-africa-why-tehran-will-boost-its-ties-continent-under-raisi-administration>.
- Naeni, A. 2023. "Iran's renewed Africa policy: Raisi's ambition and the perception of western decline". *Mei.edu*, July 31. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-renewed-africa-policy-raisis-ambition-and-perception-western-decline>.
- Njoku, T. C.M. 1995. "Christians and Muslims in Nigeria". *Vincentiana* 39 (3).
- OIC/SUM. 2013. "Islamic Summit Conference, Cairo final communiqué of the twelfth session of the Islamic summit conference". *OIC/SUM*, February. <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=19&refID=7>.
- Onapajo, H. 2017. "State Repression and Religious Conflict: The Perils of the State Clampdown on the Shi'a Minority in Nigeria". *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 37 (1): 80-93.
- Onderco, M. 2016. "A Battle of Principles: South Africa's Relations with Iran".

Commonwealth & Comparative Politics 54 (2): 252-267.

- Prempeh, C. 2015. "Secularism, Islam and Ghana: The views of a student of religions". *Modern Ghana*, March 14. <https://www.modernghana.com/news/604631/secularism-islam-and-ghana-the-views-of-a-student-of-relig.html>.
- Rigiderakhshan, M. 2022. "İran'ın Afrika Ülkeleri ile İlişkileri: Dinî, Kültürel ve Eğitim Faaliyetleri (Pehlevi Döneminden İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'ne)". *UluslararasıAfrika Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2 (2): 39-50.
- Rodney, W. 2011. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Black Classic Press.
- Rubin, M. 2008. "Iran's global ambition. critical threats". *Critical Threats*, March 1. <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/irans-global-ambition>.
- Sadeghi, S. M. M. and R. Hajimineh. 2019. "The Role of Iran's "Soft Power" in Confronting Iranophobia". *MGIMO Review of International Relations* 12 (4): 216-238.
- School and College Listing. 2025. *Lady Fatimah girls senior high school*. <https://www.schoolandcollegelistings.com/GH/Accra/583234981829281/Lady-Fatimah-Girls-Senior-High-School>.
- Schoonover, B. B. 2013. "A glimpse at Nigeria's ongoing Islamic terrorist challenges". *American Diplomacy*, October. <https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2013/10/a-glimpse-at-nigerias-ongoing-islamic-terrorist-challenges/>.
- Şeker, C. T. 2017. "İran'ın Afrika Politikası ve Karşılaşılan Zorluklar: Ahmedinejad Dönemi, 2005-2013". *İran Çalışmaları Dergisi* 1 (1): 84-116.
- Séne, M. F. 2016. "Education for Girls and (Re)Configured Gender Relations. Arab-Islamic Education in Senegal". *Afrique Contemporaine* 257 (1): 41-55.
- Shahvar, S. 2020. "Iran's Global Reach: The Islamic Republic of Iran's Policy, Involvement, and Activity in Africa". *Digest of Middle East Studies* 29 (1): 53-75.
- Shia Africa. 2025. *Shia Muslims in Ghana*. <http://shiafrica-en.blogfa.com/post/33>.
- Slavin, B. 2024. "Aghaz-e talash-ha baraye taghir-e negah-ha: Pezeshkian, ra'is jomhouri ke donbal-e diplomasi-ye jadid ba Gharb ast [The beginning of efforts to change perspectives: Pezeshkian, the president seeking a new diplomacy with the West]". *Irdiplomacy*, October 6. <http://www>.

- irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/2028491.
- Sofjan, D. 2023. "Contending Discourses on Human Rights and Dignity in the Post-World War II Era". *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 21 (4): 96-106.
- Soonest, N. 2019. "El-Zakzaky: Politics, religion and the persecution of shiites in Nigeria". *The Elephant*, March 21. <https://www.theelephant.info/analysis/2019/03/21/el-zakzaky-politics-religion-and-the-persecution-of-shiites-in-nigeria/>.
- Stratfor.com. 2012. "Eastern Africa: A battleground for Israel and Iran". *Stratfor.com*, October 29. <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/eastern-africa-battleground-israel-and-iran>.
- Szrom, C. 2010. "Ahmadinejad in West Africa". *Aei.org*, August 3. <https://www.aei.org/articles/ahmadinejad-in-west-africa/>.
- Tasnimnews. 2017. "Iran ready to help Tanzania in the energy industry". *Tasnimnews*, October 28. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2017/10/28/1558208/iran-ready-to-help-tanzania-in-energy-industry>.
- Tehran Times. 2022. "Iran, Ghana ready to deepen cooperation in copious areas". *Tehran Times*, August 18. <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/472758/Iran-Ghana-ready-to-deepen-cooperation-in-copious-areas>.
- Thurston, A. 2017. "Shiism and anti-shiism in Nigeria". *The Maydan*, May 15. <https://www.themaydan.com/2017/05/shiism-anti-shiism-nigeria/>.
- Warner, J. 2011. "Iran's troubled foray into Africa". *Global Public Square*, October 12. <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2011/10/12/irans-troubled-foray-into-africa/>.
- Yaymout, K. 2016. "Shiism: Iranian cover for community division in West Africa". *Asharq Al Awsat*, November 15. <https://eng-archive.aawsat.com/khalid-yaymout/features/shiism-iranian-cover-community-division-west-africa>.

ABSTRACT

The study aims to analyze Iran's outreach strategy, which is tried to be confined within its own borders, through the conventional tools that it believes to be effective, and especially to verify the problematic of whether political Islam is an influential tool in the region in question. In this context, it analyzes Iran's Africa policy through the theory of underdevelopment and the Third World by combining historical, religious, economic and strategic perspectives, utilizes the case study method and focuses on Senegal, Nigeria and Ghana. The main findings of the article are that Africa, although decolonized, is still fragile and vulnerable to intervention; as in other regions, religion is the soft underbelly of the people here, and Iran is one of the states that is trying to fill the void in the region in the current geopolitical conditions. And Iran invests particularly in education and language policies in the cultural sphere, while in the religious realm, it seeks to establish an ideological sphere of influence by promoting the discourse of the "axis of resistance" through the Shiite sect. This strategy is employed not only at the regional level but also on a global scale to legitimize its anti-Western rhetoric and to mitigate the effects of international sanctions. At the same time there has been a lack of previous studies focusing solely on three countries within the scope of the theory and methodology used in the study, it is thought that the article will fill the gap in literature in terms of reaching more objective information by using sources from different languages.

KEYWORDS

Geopolitics; Third World; Soft Power; Expansion Strategy

Received on May 17, 2025

Accepted on June 21, 2026

THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF IRAN

Rasoul Afzali¹

Sara Abbasi²

Sadaf Zhalehbaghi³

Introduction

The political geography and geopolitics of Iran are a central tenet in appreciating the political and social profile of the country. Several factors affecting the geography of Iran are inherently historical. Cases of such historical factors include: the cause of existence of the country, the territorial span of the Iranian plateau, the demographic composition, nationalism, geographical location, culture and national and religious subcultures, and even the form of government. The current territorial span of Iran, albeit rather diminutive as opposed to its former status, has consistently been the core territory of the country throughout history. In addition to territory, other underlying factors of political geography, counting on ethnic diversity, and form and type of government, continue to maintain the ancient heritage of the country. The ethnic and racial diversity of the modern (21st century) Iranian population are to a large extent a replica of the premodern Iranian citizen. The form of government also follows suit in that it still takes the form of central authoritarianism. Such cases highlight the salience of historical factors in the formation of political geography in Iran.

Alternative factors affecting the political geography of Iran are structural components originating in the modern era such as energy sources, geographical location, geopolitical and geostrategic elements, modern governments, etc. Energy resources have played a major role in the centralization of the political system, particularly post establishment of the modern government in 1925, when they had emerged as the prime source of

¹ Corresponding author. University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: rafzali@ut.ac.ir. ORCID: 0000-0002-8863-044X.

² University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: abbasi.sara@ut.ac.ir.

³ University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: Sadaf.Zhalehbaghi@ut.ac.ir.

income for the country. Even now energy resources continue to be the prime motivator behind the amalgamation of the political system. Relying on revenues from the petroleum industry, the government has denied decentralization and gone so far as to resist infirm local governments. The notion of geographical superiority of Iran is also confirmed by modern geopolitical theories put forth by figures such as Mackinder, Spykman, and Cohen. The geopolitics of Iran is also entirely under the influence of modern structural factors. During both the Pahlavi sovereignty and under the governance of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the country has maintained its geopolitical centrality in the Middle East by virtue of said structural factors. The Pahlavi dynasty would centralize energy resources and political alliances with the West, whereas the Islamic Republic clings to modern religious ideologies, both of which succeeded in maintaining the role of Iran as the prime instigator of the geopolitical network of the Middle East.

A scrutinization of the political geography of Iran without any regards to these two factors would be, at best, an incomplete endeavor. With this backdrop, the present chapter seeks to employ such factors as a means to provide a comprehensive definition of political geography and geopolitics of Iran.

Political-social history

Since at least the reign of the Achaemenids in the sixth century B.C., the country or its government has been formally recognized as Iran. The term Iran was first chanced upon in the ancient pre-Achaemenid texts, meaning *Land of the Arians* (Mojtahedzadeh 2013). The cause of existence of highly coherent and powerful empires throughout Iran since 708 B.C. – the Median empires being the original instances of such empires – is most probably attributable to the territorial span of the Arians. Even in the later years when the political-geographical unit of empire was replaced by the state, the factor of *sarzamin*, literally translated as mainland, remained the core cause of the existence of Iran; albeit, other factors were progressively introduced through the course of time.

One of the main pillars of governance in Iranian empires has always been the political organization of space, which incidentally found its way to other empires as well, including the Roman Empire (Pishgahifard and Sonboli 2009). Nevertheless, it is yet a matter of controversy as to whether the type of governments in Iranian empires were federal (in its current sense) or not (Petrushevsky 1987; Noamani 1979; Ashraf 1980; Katoozian 1998; Vali 1993;

Lambton 1969). The opposition in this regard, however, has not disregarded the existence of a semi-federal government, wherein different states would function under the supervision of a central government. States in Iranian empires were often recognized as Satraps, which according to Herodotus, is a form of autonomous state (Jamali et al. 2013). The division of power in each Satrap would be stratified among two prime authorities: *xšaθrapāwn*, the present-day governor or secretary, responsible for supervision over other *xšaθrapāwns*, so as to prevent the amalgamation of power in the hands of a single individual. Similar to present federalist systems, the Satraps were somewhat independent in handling religious, cultural, lingual, and even economic affairs and were only contingent upon the central government in matters relating to taxes, recruitment of soldiers, procurement of military equipment, and other matters of security. The satrap system in Iranian empires gradually evolved into a more complete form until the invasion of the country by Arab Muslims, which revolutionized the social-political system. The salience of the satrap system reached the extent that new territories were formed under the governance of satraps during the Sasanian empire (the last Iranian empire before the Islamization of Iran), with each satrap further divided into a province, Rostaq (rural districts), and Tasuj (a small administrative subdivision in Iran).

Following the Arabian conquests and the Islamization of Iran in 651 D.C., the social-political government of the country was remodeled. The once dominant federal government put in place by the Sasanian Empire had declined and Iran had fallen under the subjugation of the Arabian empire, whose capital was in Baghdad. Despite the fact that various stratified political states of Iran remained subjects to the central empire, political and social ceremonies induced by the Arabian empire were entirely different than those of the previous Iranian empires. From a social perspective, the prior feudal order, which in consonance with the opinion of most historians and experts was comparable to Western feudalism, had become obscure and substituted by the system of Iqta rooted in Islamic culture (Anderson 1974; Mann 1988; Lambton 1976, 1968, 1988). This system was an equivalent to Western feudalism and particularly focused on the public ownership of lands in the Arabian empire and the Islamic world, as opposed to the private ownership in roman feudalism. Iqta referred to large divisions of land, which the Baghdadian caliphate, as the successor and delegate of divine providence on earth, would assign as its own territorial units, receiving annual taxes and ransoms while stripping the inhabitants of the lands of virtually any form of freedom and independence. The Iqta system of order in Iran entailed further subjugation of independent states by the central government (Loscaya et al.

1975; Ashraf 1974; Fray 1984). The political organization of space during this period was also influenced by the Iqta system, which in turn was accompanied by changes in social establishments and relations. The satraps, or rather autonomous states, gradually lost their independence in handling local affairs, while the remainder of states had no right of ownership of their lands. The *xšāθrapāwns* (the state governors) had solely become representatives of the central government in charge of collecting taxes and ransoms.

The rise of the Safavid dynasty in 1501 liberated the country from Arabian sovereignty, but failed to restore the political-social system prior to the Islamization of Iran. Conversely, the country was reestablished in the form of a new Shia-centered government, which is itself considered an existential cause for a newfangled Iran with new territorial borders. The Iqta system remained the determinant factor behind social and political formalities and the governing system had further delved into the realm of celestial governance. Despite its egress from the Arabian dominion and its somewhat modern features—as stated by certain experts (Savory 2008; Heintz 1967)—the country had, under the influence of the Shia political jurisprudence, become the vanguard for the establishment of an Islamic Ommah rather than a modern government. The political organization of space in Iran during the reign of Shia jurisprudence was not unlike the previous governance of the Arabs, with the exception that political centralization had intensified.

The advent of the Qajar dynasty in 1794 put an end to the premodern political-social system in Iran, transpiring a transition from premodern to modern, a period primarily characterized by associations with Western worlds and undertones of changes in the political governance and organization of space for later periods.

The rise to power of Reza Shah in 1925 is recognized as the onset of modernism in Iran. Throughout the modern era—from the rise of the Pahlavi Dynasty to its fall, followed by the Islamic Revolution—Iran has undergone fundamental changes in terms of its political-social system as well as the political organization of space. As maintained by the majority of connoisseurs, these changes were the subsequent outcomes of relations with the west and the penetration and influence of Western political thought over the Iranian population (Halliday 1979; Abrahamian 1983). Perhaps the most significant political-social change of the modern era was the emergence of a modern territorial government substantiated at the hands of Reza Shah by dint of political centralization, ethnic integration, establishment of a modern army, administrative bureaucracy, and a modern legal rights system. The appearance of a modern government in Iran entailed many other episodes counting on the abolishment of the *Molokottavaayefi* system (Semi-Feudal),

the consolidation of previously transitional territorial borders of the country, the substitution of industrial capitalist production for agricultural production, and the construction of major road networks, all of which enabled the government total control over its territorial span. This was then followed by the replacement of the traditional legal system (Islamic) by more modern arrangements for legal systems in conjunction with the advent of modern bureaucracy, which facilitated administration, and the establishment of a modern education system and rapid escalations in public literacy.

The modern government propounded by Reza Shah engendered a variety of critical changes to the political organization of space (Naghibzadeh 2000). Pursuant to modern administrative divisions, Iran was first stratified into 10 provinces, with subsequent divisions including townships, cities, counties, rural districts, villages, and settlements. Pertinent to such divisions were regulatory bodies including provincial governments, governates, municipality, precepts, Dehdari (sheriffdom), which formed the prime political-administrative units of the country responsible for managing administrative affairs in a modern and unitary fashion, all under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior. The corresponding legislations for administrative divisions as well as municipal and land ownership laws were also codified and approved during this period. The formation of a modern government by Reza Shah, which according to theories set forth by Barrington Moore had been implemented with total authoritarianism (as opposed to democratic approaches undertaken in European countries) (Moore 1993), embedded the notion of political centralization as a major principle in the management and monitoring of the nation's territories.

The government of the second monarch of the House of Pahlavi (Mohammad Reza Shah) was to some extent a reconstruction of a modern absolutist government. Unlike his predecessor and father (Reza Shah), Mohammad Reza Shah, who was seen as a more modern individual educated in the West, sought to separate himself from physical violence in political centralization, abstaining from suppression of ethnicities and forceful urbanization of tribes and focusing on the institutionalization and modernization of political centralization in the administrative divisions of the country. Alterations in the laws of administrative division, modernization of the bureaucratic system, and development of administrative infrastructures, particularly those relating to road networks and military affairs, led to a modernized political centralization of Iran. The most notable attempt by Mohammad Reza Shah in the modernization of administrative divisions was the land reform program, implemented at the behest of the American government, aiming to disarm the feudal regimes, which were considered the

main obstacle to a modernized Iran (Foran 2019).

Overall, the both Pahlavi administrations played a major role in revolutionizing the political organization of the space in Iran. Reza Shah proceeded to establish a modern and politically unitary government, while Mohammad Reza Shah institutionalized and modernized this political centralization. This modernization of the political organization of space was further intensified by the subsequent 1979 revolution, which in effect was opposed to extreme modernization. From the revolution onwards, with the exception of the first decade from 1978-1989, which was highly influenced by the post-revolutionary idea of *Ommahism* (the governance of collective community of Islamic people) against modernism, the Islamic Republic of Iran succeeded in only further enhancing the notion of centralization in a more modern and institutionalized manner. Exclusive of the Shia political jurisprudence — considered the main ideology underlying the Islamic Republic of Iran and a motivator of political centralization — other factors were also effective in this transition towards increased centralization. Energy resources, particularly those relating to petroleum, were pivotal in the intensification of political centralization in Iran from the kingship of the second Pahlavi monarch onwards. Petroleum provided a major source of income for the country, alleviating it from civilian taxes, subjugating the population, and preventing the formation of local governments. Among other factors encouraging political centralization and prioritization of matters of security include threats, whether implicit or explicit, from transboundary ethnic trails in neighboring countries, strategic position of Iran as the communicational cross-way between the Eastern and Western worlds, and its sensitive and vulnerable situation.

Ethnic diversity

From a demographic standpoint, the spatial structure of Iran is comprised of two continual regions; the central region and the peripheral area. The peripheral regions, unlike the dense and homogenous central regions, are highly disconnected and encompass various ethnic, lingual, and religious groups scattered among numerous geomorphological and topographic units. From the perspective of geomorphology, the marginal regions of Iran consist of mountain ranges (Alborz and Zagros) and aqueous zones (Caspian Sea, Persian Gulf, and Gulf of Oman), as well as several rivers, which alone are considered among historical factors ensuing the infeasibility of a central government for controlling the diverse body of ethnic and racial groups residing in these regions.

Respectively, ethnic, lingual, and religious groups have the highest contribution in the disconnectedness of the population of Iran. The country is inclusive of 5 ethnicities counting on Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, Baloch, and Turkmen. The major demographic fraction of the country are Persians, following which are Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, Baloch, and Turkmen. The ethnic groups in Iran are primarily characterized by their transboundary trails in neighboring countries, which has always tormented the government.

Turks

The Turkish inhabitants of Iran form the largest ethnic minority and primarily reside in Ardabil, Eastern and Western Azerbaijan, and Zanjan. Nevertheless, many Turkish citizens are residents of Tehran, Hamedan, Qazvin, North Khorasan, Markazi, Fars, and Gilan provinces. The Turkish folk people are extreme nationalists and consider themselves patriots of the country, which as history narrates, is a rather genuine perception, particularly evident in their sense of belonging to the national and religious code put forth by the constitutional revolution or throughout the Iran-Iraq war. Nonetheless, there have been cases of divergence among the Turkish ethnicities such as instances in the independence movement of the Azerbaijani Democratic Party in 1945, which was primarily under the influence of the soviet union, or the operation of the Muslim People Republic Party in the early years following the Islamic Revolution (Abedi Ardakani 2010).

Kurds

The Kurdish folks are native to the provinces of Western Azerbaijan, Kermanshah, Hamedan, Kurdistan, and Northern Khorasan and are more scarce compared to the Turkish ethnic group. The urging factors behind the divergence of Kurds were broader than the Turks and include the following: concentration of the Kurdish population within a small and specific region; inferior economic, hygienic, and educational facilities; triangular geographical span located between three countries of Iraq, Turkey, and Syria and the accompanied transboundary ethnicities, political seclusion and absence of social-political talents of Kurdish ethnicity in administrative affairs; religious considerations (Sunni religion); and current regional and international changes in Iraqi Kurdistan. Kurdish divergent movements were rather frequent throughout the political history of Iran, the most notable of which include the Simko Shikak Revolt led by Ismail Agha Simitquh in 1918,

the establishment of the Kurdish Resurgence Society (komola) in 1941, which was changed to the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan under the mandate of soviet authorities, the Independence of Kurdistan movement act and the establishment of Mahabad Republic in 1945, attempts by Kurdish civilians led by Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou for the pluralism of power in Iran in 1979, and the 8-Article Declaration of the Kurdish Opposition for the Independence of Kurdistan after the Islamic Revolution (Van Bruinessen 2000).

Arabs

The Arabian minority in Iran are primarily inhabitants of the Khuzestan Province and the cities of Khorramshahr, Abadan, Shadgan, Mahshahr, Ahvaz, Hoveyzeh, Susangerd, Bostan, Shooshtar, and Southern Dezful. Arabian minorities can also be found more or less in the provinces of Fars, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Khorasan, Bushehr and Hormozgan, and the Iranian Islands of the Persian Gulf. Divergent attempts of the Arabian ethnicity are also quite evident in the history of Iran, the most noteworthy of which include the independence movement by Sheikh Khaz'al during the reign of Reza Shah, which was ultimately suppressed. Certain divergent attempts by Arabian minorities were also undertaken following the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran.

Baloch

The Baloch minority predominantly reside in the Sistan and Baluchestan Province and are primarily Sunni Muslims. The chief factors effectuating political divergence among the Baloch minority include religious gaps, economic recessions in Balochi regions, and geographical adjacency with Baloch populations in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Several divergent movements were led by the Baloch minority in Iran, the most conspicuous of which were: local rebellions by different Baloch tribes from 1931 to 1934; rise of the Baluchestan Democratic Party in 1975; establishment of the Democratic Organization of the People of Balochestan at the order of Rahmat Hosseinpour in 1979; establishment of the Political-Cultural Center of the People of Baluchestan among the academic society of the city of Zahedan in 1989; the Rigi insurgency in 2005; and attempts by the Sunni militant organization Harkat Ansar Iran from 2007-2008 (Akhbari et al. 2019).

Turkmen

The Iranian Turkmen live mainly in the Eastern regions of the Caspian sea known as the Turkmen Sahra as well as in the vicinity of the Atrek and Gorganrud rivers. The Turkmen population is primarily distributed in the northern regions of Golestan Province as well as small sectors of Razavi and Northern Khorasan provinces. Major Turkmen cities in Iran include Bandar Torkaman, Gonbad Kavus, Kalaleh, Aq Qala, Gomishan, Maraveh Tappeh, Simin Shahr, and Incheboron. Divergent activities by the Turkmen occurred between 1979 to 1980, following the Islamic Revolution (AmirAhmadi 1998).

In addition to different ethnic groups, Iran also enjoys a variety of languages including Gilaki, Luri, Talysh, Laki, etc. as well as a broad range of religions including Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and the accompanied sects. The most significant demographic gap in Iran is observed among different ethnicities, with linguistic and religious diversities considered less salient. From a linguistic viewpoint, despite the presence of numerous languages and dialects in the geographical regions of Iran, the Persian language, without any attempts at political interventions, has maintained its role as the official language of the Iranians throughout history. A similar condition is also observed in terms of religions, wherein the Shia comprise the majority (more than 98%) of the Iranian population, thereby preventing religious divergence.

The Political organization of space

With a territorial span of 1,648,195 km² and an overall population of approximately 83 million, Iran is considered a relatively large country according to global standards. The country currently comprises 31 provinces, with administrative subdivisions including cities, districts, rural districts, villages, and small settlements. The extensive spatial stretch of the country in conjunction with other natural and man-made features including climatic diversity, demographic variations, and a myriad of ethnic groups and their accompanying cultures and religions, are all contrary to a unitary political system. And so, the question of precisely what type of government is most suitable for the political organization of space in Iran based on the given conditions continues to pose as a matter of great controversy among experts of this field (Ahmadi et al. 2015). Nevertheless, the majority of experts believe

that a modified version of the current unitary-extensive political system would be more acceptable. The geopolitical and strategic position of Iran as well as its historic outlook on independence of ethnic groups and the unbalanced distribution of energy sources throughout the country are among the prime reasons why the current government has abnegated the substitution of the current system with a less unitary feudalistic political system.

The unitary-extensive political system in Iran is based on two fundamental factors of history and structure. The underlying historical components stem from both domestic (ethnic diversity and underdeveloped culture and politics) and foreign (influence of major world powers in the Middle East and foreign stimulus from ethnic groups in neighboring countries towards independence) ingredients of the newfangled modern government following the constitutional revolution, as the result of which both Pahlavi administrations were compelled to establish an unitary political system. The structural components behind the formation of a unitary-extensive political system in Iran are two-fold: authoritarianism and rentier states (governments). The authoritarian political culture, primarily found in Eastern countries, refers to the political subjugation of civilians, which thereby prevents political decentralization. Moreover, the rise of a rentier state in Iran, as an outcome of the sale of petroleum and gas, is among other major contributors to the sustainability of a unitary-extensive political system in Iran.

This being said, the unitary political system in the Islamic Republic of Iran has not always remained stable, but has rather undergone 5 separate periods of different policies:

Ideological (1977-1987)

The political organization of space during this period was highly influenced by ideological policies introduced in the first years following the Islamic Revolution, the basis of which relied first and foremost on Ommahism. The disavowal of geographic borders and an emphasis on an Islamic Ommah (the collective community of Islamic people), albeit in appearance contradictory to the unitary-extensive political system, was employed by the Islamic Republic of Iran as an approach to foreign politics, expressly pertinent to Middle Eastern countries including Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq as well as debilitated countries of Africa. On the domestic side, however, virtually no attempts were made in pursuit of combining policies of administrative divisions with notions of Ommahism. As a matter of fact, spatial centralization was further intensified through the charismatic persona

of Ayatollah Khomeini in the midst of the populism atmosphere following the Islamic revolution. Political centralization in this period was primarily justified in terms of ideological considerations, thus classified as the period of ideological policies.

Urban Welfare (1987-1997)

The end of the 8-year Iran-Iraq war in tandem with the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1987 commenced a new age of policies in the political organization of space. This decade was above all characterized by the prevalence of policies for social and economic welfare as opposed to the policies of global seclusion in the previous decade. One of the leading figures of this decade was Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani who rose to power with the slogan of Compromise and Economic Welfare and succeeded in not only restoring the majority of damages caused by the Iran-Iraq war, but also introduced new policies for the political organization of space. The clientalist policies of this period promoted the central regions of the country to a superior standing compared to the marginal regions. The aftermath of this central-marginal gap was quite deleterious to the administrative divisions of the country. The irregular emigration of inhabitants from underdeveloped regions to more industrialized areas, particularly larger cities, led to an increase in the vulnerability of the underdeveloped sectors of the country, most notably in the Sistan and Baluchestan and South Khorasan provinces. Conditions were further intensified by the erratic growth of major cities such as Tehran and Esfahan, which caused a state of indifference towards smaller locations, even discarding them from the administrative division system. The most conspicuous impact of the clientalist policy employed by the Hashemi Rafsanjani administration in terms of administrative divisions was the escalation of political centralization and the emergence of new spatial units known as metropolitans (Hosseini 2013).

Decentralization (1997-2005)

The administration of Seyyed Mohammad Khatami for political development and reform was the first instance of decentralized policies in modern Iran (Bashiriyeh 2018). Disavowing the clientelist and centralized policies of Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Khatami administration proceeded to implement serious reforms in the administrative divisions of the country. The most notable, yet short-termed consequences of this period include

the approval and implementation of the law of councils, the proliferation of larger provinces with the aim of engaging the public in policy-making and negating the clientelist policies, and changes to the rules and regulations of municipalities with the objective of granting them a status of independence against governments. Existing structural barriers, however, such as authoritarianism and reticent states evolving from the sale of petroleum rendered the outcomes of this period temporary.

Justice (2005-2013)

The Ahmadi Nezhad administration, inaugurated in 2005, also took to Khatami's slogans against clientelism of the Rafsanjani administration apropos administrative divisions (in the 90s). However, unlike Khatami's approach to substitute political centralization with decentralization, the Ahmadi Nezhad administration had ulterior economic motives for propounding political centralization, particularly in order to relieve those fractions of society, which due to the Rafsanjani clientalist policies, were marginalized. Put differently, the slogan of justice set forth by the Ahmadi Nezhad administration were not in fact directed towards political development but rather to the alleviation of the gap between the affluent and the impoverished (Ghanbari 2014).

The core principles of political organization of space in this period were primarily directed towards promoting smaller regions as opposed to major cities and metropolitans. Governmental proceedings in this period engendered significant changes in the status of smaller administrative divisions, bringing vivacity to these regions for the first time as parts of the administrative divisions of the country.

Moderation (2013 onwards)

The Rouhani administration was inaugurated in 2013, with reformist stances quite similar to those of the Khatami administration. Albeit, 6 years have thus far passed and the government does not appear to have any specific policies as regards the political organization of space. The government, with its lack of a defined political discourse, has worked towards implementing a cross-cut between both reformist and principlist (conservatives) ideologies as concerns administrative divisions. By this token, the government has not only maintained the fundamental and legal changes proposed by the Ahmadi Nezhad administration regarding political organization of space

but has, in practicality, also focused on political and cultural objectives involving metropolitans. Currently faced with a financial crisis, the Rouhani administration also seems to lack a specific plan in other regards, most notably the political organization of space.

Overall, policies of the Islamic Republic apropos of the political organization of space have somewhat varied throughout different periods. The common denominator, however, for all periods (with the exception of the third period) has been the intensification of political centralization. Nevertheless, a new era of political organization of space appears to be emerging in the virtual world, especially by the dint of social media. Presently, a large portion of civil resistance against the government is taking place in the virtual space. One can conclude that given recent changes brought on by the expansion of the virtual world, spatial centralization is metamorphosing into spatial congestion. The virtual world has compressed the space while users of social media are constantly discussing and refuting political centralization.

Geo-economical and geopolitical status

Iran, from the standpoint of geo-economics and geopolitics, stands out as a relatively powerful country in Asia. The geographical superiority of the country, i.e. its strategic position at the communication pathways between Europe, Asia, and Africa, as well as at the global North-South energy resources communication line and its placement amidst three highly sensitive regions of Western Asia (Middle East), Central Asia, and the Caucasus; access to international waters due to possession of half of the rights to the Persian Gulf; authority over the Strait of Hormuz, as a main energy transport line from the Persian Gulf; the sphere of influence in matters of cultures in the Islamic world, particularly in Shia regions, and ownership of large-scale gas and petroleum resources are among the factors contributing to the geopolitical superiority of Iran among other regions of Western Asia (the Middle East) (Coskun 2009).

Iran is recognized as the geopolitical focal point of Western Asia (the Middle East), which in turn grants it a certain influential role in the region. Up until the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the geopolitical centrality of Iran was predominantly directed towards matters of economics and security. The Pahlavi dynasty, through collaborations with Western governments, had arisen as the economic hub of the region with trans-regional influence. Security-wise, Iran was also acknowledged as the prime gendarme and authoritative figure of the region in terms of politics (Cronin 1997). With

the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the egress of the Islamic Republic from the Western geopolitical network, Saudi Arabia rose as the new geopolitical center of the region in terms of economics and security, while Iran focused on extending its geopolitical centrality under the guidance of culture and ideological tendencies. Stated differently, the religious role played by Saudi Arabia prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution had thenceforth been delegated to Iran. One of the most salient geopolitical networks, in which Iran now holds centrality, is the Shia Resistance network. Within this Shia geopolitical network comprising Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon, and Syria, Iran has emerged as the moral and political leader of the Shia, which has been, not in the least, due to the strategic position of the country. By virtue of Shia teachings such as the disavowal of secularism and arrogance, Iran has afforded itself a certain Shia political identity as opposed to the Sunni geopolitical network led by Saudi Arabia. Shia geopolitics is the nomenclature used in recent years by certain authors to refer to the status of the Shia network (Nasr 2006).

The superior centrality of Iran within the resistance geopolitical network, comprising Iran, Syria, Iraq, and the Hezbollah (party of god) of Lebanon, Hamas and Ansarollah of Yemen, has further added to its significance within the region. Pursuant to this centrality, Iran has been able to pilot and control the political crisis in Iraq subsequent to the downfall of the Ba's party and manage domestic tensions within Syria and Yemen quite effectively (Zweiri 2016).

Iran also plays a major role so far as geo-economics are concerned. With an allotment of over 10% of the world's oil resources, the country is amongst the major producers of petroleum in the greater Persian Gulf area as well as the holder of the second largest gas resource in the world after Russia (Sarmadi-Rad 2005; Mohammadi 2010). Being located in the Rimland region and Strategic Energy Ellipse, considered the connecting loop between major global energy resources, i.e. the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, has transformed Iran into the main focal point of energy for both Eastern and Western countries. Eastern countries, particularly China, comprising the largest energy market for Iran, consider Iran as not only a major source of petroleum and gas, but also as one of the most salient trajectories of energy sources in Central Asia. This transient state has also granted the country the opportunity to transfer energy resources from the Persian Gulf zone to countries in Southern and Central Asia. The Iran-Pakistan pipeline, also known as the Peace pipeline, is a case in point regarding the transfer of energy between Iran and South Asian countries (Cohen et al. 2008).

Nevertheless, the geopolitical and geo-economic superiority of Iran has also brought with it certain threats. The impact of major countries on the

Middle East during the colonialist era, primarily justified through the theories of Mackinder and Spykman, had transformed Iran into a crisis nexus. In addition, the competitive nature of major countries over rich sources of oil and gas in the Persian Gulf region ensued further obstacles to the development of countries within this region, especially Iran. Following the colonialist era and alongside spread and broadening of threats, the authority of Iran over the region was further intensified, to the extent that the country, through distinct policies towards other neighboring countries, had become a major competitor to other power figures, particularly the United States of America (Pletka 2014). The USA, quite aware of the geopolitical and geo-economical superiority of Iran within the region, sought and still seeks to subjugate Iran to its own policies regarding the Middle East, through the deployment of sanctions and embargos. Economic sanctions of the US against Iran have entailed irreparable damages to the economy of Iran, albeit the resistive approach employed by Iran continues.

Conclusion

Premodern Iran was predominantly characterized by spatial dispersion apropos of political geography. The political span of Iran tended to expand during both the pre-Islamization phase (ancient empires) and post-Islamization, when the country had become part of the Arabian Caliphate. The political organization of the space during that era was not that of a centralized and unitary government but more of a semi-federal system. With the advent of the modern age, the political geography of the country underwent tremendous changes, the result of which was the substitution of the previous spatially dispersed states for a unitary government. The requirements of an advanced government during the modern age in establishing national integrity and government's attempts to rely on oil resources in order to separate itself from the population, in conjunction with the continuance of political authoritarianism were among the prime motivators behind the institutionalization of political centrality. Policies regarding the administrative divisions of the country during different periods were also primarily directed towards solidifying the already present unitary government. The existence of different ethnic groups and the accompanying threats of independence and separation, the strategic location of Iran, the threats posed by major world powers, and the unjustified distribution of wealth in different geographical regions were all among the reasons why the government continued to play along with the idea of a unitary government. Nevertheless, the advent and

expansion of the virtual world, particularly social media, hints at the potential emergence of a new age of political organization of space in Iran—a post-modern age, wherein civil groups are enabled to challenge the policies of a unitary government through tools provided by social media and in a way form a new type of bottom-up resistance against extreme political centralization, all within the safe realms of the virtual world.

On a regional scale, the geopolitical and geo-economical capacities of the country have granted Iran a state of superiority and increased its overall influence in the world. The geopolitical codes implemented in Iran are presently of an ideological nature, which contra to the economic atmosphere prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, have in a certain way generated a sense of authority. By virtue of a new geopolitical network in the region, Iran has emerged as the prime political figure in the area, to the extent that it now calls into question the authority of even major world powers.

References

- Abedi Ardakani, H. 2010. "A study of the causes of the rise and fall of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party". *History of Foreign Relations quarterly* 42.
- Abrahamian, E. 1983. *Iran between two revolutions*. Princeton University Press.
- Ahmadi, S.A., H. Khaledi and B. Qolami. 2015. "Political organization of space and territorial challenges in Iran (case study on the provinces of Ilam and West Azerbaijan)". *Planning and Preparation of Space Quarterly* 19 (2): 89-120.
- Akhbari, M., A.A. Dabiri, M.R. Hafeznia, and S.Y. Safavi. 2019. "Locational-spatial analysis of the formation and activities of terrorist groups in the borderline regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan". *Shebhe Qarre sciences quarterly* 11 (37): 25-44.
- Amir Ahmadi, H. 1998. "Ethnicity and security". *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 1 (2): 207-234.
- Anderson, P. 1974. *Lineage of the absolutist state*. Lynne Reiner.
- Ashraf, A. 1974. Historical features of urbanization in Iran-during the Islamic period. *Social Sciences Quarterly* 4.
- Ashraf, A. 1980. *Historical barriers to capitalism in Iran during the Qajar Period*. Payam Publications.
- Bashiriyeh, B. 2018. *Debates on political sociology in Iran*. Negah-e Moaser publications.

- Cohen A., L. Curtis, and O. Graham. 2008. *The proposed Iran-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline: an unacceptable Risk to regional security*. Nffl 2139. Heritage Foundation.
- Coşkun B. B. 2009. "Global energy geopolitics and Iran". *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 5 (20): 3
- Cronin, S. 1997. *The army and creation of the Pahlavi state in Iran, 1921-1926*. Tauris Academic Studies.
- Fray, R. 1984. *The history of ancient Iran*. C.H.Beck.
- Foran, J. 2019. *Fragile resistance: social transformation in Iran from 1500 to the revolution*. Routledge press.
- Ghanbari, N. 2014. "Comparison of Khatami and Ahmadinejad administrations foreign policy discourse and its impact on Middle East policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran". *Researcher* 6 (2): 27-33.
- Heintz, W. 1967. *The formation of a national government in Iran, The Aq Qoyunlu government and the emergence of the Safavi Dynasty*. Translated by Keykavus Jahandari. Maaref Commission publications.
- Halliday, F. 1979. *Iran: Dictatorship and development*. Penguin books.
- Hosseini, S. M. 2013. *Tan Dal: cultural-political revolutions in high-profile cinema of Iran*. Rokhdad-e No publications.
- Jamali, Y., M.K. Imanpoor, and M.T. Shahabadi. 2013. "The role and position of Satraps in the Achaemenid Empire". *History of Islam and Iran Quarterly* 23 (18): 89-110.
- Katoozian, M. A. 1998. *9 articles on historical sociology of Iran*. Translated by Alireza Tayyeb. Markaz publications.
- Lambton, A. 1968. "The International Structural of Saljuq Empire". In *The Cambridge History of Iran: The Sakjuq and Mongol period*, edited by Boyle, J. A. Cambridge University Press.
- Lambton, A. 1969. *Landlord and peasant in Persia*. I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd.
- Lambton, A. 1976. "Evolution of Iqta in Medieval Iran". *Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 5 (1): 41-50.
- Lambton, A. 1988. *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persian*. Lynne Reiner.
- Loscaya P, et al. 1975. *History of Iran*. Translated by Karim Keshavarz. Payam Publications.
- Mann, M. 1988. *State, war and capitalism: Studies in political sociology*. Oxford Press.
- Mojtahedzadeh, P. 2013. *Political geography and geographical policies*. Samt publications.

- Mohammadi, F. 2010. "The Iran Primer: The oil and gas industry". *Website of Tehran Bureau*, October 26. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/10/iran-primer-the-oil-and-gas-industry.html>.
- Moore, B. 1993. *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy*. Beacon Press.
- Naghibzadeh, A. 2000. The government of Reza Shah and the tribal system. Enghelab-e Eslami Notary Office publications.
- Nasr, V. 2006. When the Shiites rise. *Foreign affairs* 85 (4).
- Noamani, F. 1979. *Evolution of feudalism in Iran*. Kharazmi Publications.
- Pishgahifard, Z. and A. Sonboli. 2009. "An outlook on the political organization of space and power in ancient Iran and Greece". *Human Geography Studies Quarterly* 67: 48.
- Petrushevsky, A.P. 1987. *Agriculture and land relations in Iran during the Mongol reign*. Translated by Karim Keshavarz. Neil Publications.
- Pletka, D. and F.W. Kagan. 2014. *America vs. Iran: The competition for the future of the Middle East*. American Enterprise Institute.
- Sarmadi-Rad, M. A. 2005. *Iran's strategy for Export of Natural Gas*. Statement presented at the 15th Session of the Working Party on Gas, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Geneva, January, 2005
- Savory, R. 2008. *Iran under the Safavids*. Cambridge University Press.
- Vali, A. 1993. *Pre-capitalist, a theoretical history*. I.B. Tauris& Co Ltd.
- Van Bruinessen, M. M. 2000. *The Kurds in movement: Migrations, mobilizations, communications and the globalization of the Kurdish question*. Working Paper nffl 14. Islamic Area Studies Project, University of Tokyo.
- Zweiri, M. 2016. "Iran and political dynamism in the Arab World: the case of Yemen". *Digest of Middle East Studies* 25 (1): 4-9.

ABSTRACT

With a territorial span of nearly 1,648,195 km² and a population circa 87 million, Iran, also called Persia, has long chanced upon the ebbs and flows of political history and is within the ranks of countries fit for scrutinization and studies apropos of political geography and geopolitics. From the premodern era up to the modern age, Iran has been the subject of revolutionary changes in the inception and genesis of social-political systems and political organization of space. The geographical placement of Iran and the manner of its lodgment on earth has granted it a somewhat peculiar quality in terms of geopolitical and geostrategic significance: Iran is located within the Middle East, but is historically rooted to Central Asia and Caucasus, with shared past narratives with Southern Asia and India. On the other hand, Iran is connected to Europe through Turkey and with a share of more than 50% of the strategic water reserves of the Persian Gulf has access to international waters. In this light, it is quite conspicuous how Iran is located in a very fragile and sensitive location as concerns political geography and geopolitics. Iran is also quite unique in terms of domestic geography in that it possesses both a considerable number of geomorphological and topographic units as well as a myriad of cultural and social geographies, each of which are, in a certain way, connected to histories and regions beyond its political borders. The political geography of Iran has also been highly influenced, both negatively and positively, by the continuance of abundant sources of petroleum and gas energy in conjunction with certain underground mines. These rather exceptional features within and outside the borders of the country have engendered a multitude of phenomena relating to political geography as well as the numerous supplemented geopolitical occurrences. Such issues lend weight to the study of the political geography and geopolitics of Iran so as to better comprehend the nation and the country.

KEYWORDS

Iran, Political geography, Geopolitics, Geo-economics, Political organization of the space

Received on September 25, 2025

Accepted on July 13, 2026

FROM THE ARAB PETRO-POLITICS OF 1973 TO THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM SANCTIONS AS AN AGENCY OF COERCION?

Agaptus Nwozor¹

Oladiran Afolabi²

Chukwudi G. Chidume³

Introduction

Since the consolidation of contemporary human civilization, war has been a recurring phenomenon. It is inconceivable to imagine a world without intermittent outbreaks of wars. Conceptually, there is a disagreement among scholars as to how to frame and understand war in its contemporary manifestation vis-à-vis the pre-World War II period. Clausewitz's classic view of war as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will" is challenged as being minimalist and unreflective of the complex nature of war in terms of scope, tempo, methods and strategies (Dimitriu 2020). Many scholars contend that Clausewitz's conceptualization does not appear to capture and convey the complexity of war and the many facets that move it, especially such considerations that range from strategic issues, identity politics, culture, national prestige, global interest, and economic motives (Ahluwalia and Miller 2016).

War has manifested in diverse forms in the course of history. Despite

¹ Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria. E-mail: agaptus.nwozor@bowen.edu.ng. ORCID: 0000-0002-9782-6604.

² Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria. E-mail: oladiran.afolabi@bowen.edu.ng. ORCID: 0000-0002-1720-8495.

³ Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, Nigeria. E-mail: chudidume@yahoo.com. ORCID: 0000-0003-3921-1641.

the diversity of war, it can be conceptually divided into three categories: intra-state, inter-state, and multilateral wars. All wars, whether intra-state, interstate or multilateral, have different impacts beyond their immediate operational bases. In other words, wars normally have direct and indirect destabilizing socio-economic, political and strategic impacts. From historical evidence, multilateral wars, especially the first and second world wars, had far-reaching global impacts as great powers were involved. The 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the Russia-Ukraine war assumed a multilateral character as their impacts diffused beyond their respective enclaves.

The 1973 Arab-Israeli war was an unprecedented and well-coordinated military campaign against Israel by the coalition of Egypt and Syria. The surprise element of the war was that the global intelligence community, including the Israeli Intelligence apparatuses, neither envisaged nor saw it coming. As such, Israel was taken off-guard when the attack was launched on the Yom Kippur religious holiday (October 6, 1973). The outbreak of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war has been traced to four interrelated factors, namely, the failure of intelligence at all levels, including complacency among the superpowers as well as the failure of all international initiatives to resolve the seemingly intractable Arab-Israeli disputes and skirmishes; the resurgence of the Pan-Arabist consciousness and the emergence of Arab coalition ready to battle Israel; the quest for national prestige; and the steady flow of weapons from the superpowers to their allies in the Middle East (Shlaim 1996; Rodman 2015; Eiran 2020). The war, which lasted for 19 days (October 6–26, 1973), had far-reaching implications on the Middle East region and the global system. Not only did the war raise security tensions across the world due to the active involvement of the US and the former Soviet Union, it had significant adverse effects on the global economy and altered it in a fundamental way (Zakariah 2011; Eiran 2020).

The deployment of the tool of economic sanction in the form of oil embargo internationalized the 1973 war. The war was different from other wars in several respects: the unprecedented element of strategic surprise and poor intelligence which caught the Israeli Intelligence apparatuses off-guard, the novel cooperation between Egypt and Syria, and the more coordinated oil embargo that involved more oil-producing Arab countries (Amos 1979; Eiran 2020). In 1967, when Arab countries deployed oil embargo against countries supporting Israel in the Six-Day War, they did so individually and diversely through production slowdowns, stoppages, and ad hoc boycotts (Mallakh 1977). The individualistic nature of this embargo coupled with lack of coordination undermined its success. Mann contended that the embargo's effectiveness was limited due to a combination of factors, namely, lack of

Arab unity, Western stockpiles, wrong timing of the embargo (the embargo was imposed at the beginning of June when oil consumption was not as high as the cold winter months), and the availability of alternatives (diverse energy components meant that they could use coal instead of oil) (Mann 2013).

The oil embargo by Arab countries in 1973 was aimed at altering the behavior or disposition of the US and its Western allies towards Israel. The impacts of the oil embargo by Arab states included the unprecedented rise in the price of oil (from US\$3 per barrel in 1971 to about US\$12 by December 1973); acute shortages of fuel in many industrialized countries, macroeconomic contradictions manifesting in the world-wide decline in economic growth, recession, inflation, and unemployment (IMF 1974; Graf 2012). Despite these impacts, the embargo was unable to significantly elicit anticipated concessions from the US and its Western allies. There was a continuous flow of support to Israel, including the approval of US\$2.2 billion in emergency aid to Israel by the US Congress based on Richard Nixon's request (Verrastro 2013; Painter 2014).

There is a parallel in the perceptions of oil-producing Arab states and Western powers that sanctions possess coercive effectiveness in inducing anticipated behavioral response. This perception underpinned the 1973 oil embargo and the bouquet of sanctions imposed against Russia by the Western-led coalition. The sanctions regime against Russia started in 2014 for annexing Crimea, and was expanded since 2022 when it invaded Ukraine. The whole idea of sanctions in international politics is to coerce changes in the policies of target states by inflicting economic damage. When sanctions are applied, the sender-state or coalition of states are basically demanding a change in the behavior of the target state (Allen 2005; Neuenkirch and Neumeier 2015). Thus, the success or otherwise of sanctions depends on the extent to which the target government concedes to the demands of the sender.

The paper focuses on what makes a seemingly interstate war assume a multilateral character with far-reaching global impacts. In addition, it attempts to address the question about whether targeted actions by a state or a coalition of states can extract an expected behavioral response in the context of belligerency. In addressing the foregoing, the paper evaluates why the oil embargo imposed by OPEC and Western-led sanctions against Russia appeared not to have secured the expected compliant behavior. The paper relies on secondary data, including statistical reports, government papers, and scholarly publications, in its analysis. The lesson from the oil embargo has become necessary in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war and the sanctions regime imposed by the Western-led coalition.

The paper is divided into five sections starting with the introduction.

It is followed by sections two and three, which assess the international dimensions of the 1973 war, and the oil embargo, especially its domino effects on the global economy respectively. Section four examines the question of sanctions and its capacity to extract compliant behavioral response from states in the context of both the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the Russia-Ukraine war and section five concludes the paper.

The Internationalization of the Arab-Israeli War: Its Nature, Scope and Elements

The 1973 Arab-Israeli war was fought in the Middle East. However, it had international dimensions. There were four ways by which the war was internationalized, namely the superpower involvement, the weaponization of oil through the instrumentality of oil embargo, the United Nations involvement, and international diplomatic efforts. The superpower involvement was in keeping with their strategy of proxy war, a phenomenon that characterized their relations during the cold war era (Marshall 2016). As Mumford explained, “proxy wars are the logical replacement for states seeking to further their own strategic goals yet at the same time avoid engaging in direct, costly and bloody warfare” (Mumford 2013, 40). Proxy warfare enabled the superpowers to strike a strategic bargain of maintaining their rivalry without descending to a direct nuclear faceoff (Mumford 2013; Rauta 2020). The superpowers provided military equipment, intelligence, and diplomatic support to their respective allies. While the US and its western allies provided economic and military assistance to Israel, the former Soviet Union assisted Egypt and Syria (Eaker 1974; Kahana 2002; Graf 2012). These supports nearly brought the two superpowers to the brink of crisis, with the US raising its nuclear alert to Defense Readiness Condition 3 (DEFCON3) on the worldwide stage, the first of such an alert since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis (Leitenberg, 2018). However, this threat of nuclear confrontation was averted due to international diplomatic intervention.

The support to the belligerents by the superpowers is understandable. While the US had been a long-time ally of Israel, the Soviet Union also enjoyed a long relationship with Egypt and Syria. For instance, in 1955 the Soviet Union supplied its first consignment of military hardware to Egypt in the so-called Czech arms deal (Bennett 1985). Additionally, in 1971, the Soviet Union signed a treaty of friendship with Egypt known as ‘the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation’. This treaty accounted for the strong support that the Soviet Union extended to Egypt and its ally, Syria

during the war of 1973. According to Bennett (1985, 756), “up to the 1973 war, Egypt was the Soviet Union’s most important client in the Third World, receiving more Soviet military deliveries than any other state”. In the same vein, Soviet arms deliveries to Syria were at their height in 1973, especially in the course of its war against Israel. The Soviet Union ensured the restoration and modernization of Syrian military architecture by delivering weapons and combat equipment, and by sending military advisers and specialists in 1974 (Kirshin 1998). Egypt received unquantifiable military assistance from the USSR despite an agreement signed by Nixon and Brezhnev in Moscow in January, 1972 to the effect that “if Russia would not resupply Arab losses, the U.S. would withhold weapons to Israel” (Eaker 1974, 158).

In the context of the realist paradigm, the Soviet Union’s pursuit of its national interest appeared to have led to its abandonment of the Nixon-Brezhnev agreement of neutrality. In the same vein, the US foreign policy interests dictated its responses and involvement (Israeli 2013). Both superpowers recognized the strategic relevance of the war and hoped for a positive outcome for their respective sides as it could change the dynamics of global politics. For instance, an Arab victory would have advanced Soviet foreign policy in several respects, including permitting the reopening of the Suez Canal, (which was eventually reopened in 1975), the restoration of Russian prestige in the Arab world, and the Russian control of the flow of Arab oil to the Western world, which could have far-reaching impacts on their economies (Eaker 1974).

Another international dimension to the war was the embargo on oil export to western countries. The oil embargo had a serious impact on the global economy. The shortage which the embargo created caused an unprecedented downtime in productive activities amidst an unparalleled spike in crude oil price. The price of oil in the international market jumped almost four-fold from US\$3 to US\$12 (Salameh 2004; Masterson 2022). This ultimately led to global recession, which manifested in declines in the gross domestic product (GDP) of industrialized countries. For instance, the GDP fell by 4.7 percent in the US, 7 percent in Japan, and 2.5 percent across Europe (Salameh 2004).

Apart from the oil embargo, many Arab countries further weaponized oil by nationalizing foreign oil companies. The nationalization movements in oil-producing countries undermined western multinational oil companies and deprived them of their hitherto influence and control of oil prices. The trend towards the nationalization of the oil industry, which started in Iran in 1951, Iraq in 1961 and Egypt in 1962, gathered momentum with the formation of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). However, the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the embargo and attendant spike in oil

price provided further impetus for nationalization. Thus, Kuwait nationalized its oil industry in 1975 and Saudi Arabia through the late 1970s (Gross 2017). The overall impact on traditional oil giants such as Exxon and Shell was loss of their ownership and share of global oil and gas reserves, which plummeted from 85 percent in the late 1960s to 60 percent by the end of the 1970s and somewhere around 15 percent in the 2000s (Zhao 2019).

The Camp David Peace Accord which was finally ratified by the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat on September 17, 1978 was another international dimension to the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. The peace accord was greeted with mixed reactions of applause and criticisms. It was applauded as a paradigm shift in peacemaking and a sure foundation for peace between Egypt and Israel, and criticized as not being comprehensive enough to address the Palestinian question (Quandt 1986). The Arab world did not stop at only a critique of the peace accord, they followed up with the suspension of Egypt from the Arab League in 1979.

The United Nations played a key role through multilateral diplomacy that resulted in Security Council Resolutions 338 and 339 that spawned the ceasefire process. However, while Egypt and Israel accepted the ceasefire, it took the intervention of the Soviet Union for Syria to do so. Despite the Resolutions, hostilities continued, which eventually led to the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 340 that finally put the Arab-Israeli war on hold (United Nations 1974). All these controversial circumstances placed the 1973 Arab-Israeli war beyond the template of Arab politics. Scholars have also argued that one international result of the war was the global support for, and recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (Khalidi 1990). The UN General Assembly in 1974 recognized and reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence, sovereignty, and to return, and granted the PLO observer status as a national liberation organization in the UN. Since the Palestinian declaration of independence on November 15, 1988, its status in the UN has changed to non-member observer state and recognized by the majority of the countries in the UN.

The Geopolitics of Sanctions: the Oil Embargo and the Global Economy

It was not the 1973 war per se that directly impacted on the global economy but the active intervention of OAPEC through the economic diplomacy of the oil embargo. As pointed out by Gawrych (1996, 11), the

oil embargo was designed to mount pressure on Western governments to abandon their support for Israel and “adopt policies more favorable to the Arab cause”. From the production profile of September 1973, OAPEC cut back production by 4.4 million barrels per day (mb/d) representing 7.5 percent of global output in November 1973 (Hamilton 2011). Interestingly, the Western oil companies that controlled oil in the Middle East could not avert the embargo (Zhao 2019).

OAPEC was founded in 1968 by three Arab countries, namely, Kuwait, Libya, and Saudi Arabia as a strictly pan-Arab intergovernmental organization. Its membership has expanded since then to include Algeria, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. The focus of OAPEC revolves around coordinating and harmonizing oil-related policies, especially in the areas of production, pricing, and marketing of petroleum products, as well as in promoting the development and utilization of petroleum resources in the Arab world through informational programs, research, manpower training, and data exchange (Mallakh 1977). OAPEC is distinct from OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) although both share overlapping membership. However, OPEC is a broader body with membership beyond Middle Eastern states. Both organizations have a common interest that centers on ensuring stable and fair prices for petroleum, as well as promoting the development and utilization of petroleum resources. Nwaezeigwe has contended that the formation of OAPEC was motivated by the political quest of Arab states to have a regional platform that would motivate the initiation and pursuit of exclusively pro-Arab policies (Nwaezeigwe 2021).

OAPEC took advantage of the dependence of industrialized countries on oil to advance their collective interest, which was to secure support for the Arab cause in relation to Israel. Thus, between October 1973 and March 1974, OAPEC maintained an oil embargo to Western countries that were friendly to Israel (Graf 2012; Painter 2014). They adopted a three-classificatory schema in deploying and effectuating their embargo, namely, friendliness, neutrality and hostility (Alhajji 2005; Zakariah 2011). While the countries considered as being supportive of the Arab cause were classified as “friendly” and therefore did not experience reduction in oil imports from OAPEC, countries categorized as “neutral” and “hostile” were subjected to a five percent reduction in imports and full embargo respectively (Zakariah 2011, 96).

The oil-producing Arab countries agreed to cut crude oil production by 10 per cent and progressively by 5 percent a month afterwards until the withdrawal of Israel from occupied territories (Licklider 1988; Painter 2014). The ensuing oil crisis brought to the fore “a new understanding of the role oil

could play in geopolitics” (Gross 2017). The inflated oil prices had a particularly negative effect on the global economy, with industrialized countries suffering more, although with snowballing effects across the world.

The oil embargo was possible, and indeed successful due to the changes in the institutional structure of the international oil market. These changes were made possible by the nationalization of the oil industry by oil-producing countries (Gross 2017; Zhao 2019). Nationalization made the embargo successful as the international oil market ceased to be in the control of major oil companies. Thus, by 1973, many OPEC members were in control of crude oil-producing operations and exercised decision control over prices and production volumes (Kilian 2006). This trend was a departure from the pre-1973 period where oil-producing countries had no hand in crude oil production and pricing. In fact, the major oil companies presided over an oligopolistic oil market where they determined the price of oil and merely paid royalties and taxes to host governments on the basis of such prices (Okogu 2003).

The impact of the oil embargo was felt by countries differently. Overall, the embargo impacted the world negatively because of the importance and centrality of oil in the schema of modern industrialization as well as the ever-expanding global dependence on it. Apart from massive disruptions in productive economic activities, the attendant price increases created serious balance of payments problems for many countries.

The non-Arab oil producers could not counterbalance the production cutbacks by OAPEC. The rise in the price of crude oil was instrumental in emboldening OAPEC to continue with the embargo. The good run of oil prices made it possible for OAPEC to sustain production cutbacks without revenue loss or negative consequences to their budgets (Salameh 2004). Prior to the oil embargo, the fixed nature of oil prices ignited the ever-increasing demand for oil. However, the embargo created contradictions in the domestic economies of countries, thus generating the need for the introduction of a host of measures to contain the situation, especially in terms of conserving oil and curtailing the demand for it. The major fallout from this experience was that it incentivized the search for the efficient use of oil. It also opened the door for alternative sources of energy. With regard to the efficient use of oil, the US formulated a policy measure requiring automakers to raise mileage consumption of fuel by vehicles from 13.5 to 27.5 miles per gallon (Myre 2013).

Another major effect of the oil embargo was macroeconomic contradictions resulting in a world-wide decline in economic growth, recession, inflation, and unemployment (IMF 1974). The macroeconomic contradictions that enveloped the global economy did not disappear with the

restoration of normalcy in oil supplies by OAPEC in March 1974. As a matter of fact, inflation remained high in many countries long after the embargo. This was further compounded by the second round of oil price rises in 1979-80 (IMF 1983). The reason for this was that the prices of oil did not revert to their pre-embargo levels unlike during previous oil embargoes in 1956 and 1967, where prices reverted to their pre-embargo levels (Alhajji 2005).

The embargo also produced enormous petro-wealth for oil-producing countries. Alhajji (2005) notes that the unprecedented transfer of wealth changed the economic, political, and social circumstances of oil-producing countries around the world. There was also a multiplier effect on non-oil-producing developing countries. The petrodollars earned by oil-producing countries were channeled to the Eurodollar market and thus, provided a pool of long-term lendable funds from which many developing countries borrowed to finance national development. The petrodollars not only boosted the long-term loan market but also provided an easily accessible pool of funds for national development amongst developing countries (Kopper 2009). The conditions for granting loans to states (in contradistinction to the strict conditionalities of the IMF) made the Eurodollar market an attractive option to developing countries. Unfortunately, the borrowings of this era eventually led to a debt crisis which entrapped many developing countries in the 1980s and subsequently (Nwozor 2009).

Sanctions and the Question of Compliant Behavioral Response

In the international arena, economic sanctions and embargoes have been deployed unilaterally and multilaterally to exert pressures on states and condition their behavior towards achieving or actualizing some stated and unstated foreign policy objectives. Economic sanctions may be comprehensive or targeted depending on the overall objectives that underpin and influence them. The deployment of sanctions and embargoes is prevalent in the international system despite their debatable effectiveness. The attraction of economic sanctions as a foreign policy tool is based on the naïve theory that economic coercion with attendant high cost is more likely to achieve its intended policy objectives, especially of eliciting compliant behavior from states, when it inflicts major damage on the target economy (Peksen 2019). Additionally, economic sanctions are generally viewed as “a lower-cost, lower-risk course of action between diplomacy and war” (Masters 2019). The confidence of foreign policy makers in the coercive effectiveness of economic sanctions and embargoes underpins their increasing deployment both unilaterally

and multilaterally. The US tends to use economic sanctions more than any other country due to its superpower status. According to Masters, the US has more than two dozens of sanctions regimes targeted at different countries for a variety of reasons that range from terrorism nuclear proliferation, drug trafficking, to human rights violations among others (Masters 2019).

There is an admixture of success and failure in the policy domains of economic sanctions in terms of inducing or extracting compliant behaviors from states. It is important to point out that there is a general lack of agreement in the literature about the success or failure of economic sanctions as well as the constitutive thresholds or parameters that indicate the success or failure of the sanctions regimes (Pape 1997; Allen 2005; Dizaji and van Bergeijk 2013). Allen contends that sanctions may be abandoned if the expected change does not occur and that “only concession by the sender causes sanctions to fail, and different factors play into that decision than those which affect the target’s choice” (Allen 2005, 118). However, there is a growing consensus that for sanctions to be considered as effective, they should result in either full target compliance or at least partial policy change in line with the stated policy objectives of the initiating state or coalition of states (Peksen 2019). The sanctions arena is characterized by complex outcomes. There appears to be evidence that multilateral sanctions, under the auspices of international institutions, have been more effective than those by a single country or an ad hoc coalition of a few countries (Peksen 2019). The seeming success of multilateral sanctions is attributed to a combination of factors, namely, the accompaniment of sanctions with such tools as diplomacy and mediation, peacekeeping, the threat or use of force, less likelihood of sanction-busting, and broad-based international support.

The 1973 oil embargo was initiated under the auspices of OAPEC. The imperative of institutionalizing a common platform to coordinate Arab interests in the global arena, using oil as a primary weapon, was particularly dictated by the limited effectiveness of the individually-administered oil embargo in 1967 (Mann 2013). Mallakh (1977) acknowledges that the initial impulse in fashioning the body consisted of the need to reduce the disarray in Arab oil policies through a formalized or institutionalized level of coordination, and to provide a means of channeling aid to Arab states in crisis, especially Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. The 1973 oil embargo had far-reaching impacts on the global economy as it undermined the energy security of developed countries with implications on their sovereignty and independence.

The question is, did it really achieve its political objective of securing compliant behavior from the targeted states? The preponderant reliance of the US and Western economies on oil underscored their vulnerability to

any policy that threatened the free flow of oil. Thus, any form of disruption created energy insecurity and posed a serious threat to their national security (Glaser 2013). The political goals that motivated the embargo included: an end to the support provided by Western countries to Israel; recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people as well as the respect for their sovereignty over their natural resources in the context of the UN Security Council Resolution 242 (1967); and the recognition and active intervention of the international community in the Arab-Israeli conflict in terms of supporting its resolution in a way that could be regarded as fair and just to all parties.

The oil embargo appeared not to have succeeded in extracting direct concessions from the US and its allies in the scope and magnitude expected, especially in the context of the UN Resolution 242. The UN Security Council Resolution 242 specifically provided among other things the:

- (i) Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict; (ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force (UN Security Council Resolution, 1967).

Notwithstanding the seeming simplicity of the resolution, it was steeped in ambiguities that made the Middle East problem even more complex (Goldberg 2011). As Dajani (2007, 24) observes, “the resolution’s ambiguities and omissions further diminished its value as a tool of dispute resolution, creating confusion about what the acceptance of the 242 Resolution meant, encouraging hard bargaining by the parties, and denying leaders the political cover for necessary compromise”. Thus, the interpretation of its various provisions was mired in controversy. Israel and the Arab states held contradictory positions regarding what “withdrawal of Israeli forces”, “secure and recognized boundaries” as well as “a just settlement of the refugee problem” really meant, or what should constitute the recognition of Palestinian rights (Lynk 2007; Lapidoth 2011). The baseline contention of Arab states was that Resolution 242 had not been effectively implemented or enforced, resulting in Israel’s continued expansion of settlements in the occupied territories in violation of the resolution. The oil weapon was primarily designed to extract concession on these political issues from the Western allies of Israel.

There is no consensus among scholars as to the success or otherwise of the 1973 oil embargo. Some scholars contended that the embargo was unsuccessful based on the perspective that it was unable to coerce the

targeted states to change their policies with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict even in the face of its deleterious effects on their economies (Licklider 1988). As already noted, the embargo had negative impacts on the economies of the targeted states, which ranged from creating energy crisis, inducing inflationary pressures to loss in welfare (Hayes and Hudak 1987; Goel and Morey 1993; Roeder 2005). Others held the view that the embargo was successful considering that it restored Arab self-confidence, attracted international attention that facilitated a rapid peace settlement, and spawned a change of attitudes toward the Arab states in the Western world (Zakariah 2011; Graf 2012). Generally speaking, the oil embargo achieved a number of goals: it highlighted the capacity of Arab countries to unite and fight for a common cause. It also contributed to the appreciation of oil prices, which resulted in unprecedented petrodollar earnings by oil-producing countries.

With specific reference to the political issues that signposted the embargo, it was evident that the targeted countries absorbed the impacts of the embargo without altering their policy position on the Arab-Israel conflict. However, a holistic appraisal of the embargo would suggest that the post-embargo engagement of Arab states as well as long-term changes in Western countries vis-à-vis the Arab states was a recognition of their power in the international system. A specific gain was the Camp David Accords of 1979 in which Israel and Egypt brokered a peace treaty. There were subsequent peace talks. These gains could be attributed, even if indirectly, to the embargo. However, the lesson that is easily learnable from the 1973 oil embargo is its far-reaching impacts that reverberated across the world with developing countries suffering severe balance of payment crisis. An additional lesson is that the embargo did not directly achieve the major objectives of its initiators as the target states never altered their policy towards Israel in the manner anticipated.

Relatedly, the question is whether the expanded sanctions regime against Russia since 2022 is likely to induce policy alteration in deference to the wishes of the initiators? By the nature and scope of sanctions imposed on Russia by Western countries and their allies, Russia is one of the world's most sanctioned countries. According to Atlantic Council Russia Sanctions Database (n.d) as at February 2023, there were 11,803 designations of sanctions from Western countries and their allies against Russia, with 77 percent of them targeting individuals and 22 percent targeting entities, vessels and aircraft. It is estimated that more than 30 countries, including the European Union, imposed sanctions against Russia (Funakoshi, Lawson, and Deka 2022). The sanctions resulted in cutting energy imports, blocking financial transactions and halting shipments of key imports with the snowball effect that over 1,000

foreign companies halted operations in Russia.

Prior to the new sanctions regime that the Western leaders rallied the world to impose on Russia in the aftermath of the latter's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, it was under sanctions for annexing Crimea, which began in late February 2014. The impact of these earlier sanctions, spearheaded by the US, Canada and the European Union, was quite disruptive to the Russian economy (Christie 2016; Davis 2016). According to reports, the Russian economy slumped, recording its longest recession in almost twenty years, the value of its currency, the ruble, crashed and oil prices plummeted (Chatzky 2019). By mid-2016, Russia had lost an estimated US\$ 600 billion due to financial sanctions and revenues from oil and gas (Pettersen 2016). The overall objective of the sanctions was to punish Russia for annexing Crimea and force it to withdraw from the territory, deter it from further aggression, and signal that national borders must be respected (Chatzky 2019). The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 in defiance of global opposition could be considered as a demonstration of the limited value of economic sanctions as a tool of pressuring target states and securing behavioral compliance.

If previous sanctions did not deter Russia from further aggression, how is it possible that the current sanctions regime could force it to end its war in Ukraine? Multilateral sanctions against Russia have been in place since February 2014. The major difference is that they were expanded from February 2022 following the invasion of Ukraine. Undoubtedly, the Russian economy is under dire straits as exemplified by the shutdown of its stock market, loss in the value of Russian companies traded on foreign stock exchanges, crisis in its financial system with the value of its currency plummeting, removal of Russian equities from global indexes, and the collapse of Russia's sovereign credit rating to junk status (Cecchetti, Schoenholtz, and Berner 2022; Berman and Siripurapu 2023). These sanctions have tended to be unsuccessful in extracting the expected behavior from Russia, which is to stop its war campaigns in Ukraine. However, there is a sense in which the sanctions could be considered as relatively effective, namely, blunting Russia's military edge, restraining it to conventional warfare strategies, and precluding the option of deploying nuclear weapons.

Like the 1973 oil embargo, there are several reasons why economic sanctions alone may not be sufficient to force First-World countries to manifest desired behavioral changes. While the 1973 oil embargo hurt the economies of target countries, they adopted domestic measures that mitigated its overall impacts, thus making it insufficient to induce the expected behavioral changes. The domestic measures were followed up with diplomatic efforts that yielded dividends when Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to increase their

oil production and exports (Issawi 1978; Garavini 2011). The same factors that played out during the 1973 oil embargo appear to underpin the present multilateral sanctions regime against Russia. It is apparent that the present composition of the sanctions regime against Russia would be insufficient to make it suspend its war against Ukraine. In addition, there is a limit to which Western-led sanctions could be stretched without torpedoing the global economic system. Russia is a particularly strategic country as it is an exporter of many crucially important commodities, including oil, fertilizers, wheat, and precious metals (Berman and Siripurapu 2023).

Why sanctions may not be completely considered as effective coercive tools to prevail upon Russia to end the conflict in Ukraine are the peculiarities of Russia. These peculiarities include: one, Russia has a relatively diversified economy that can withstand some level of economic pressure. Two, the existence of sanction busters and their willingness to align with Russia. This makes it possible for Russia to rely on them as well as find new trading partners, particularly in Asia, to mitigate the impact of sanctions. Three, Russia's membership of the UN Security Council and the power of veto precludes the possibility of UN-backed sanctions. Four, Russia's capacity of retaliation, its strategic positioning and relevance in the energy sector serve as some form of restraint. Lastly, the Russian leadership views the conflict in Ukraine as a matter of national security and therefore unwilling to make concessions under pressure (Davis 2016; Berman and Siripurapu 2023). While the 1973 oil embargo demonstrated the inadequacy of oil embargo as a coercive tool, it also bequeathed to the global community the legacy of thinking out of the box to deal with energy insecurity. This thinking underpinned the global quest for energy efficiency standards, alternative fuels and efficient technologies (Mallick 2010; Martínez, Ebenhack, and Wagner 2019). Notwithstanding the divergent perception of scholars on the effectiveness or otherwise of the sanctions regime against Russia, a most notable achievement is the unequivocal message of the multilateral coalition against unprovoked aggression. Thus, like the 1973 oil embargo, the economic sanctions against Russia would ultimately lead to diplomatic engagements capable of inducing behavioral changes that could pave the way for the resolution of the war.

Conclusion

The 1973 Arab-Israeli war was a continuation of wars that started on November 30, 1947. Prior to 1973, there had been a total of four wars consisting of three major and minor wars. The 1973 oil embargo was not the

first time that oil-producing Arab states would weaponize oil in the context of Arab-Israeli conflicts. In 1967, the Arab oil ministers initiated a “prohibition against exporting oil to any country that intended either to assist Israel or to take part in the looming war” (Mann 2013, 696). The involvement of oil-producing Arab countries in the war under the auspices of OAPEC in 1973 introduced new dimensions that ultimately internationalized it. By deploying the oil weapon, the OAPEC was able to create an oil shock in the global economy. Notwithstanding the shock created by the oil embargo, it was not able to change the intentions of the initiators, which was to make the Western allies of Israel to discontinue their support.

In the same vein, the multilateral sanctions regime imposed on Russia following its annexation of Crimea in 2014 and later, the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, were designed to mount economic pressures and induce a discontinuation of the war. Although the sanctions have caused significant damage to the Russian economy and its financial system, it has not forced it to abandon the war. Some important lessons could be picked from the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and juxtaposed to the Russia-Ukraine war. The first is the seeming limitation of sanctions against industrialized countries. The second important lesson is that pressures, whether economic, political or military, may not automatically yield the expected payoffs. The third is that states will always adjust in order to deal with evolving challenges. With the oil production cutbacks and embargo by OAPEC resulting in shortages and price increases, countries began to adjust through a plethora of strategies including the reduction of oil consumption through greater efficiency and conservation, replacement of oil with other energy sources, strategic reduction of oil imports from OPEC producers, especially those in the Middle East, intensification of efforts towards the discovery of new oil fields, and the encouragement of expansion in oil production elsewhere (Painter 2014).

The multilateral sanctions against Russia have led to various domestic adjustments, including shutting down its stock exchange to cushion the possibility of its collapse under the weight of Western onslaught, shoring its currency, the ruble, by hiking interest rates to 20 percent and conducting much of its bilateral trade in rubles, and creating new avenues of sanction busting through China and other friendly states. Like the 1973 oil embargo, the sanctions will be followed by diplomatic engagements that could lead to diverse agreements and concessions.

References

- Ahluwalia, P., and T. Miller. 2016. "Why do wars happen?". *Social Identities* 22 (4): 347-349.
- Alhajji, A. F. 2005. "Three decades after the oil embargo: Was 1973 unique?". *The Journal of Energy and Development* 30 (2): 223-237
- Allen, S. H. 2005. "The determinants of economic sanctions success and failure". *International interactions* 31(2): 117-138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620590950097>
- Amos, J. W. 1979. *Arab-Israeli military/political relations: Arab perceptions and the politics of escalation*. Pergamon Press.
- Atlantic Council. n.d. *Russia Sanctions Database*. Accessed 10 March 2023. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/econographics/russia-sanctions-database/>
- Bennett, A. J. 1985. "Arms transfer as an instrument of Soviet policy in the Middle East". *Middle East Journal* 39 (4): 745-774.
- Berman, N. and A. Siripurapu. 2023. "One year of war in Ukraine: Are sanctions against Russia making a difference?". *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 21. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/one-year-war-ukraine-are-sanctions-against-russia-making-difference>
- Cecchetti, S., K. Schoenholtz, and R. Berner. 2022. "Russian sanctions: Some questions and answers". *Centre for Economic Policy Research*, March 21. <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/russian-sanctions-some-questions-and-answers>
- Chatzky, A. 2019. "Have sanctions on Russia changed Putin's calculus?". *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 2. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/have-sanctions-russia-changed-putins-calculus>
- Christie, E. H. 2016. "The design and impact of western economic sanctions against Russia". *The RUSI Journal* 161 (3): 52-64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2016.1193359>.
- Dajani, O. M. 2007. "Forty years without resolve: Tracing the influence of Security Council Resolution 242 on Middle East peace process". *Journal of Palestine Studies* 37(1): 24-38. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2007.37.1.24>
- Davis, C. M. 2016. "The Ukraine conflict, economic-military power balances and economic sanctions". *Post-Communist Economies* 28 (2): 167-198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631377.2016.1139301>
- Dimitriu, G. 2020. "Clausewitz and the politics of war: A contemporary theory". *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43 (5): 645-685.
- Dizaji, S. F. and P.A.G. van Bergeijk. 2013. "Potential early phase success

- and ultimate failure of economic sanctions: A VAR approach with an application to Iran". *Journal of Peace Research* 50 (6): 721–736
- Eaker, I. C. 1974. "The fourth Arab-Israeli war". *The Military Engineer* 66 (431): 156–160.
- Eiran, E. 2020. "Dangerous Liaison: The 1973 American intelligence failure and the limits of intelligence cooperation". *Journal of Intelligence History* 19 (2): 213–228.
- Funakoshi, M., H. Lawson, and K. Deka. 2022. Tracking sanctions against Russia. *Reuters*, July 7. <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/UKRAINE-CRISIS/SANCTIONS/byvrjenzmve/>
- Garavini, G. 2011. "Completing decolonization: The 1973 "oil shock" and the struggle for economic rights". *The International History Review* 33 (3): 473–487. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2011.595593>
- Gawrych, G. W. 1996. "The 1973 Arab-Israeli war: The albatross of decisive victory". *Leavenworth Papers* Number 21. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA323718.pdf>
- Glaser, C. L. 2013. "How oil influences U.S. national security". *International Security* 38 (2): 112–146
- Goel, R. K., and M.J. Morey. 1993. Effect of the 1973 oil price embargo. *Energy Economics* 15 (1): 39–48. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-9883\(93\)90041-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-9883(93)90041-0)
- Goldberg, A. J. 2011. "What Resolution 242 really said". *American Foreign Policy Interests* 33 (1): 41–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10803920.2011.550240>
- Graf, R. 2012. "Making use of the "oil weapon": Western industrialized countries and Arab petropolitics in 1973–1974". *Diplomatic History* 36 (1): 185–208.
- Gross, S. 2017. The 1967 war and the "oil weapon". *Brookings*, June 5. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/06/05/the-1967-war-and-the-oil-weapon/>
- Hamilton, J. D. 2011. *Historical oil shocks*. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3045/04afeaa155c19244a55c66903a7c0b16599c.pdf>
- Hayes, K., and S.P. Hudak. 1987. "Regional welfare loss measures of the 1973 oil embargo: A numerical methods approach". *Applied Economics* 19 (10): 1317–1327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00036848700000119>
- International Monetary Fund (IMF). 1974. *Annual report 1974*.
- International Monetary Fund (IMF). 1983. *1983 Annual report*.

- Israeli, O. 2013. "The 1973 war: Link to Israeli-Egyptian peace". *Middle East Policy* 20 (4): 88–98.
- Issawi, C. 1978. "The 1973 oil crisis and after". *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics* 1 (2): 3–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01603477.1978.11489099>
- Kahana, E. 2002. 'Early warning versus concept: the case of the Yom Kippur War 1973". *Intelligence and National Security* 17 (2): 81–104.
- Khalidi, R. 1990. "The resolutions of the 19th Palestine National Council". *Journal of Palestine Studies* 19 (2): 29–42.
- Kilian, L. 2006. *Exogenous oil supply shocks: How big are they and how much do they matter for the U.S. economy?*. http://www-personal.umich.edu/~lkilian/oil1jano1_06.pdf
- Kirshin, Y. 1998. "Conventional arms transfers during the Soviet period". In *Russia and the arms trade*, edited by Ian Anthony. Oxford University Press.
- Kopper, C. 2009. "The recycling of petrodollars". *Revue d'économie Financière* (English ed.) 9 (1): 37–46.
- Lapidoth, R. 2011. "The misleading interpretation of UN Security Council Resolution 242 (1967)". *Jewish Political Studies Review* 23 (3/4): 7–17
- Leitenberg, M. 2018. "The hazards of operations involving nuclear weapons during the Cold War". *Journal of Cold War Studies* 20 (3), 207–249. https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_00826
- Licklider, R. 1988. "The power of oil: The Arab oil weapon and the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, and the United States". *International Studies Quarterly* 32: 205–226.
- Lynk, M. 2007. "Conceived in law: The legal foundations of Resolution 242". *Journal of Palestine Studies* 37 (1): 7–23. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2007.37.1.7>;
- Mallakh, R. E. 1977. "The Organization of the Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries: Objectives and potential". *Annual Review of Energy* 2 (1): 399–415. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.eg.02.110177.002151>
- Mallick, P. K. 2010. Overview. In *Materials, design and manufacturing for lightweight vehicles*, edited by P.K. Mallick. Woodhead Publishing Limited.
- Mann, J. 2013. A reassessment of the 1967 Arab oil embargo. *Israel Affairs* 19 (4): 693–703. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537121.2013.829611>
- Marshall, A. 2016. From civil war to proxy war: past history and current dilemmas. *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27 (2): 183–195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602541.2016.1191111>

0.1080/09592318.2015.1129172.

- Martínez, D. M., B.W. Ebenhack, and T.P. Wagner. 2019. Policy instruments to foster energy efficiency. In *Energy Efficiency: Concepts and calculations*, edited by D. M. Martinez, W. Ebenhack and T. P. Wagner. Elsevier.
- Masters, J. 2019. "What are economic sanctions?". *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-are-economic-sanctions>
- Masterson, V. 2022. "The 1973 energy crisis sparked the idea for establishing the IEA. What have we learned since?". *World Economic Forum*, March 29. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/03/iea-1970s-energy-crisis/>
- Mumford, A. 2013. "Proxy warfare and the future of conflict". *The RUSI Journal* 158 (2): 40-46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2013.787733>
- Myre, G. 2013. "The 1973 Arab oil embargo: The old rules no longer apply". *NPR*, October 16. <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2013/10/15/234771573/the-1973-arab-oil-embargo-the-old-rules-no-longer-apply>
- Neuenkirch, M., and F. Neumeier. 2015. "The impact of UN and US economic sanctions on GDP growth". *European Journal of Political Economy* 40: 110-125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2015.09.001>
- Nwaezeigwe, N. T. 2021. "Politics of Arab aid and the African economic predicament in the post-Yom Kippur war Arab oil boycott of 1973". *Archives of Political Science Research* 2 (3): 30-40.
- Nwozor, A. 2009. "Echoes of divergence within: The politics and politicisation of Nigeria's debt relief". *Review of African Political Economy* 36 (119): 23-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056240902888444>
- Okogu, B. E. 2003. "The Middle East and North Africa in a changing oil market". *International Monetary Fund (IMF)*. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/med/2003/eng/okogu/okogu.htm>
- Pape, R. A. 1997. "Why economic sanctions do not work". *International Security* 22 (2): 90-136. <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.22.2.90>
- Painter, D. S. 2014. "Oil and geopolitics: The oil crises of the 1970s and the Cold War". *Historical Social Research* 39 (4): 186-208.
- Peksen, D. 2019. "When do imposed economic sanctions work? A critical review of the sanctions effectiveness literature". *Defence and Peace Economics* 30 (6): 635-647. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10242694.2019.1625250>
- Pettersen, T. 2016. "Russia loses \$600 billion on sanctions and low oil prices".

- The Barents Observer*, February 5. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry/2016/02/russia-loses-600-billion-sanctions-and-low-oil-prices>
- Quandt, W. B. 1986. "Camp David and peacemaking in the Middle East". *Political Science Quarterly* 101 (3): 357-377.
- Rauta, V. 2020. "Proxy warfare and the future of conflict: Take two". *The RUSI Journal* 165 (2): 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2020.1736437>
- Rodman, D. 2015. "Combined arms warfare: the Israeli experience in the 1973 Yom Kippur War". *Defence Studies* 15 (2): 161-174.
- Roeder, J. L. 2005. "What we learned from the oil crisis of 1973: A 30-year retrospective". *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 25 (2): 166-169. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0270467604274085>
- Salameh, M. G. 2004. "Oil crises, historical perspective". In *Encyclopedia of Energy*, edited by Cluter J. Cleveland. Elsevier.
- Shlaim, A. 1996. The Middle East: The origins of Arab-Israeli wars. In *Explaining international relations since 1945*, edited by N. Woods. Oxford University Press.
- UN Security Council Resolution. 1967. *Resolution 242 of 22 November 1967*. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/IP%20S%20RES%20242.pdf>
- United Nations. 1974. UN Cease-fire resolutions, October 1973. *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 16 (3): 146-147.
- Verrastro, F. and G.F. Caruso. 2013. "The Arab oil embargo—40 years later". *CSIS*, October 16. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/arab-oil-embargo%E2%80%9440-years-later>
- Zakariah, M. H. B. 2011. "The oil embargo following the Arab-Israel war of October 1973: British economic experience and reaction". *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* 5 (2): 92-120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19370679.2011.12023181>
- Zhao, H. 2019. *The economics and politics of China's energy security transition*. Translated by Li Zhang. Academic Press.

ABSTRACT

Drawing on diverse sources, this paper examines two interrelated questions: how a seemingly interstate war acquires a multilateral character, and the extent to which coercive measures employed by a state or coalition of states can induce compliance from a belligerent actor. The analysis focuses on two cases of economic coercion: the 1973 Arab oil embargo and the contemporary Western-led sanctions regime against Russia. By deconstructing the weaponization of economic instruments in both cases, the paper assesses their effectiveness in shaping the behavior of targeted states. The findings indicate that, despite the far-reaching consequences of the 1973 oil embargo for the global economy, it failed to compel policy change by the United States and its allies. Similarly, Western sanctions against Russia have thus far failed to secure Russian capitulation or restore the status quo ante in Ukraine. The paper argues that while economic coercion can impose significant costs on target states and the international system, its capacity to generate the desired political and strategic outcomes remains limited.

KEYWORDS

Petro-politics, economic sanctions, oil embargo, weaponization of oil, Russian-Ukraine war

*Received on May 8, 2024
Accepted on June 7, 2026*

FOREIGN POLICY AND SELECTIVE ASSASSINATION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE BIN LADEN AND SOLEIMANI CASES

Marcos Aurélio Guedes de Oliveira¹

José Francelino Galdino Neto²

Vinicius Santos da Cruz³

Introduction

After 9/11, the United States began to prioritize a foreign policy aimed at eliminating terrorist groups. The protection of national borders and international security drove the military actions carried out from that moment on. However, the difficulty in identifying a diffuse non-state threat and its implications made the ongoing military actions extend over the years. With support from more than half of the American population (Schaeffer 2022), they began in 2001 and officially ended only in 2021. As in previous wars, the spoils of the war on terror affected the presidents' popularity. The extent and use of considerable numbers of military personnel in the conflicts resulted in the wearing down of public opinion, with frequent casualties of American soldiers. However, recent technological advances have enabled the USA to rely on a key asset: drone strikes in the fight against terrorism. The level of precision of this device favors a decrease in casualties and a reduction in the material costs of armed interventions, making it seem possible to put an end to military actions that are so costly in human lives and material losses to incumbent governments.

The selective assassination of a particular enemy in an orderly fashion has become a foreign policy strategy considered by U.S. presidents, having occurred with Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, a similar method for eliminating distinguished political leaders,

¹ Federal University of Pernambuco, Recife, Brazil. E-mail: marcosaurelioguedes@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0001-9792-5453.

² State University of Paraíba, Campina Grande, Brazil. E-mail: netogaldino@servidor.uepb.edu.br. ORCID: 0000-0002-1115-0827

³ Federal University of Pernambuco, Recife, Brazil. E-mail: vinicius.cruz@ufpe.br. ORCID: 0000-0001-9544-7814.

a non-state actor and a statesman, respectively. Taking into consideration the motivations, repercussions, and consequences of using this strategy, what impacts did the decision-making generate for the governments of Barack Obama and Donald Trump?

Selective assassination as a foreign policy strategy of a State is still an under-explored topic in Political Science. The secretive nature of this type of operation limits its studies. Moreover, the use of drone strikes is a controversial topic. On one hand the expectation that targeted assassinations assist in defeating insurgencies in a given country and consequently reduce tensions in peacebuilding activities, on the other hand, field research points to negative outcomes of the use of drones. The reason for this conclusion would be that targeted killings using drones would affect the sense of fear in the population, as well as the existing social and economic disturbances in the local community, in addition to affecting institutions of governance (Page and Williams 2022).

However, when compared to traditional air power, remotely controlled drones offer strategic advantages in military operations in terms of persistence, lethality, and relative risk (Grieco and Hutto 2021). U.S. presidents have used this alternative primarily to eliminate terrorist groups. Since 2001, when the first drone attack was carried out in Afghanistan, presidents have authorized 414 attacks in Pakistan, 374 mixed operations in Yemen, and 253 in Somalia that involve this type of technology with air strikes or special troops (Bergen et al. 2021). However, despite these characteristics, Grieco and Hutto (2021) argue that the coercive effects that drones have are limited. Drones would be less effective in terms of clear communication, credibility, and assurance, making a successful act of coercion more difficult. Because of the mixed conclusions found in the literature, the debate on the importance of this strategy in counterterrorism remains.

Existing empirical evidence points to a relationship between drone use and the popularity of the president-in-office (Bodderly and Klein 2021). The terrorist threat arouses a sense of anger in individuals (Fisk et al. 2018), and is related to people's support for harsher counterterrorist tactics, regardless of their perception of the motivations of terrorist groups (Canetti et al. 2021). Support for armed drone use varies according to individual values, i.e., values more associated with tradition, security, and conformity are positively associated with support for armed drone use, while values closer to benevolence and universalism are negatively associated (O'Dwyer and Coymak 2020). Thus, if values that are more closely related to conservation (i.e., security, conformity, and tradition) predominate in the post-9/11 American population, we can expect greater support for the U.S. government's policy of

selective assassination in the fight against terrorism.

In this regard, what were the motivations, repercussions, and consequences of the use of selective assassination as a foreign policy strategy in the War on Terror? The purpose of this article is to evaluate the similarities and differences of the decision-making process of Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump in the selective assassinations of Al Qaeda terrorist leader Osama bin Laden and Iranian General Qassem Soleimani. The descriptive research design proposes a comparative analysis from official documents and speeches, among other primary and secondary sources. The research findings point to different decision-making styles of presidents and indicate how the impact of selective assassinations on foreign policy increases political and electoral gains in the short and medium terms, regardless of the president's party or political ideology in office.

The analysis is conducted in five parts. In the first part, we have gathered empirical evidence that points to the strategic use of targeted killings for electoral gains. In the second part, we discuss the theoretical concepts present in the motivations of governments after Schilling and Schilling (2016) and present the analyzed cases. In the third part, we analyze the decision-making process during the Obama government, specifically for the killing of bin Laden. In the fourth part, we conduct the same analysis of the decision-making process of the Soleimani assassination during the Trump government. Finally, in the final considerations, we discuss the main findings of the research and the contributions to the still-emerging literature on the topic.

Public opinion and the support for counterterrorist actions

Empirical evidence suggests that a successful drone strike against a terrorist target significantly increases the president's approval, even if the country's scenario is economically unfavorable, such as a weak economy and high unemployment. Therefore, the effect of the military use of drones on the president's approval is greater than when compared to the use of troops of soldiers to help fight terrorism, for example. Thus, a drone strike produces more positive electoral effects than a traditional diversionary force (Bodderly and Klein 2021).

When people feel threatened by terrorism, they have higher levels of anger. Contrary to expectations, the feeling of fear is more related to economic-type threats. When comparing three countries - the United States, France, and Turkey - researchers find that the threat of terrorism is more likely to trigger

anger in individuals, while the economic threat is more likely to generate fear. In the USA, individuals exposed to a terrorist threat are more supportive of drone strikes when compared to individuals not exposed to the same threat. Thus, feelings of anger are related to a significant increase in support for drone use (Fisk et al. 2018).

Threat perception is correlated to the individuals' support for violent and restrictive counterterrorism measures (Ceccoli 2021). People support harsher counterterrorism tactics when they hold the perception that terrorists are motivated by hatred (compared to motivation by lack of opportunity). These perceptions can be changed when experts expose the real motives of the terrorist group, but this does not seem to affect the change in preference for a tougher counterterrorism policy (Canetti et al. 2021). This finding helps us better understand the public's support for the selective assassination actions ordered by U.S. presidents.

Looking deeper into public opinion, the researchers found significant differences. There is variation among individuals' values regarding foreign policy preferences, i.e., while values more associated with tradition, security, and conformity are positively associated with support for armed drone use, values closer to benevolence and universalism are negatively associated. Furthermore, women, compared to men, are less likely to support the strategy (O'Dwyer and Çoymak 2020). These results may indicate that in a scenario where there is a predominance of more conservation-related values in the post-9/11 American population, we are likely to observe greater support for the policy of selective assassination in the fight against terrorism.

In this part we discuss the most recent findings in the literature on the impact of the military use of drones in counterterrorism on U.S. public opinion; in other words, what lies behind public support for this foreign policy strategy. Next, we will look at the motivations that governments have for taking the actions in question.

The motivations of selective assassinations as foreign policy tools

Why do U.S. governments use selective assassination as a foreign policy strategy? What do they expect to gain from the executions? The inaugural paper by Schilling and Schilling (2016) points to three possible motivations: 1) gains associated with the policies of the successor, i.e., by interfering in the correlation of forces, the expectation is that the successor of the assassinated leader will adopt policies that are less hostile to foreign interests; 2) gains

based on the successor's capabilities, i.e., the intent is to eliminate important military leaders and prevent the enhancement of rivals' war capabilities; 3) gains unrelated to the successor, when the intent is to generate effects on a third State, to satisfy domestic emotional demands, or to demonstrate power and affect the morale of the opponents.

The case of the arrest and death of Osama bin Laden is a recent example of political assassination (Schilling and Schilling 2016). Although the officially stated purpose was the arrest of the terrorist leader, his assassination in 2011 provided gains to President Obama. The use of drones to execute political and military leaders who are hostile to U.S. interests in the international system has been increasingly used by presidents as a strategy. The main justification is to avoid U.S. soldier casualties and to lower costs when compared to traditional military operations. According to a Pew Research Center poll published in 2015, 58% of Americans approved of the lethal use of drones in attacks abroad.

Like the bin Laden case, this article also analyzes the targeted assassination of General Qasem Soleimani. In both analyzed cases, we seek to explore possible motivations related to domestic politics. The vast majority of political assassinations occur in State secrecy; however, polling data shows that Presidents Obama and Trump carried out extensive press and social media publicity of the assassinations of bin Laden and Soleimani, respectively. The central argument of this article is that among the motivations there are electoral interests and political use of the assassinations by U.S. presidents.

Barack Obama's Motivations in the Assassination of Osama bin Laden

As soon as he took office as President of the United States in 2009, Democrat Barack Obama made it clear to the National Security and Defense Agencies subordinate to the White House that the priority in fighting terrorism would be the capture of Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden (Bowden 2012). In August 2010, American intelligence discovered that bin Laden might be hiding out in a compound in Abbottabad in Pakistan (The New York Times 2011). About eight months later, in April 2011, President Obama authorized the operation (known as Neptune Spear) to capture the Saudi terrorist (The New York Times 2011).

What motivated the operation? We can identify four possible motivations for carrying out the operation: a) to satisfy the feeling of revanchism present in the American population since 9/11; b) to carry out

counterterrorism; c) to protect the national territory of the USA; and d) to increase the President's electoral popularity. Each motivation is discussed in more detail below.

The first motivation is the declared desire of Americans for revenge for the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers ten years before, at the command of the leader of Al Qaeda. We believe that this motivation is one of the main explanatory factors for the targeted assassination of bin Laden in 2011. After the leader's death was announced, Americans felt relief, happiness and pride, attributing the success of the operation to the work of the military and the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) (Pew Research Center 2011). Interestingly, this datum shows us that the credit for the achievement did not lie with the president, but with the agencies linked to the government. However, this feeling, present in public opinion, was also expressed in the President's rhetoric. In his speech announcing the success of the operation, President Obama recalled the 9/11 attack in a sentimental way, pointing out that three thousand Americans had lost their lives on that tragic day in U.S. history, illustrated in the excerpt below:

It was nearly 10 years ago that a bright September day was darkened by the worst attack on the American people in our history. The images of 9/11 are seared into our national memory – hijacked planes cutting through a cloudless September sky; the Twin Towers collapsing to the ground; black smoke billowing up from the Pentagon; the wreckage of Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where the actions of heroic citizens saved even more heartbreak and destruction (Phillips 2011).

The 2001 al Qaeda attacks planned by bin Laden were the first major direct attacks on the U.S. territory since the Japanese raid on the U.S. base at Pearl Harbor during World War II. In effect, there was a breakdown in the confidence and general sense of security of the American population in living within their own country. This feeling of insecurity and fear spread throughout society as a whole, raising doubts about the ability of the USA to maintain the inviolability status of their territory in the international system.

The confirmation that Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden was the intellectual mastermind of the attacks began a ten-year international hunt. In a speech, President Obama reinforces the need for a strong American response against a terrorist organization that had declared war on the United States, acting to destroy American citizens:

We were also united in our resolve to protect our nation and to bring

those who committed this vicious attack to justice. We quickly learned that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by al Qaeda – an organization headed by Osama bin Laden, which had openly declared war on the United States and was committed to killing innocents in our country and around the globe. And so, we went to war against al Qaeda to protect our citizens, our friends, and our allies (Phillips 2011).

The second motivation is directly associated with the first. The terrorist attacks on American territory produced a debate for the creation of a new paradigm in foreign policy.

Combating terrorism became the main focus of republican President George W. Bush's presidential agenda. The U.S. strategy focused on prevention by pursuing terrorist groups abroad before they could successfully direct operations against the homeland (Ganor 2014). President Obama endorsed this perception in his speech announcing bin Laden's death: "Over the last 10 years, thanks to the tireless and heroic work of our military and our counterterrorism professionals, we've made great strides in that effort. We've disrupted terrorist attacks and strengthened our homeland defense" (Phillips 2011).

Bush had been elected on a platform of social public policies and soft power in foreign policy. Among other proposals was the legalization of illegal immigrants and the expansion of soft and hard power in Europe and Asia. In that first moment, the fight against international terrorism played a secondary role in Bush's foreign policy strategy (Leffler 2011). After the terrorist attacks, the president began a profound reform of the institutional and bureaucratic structures of the government. The first step was the creation of the Patriot Act in 2001, followed by the reform of the specialized intelligence agencies under the White House with the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (Waxman 2009).

The third motivation, national protection, was also a determining factor in President Obama's decision in favor of the operation, since bin Laden was considered a central threat to national security. However, that was not the first time that bin Laden had threatened the national security of the USA. The Al Qaeda leader was responsible for ordering several attacks that resulted in the deaths of U.S. servicemen in Somalia and Saudi Arabia; he also masterminded the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993, when about 1,000 people were injured; he also ordered the attack on the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996; and he was unsuccessful in a failed plot to target a plane at the CIA headquarters and assassinate President Bill Clinton in 1993. Therefore, in the 1990s, bin Laden became one of the most wanted

names by the U.S. government (International Committee of the Red Cross 2022).

The focus on capturing bin Laden proved to be justifiable. During Operation Neptune Spear, numerous documents, computers and flash drives that revealed his direct participation in organizing terrorist attacks were found, even though he had been in hiding for a decade (The New York Times 2011). In other words, bin Laden was indeed one of the main threats to U.S. national security.

Finally, electoral ambition was a relevant motivational factor in authorizing the execution of Osama bin Laden. President Obama was looking for ways to increase his approval rating as a national leader and facilitate his re-election the following year. The U.S. history shows that positive results in the military or in foreign policy produce positive results in the popularity of presidents. President Bush, for instance, after the success of Operation Red Dawn, in which the hideout and capture of the former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was discovered in 2003, achieved a 7% increase in popularity (Pew Research Center 2011). President Obama's approval rating prior to Operation Neptune Spear remained at about 40%. However, during this period, there were huge concerns among Americans about the Obama government's economic management, marked by rising gas prices, unemployment rates, and foreign debt (Dao and Sussman 2011).

Mark Bowden, in his book published in 2012, reported in detail on the meetings to prepare the operation that would invade the Abbottabad compound. According to the author, election concerns were a major factor in the decision-making process, as they involved important names from the military, from foreign policy and from the intelligence sector, as well as President Obama and members of his office. According to reports, then Vice-President Joe Biden believed that a failure in the operation could cost Barack Obama's re-election in 2012.

Another source that reinforces the argument of electoral ambition is the documentary "President in Waiting," produced by the CNN news channel chronicling the vice-presidents' performances over the years. In the documentary, Biden reports that he urged caution from President Obama regarding Operation Neptune Spear. There was an atmosphere of alarm over the Democrat President's re-election, stressing the importance of capturing bin Laden to secure the president's electoral ambitions. At the same time, any negative outcome of the operation could cause irreversible electoral damage, according to Vice-President Biden (CNN FILMS 2020).

Repercussion of the successful operation Neptune Spear

The successful U.S. military operation Neptune Spear marked a major victory in the fight against terrorism, resonating nationally and internationally. Success in the execution of military operations, or in foreign policy, has resulted in the growth in popularity of the ruler (Lian and Oneal 1993). According to the poll conducted by the partnership between The New York Times and CBS TV after President Obama's speech announcing the success of Operation Neptune Spear, his popularity rating increased significantly (Dao and Sussman 2011). In this sense, polls show an increase in the Obama administration's approval of the fight against terrorism and of his foreign policy management (Dao and Sussman 2011). The population's fear of a terrorist threat still prevailed.

The poll showed an 11% increase in the President's approval rating compared to previous polls, from 46% to 57%. Another important fact: a little more than half of the population came to approve of his management of foreign policy, compared to 39% in the previous poll. It was also possible to see that seven out of ten people approved of the fight against terrorism under the Obama government - a significant increase, since in the previous survey the figure was below 50%. Finally, about 90% of the American population believed that the assassination of Osama bin Laden represented a victory in the fight against terrorism (Dao and Sussman, 2011).

However, the survey also brings up data about the fear of the American population regarding possible reprisals for the killing of bin Laden. The results present alarming data: a) 60% of Americans believed in an increased terrorist threat to the USA; b) 70% saw a terrorist attack on U.S. soil in the following months as very likely; and c) only 16% felt safer with the death of bin Laden (Dao and Sussman 2011).

In the international arena, the reaction was positive after the announcement of the successful military operation Neptune Spear. The celebrations were comparatively smaller than those at home. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) reacted positively to the success of the operation. In an official statement, then Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen made it clear that the killing of bin Laden was a victory for the West: "a significant success for the security of NATO allies and all nations that have joined us in our efforts to combat the global scourge of terrorism" (NPR 2011).

In Europe, the response was also largely favorable, with congratulatory speeches coming from then President of the European Union Parliament

Jerzy Buzek, from former British Prime Minister David Cameron, and from former German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The European leaders' speeches were marked by positive messages; however, they also had a cautious message and stressed that the fight against terrorism was not over (NPR 2011).

In some Middle-Eastern countries, reactions were moderate. In Saudi Arabia, Osama bin Laden's homeland, the government issued a simple note in favor of fighting terrorism. In Afghanistan, reactions were mixed, as part of the local population feared the withdrawal of American troops from the region before it was stabilized. However, this fear did not materialize and the USA did not withdraw their troops from Afghanistan under the Biden Administration until 2021 (Schaeffer 2022). The Afghan leader at the time, Harmid Karzai, celebrated the killing of the Saudi terrorist. Finally, in Pakistan, where the operation took place, there was a sense of accomplishment on the part of the local government, and the Pakistani people wanted the USA to withdraw immediately (NPR 2011).

The consequences of the death of bin Laden

The death of bin Laden was a historic milestone in the fight against terrorism. Al Qaeda suffered irreversible damage, fragmenting and dispersing their members. The group was taken over by Ayman al-Zawahiri. Unlike bin Laden, the new leader was not a prominent charismatic figure and his speeches did not have the same motivational and mobilizing effects on the members. Although not extinguished, Al Qaeda's capacity and power were reduced after the selective assassination of their historic leader (Jenkins 2016).

Although bin Laden's assassination was fundamental as a symbol of counterterrorism, it failed to actually destroy international terrorism. The space left by the terrorist organization was occupied by the Islamic State (ISIS), a group that also pursues jihadist goals (Annamalai 2011). After 2011, ISIS has become the main terrorist threat in the international system. The group uses suicide operations and mass killings. What differentiates ISIS, from an ideological point of view, is the goal of immediately establishing a caliphate in which religious radicalism is treated as a mobilizing factor for recruiting young people, unlike Al Qaeda, which conceived this idea as a long-term strategy (Haykel 2016).

The central argument of this article is that among the main

motivations there are electoral interests in the political use of political assassinations by U.S. Presidents. The use of this foreign policy tool boosts the popularity of presidents, as was seen in the Obama government, in which the assassination of Osama bin Laden may have been a determining factor for his reelection, considering that other foreign policy proposals that were campaign promises, such as closing the Guantanamo Bay Prison, were not carried out. The correlation between political assassination and an increase in popularity becomes a central element of the cost-benefit analysis of this type of strategy in the fight against international terrorism, since it brings political benefits in the international system and in domestic politics.

President Trump's Decision-Making Process in the Selective Assassination of Qassem Soleimani

The military operation that assassinated Iranian General Qassem Soleimani was carried out on January 3, 2020, during the rule of Republican President Donald Trump. Unlike the hunt for Osama bin Laden, due to the fact that General Soleimani was a major military political actor and was not in hiding, the American intelligence services had no difficulty in locating him. Relying on Israeli intelligence assistance, the USA was able to plot their target's route of movement. Soleimani took off for Baghdad, Iraq's capital, to meet with the deputy head of the anti-American stance Iraqi militia Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. According to press reports, the intelligence service was already at the airport to confirm the general's location (Doucet, 2020).

The operation was carried out by three MQ-9 Reaper model drones, which were positioned in the skies above the airport. Each drone carried four Hellfire missiles. The images transmitted by the drones showed two elderly people, Al-Muhandis and Soleimani, getting into a sedan car, leaving the premises, and being followed by the rest of the retinue in a minivan. The drones began tracking the two vehicles leaving the airport, and once the identities of the targets inside the vehicles were confirmed, the raid was authorized. Altogether, four missiles were fired, blowing up the car and the minivan, killing all the people in them (Doucet 2020)

According to Ryan, et al.(2020), President Trump's decision to authorize the operation that assassinated General Soleimani was perceived as unexpected, surprising even many high-ranking U.S. government officials. However, in the months leading up to the execution, an escalation of tensions

between the USA and Iran occurred. We can then cite two main motivations that influenced President Trump's decision to authorize the assassination of General Soleimani: national protection and electoral ambitions.

Considering that nationalist discourse was part of Trump's politics, national protection is understood to have been a key factor in authorizing the execution of the military operation. As Trump states at the UN General Assembly in 2019: "Wise leaders always put the good of their own people and their own country first. The future does not belong to globalists. The future belongs to patriots." (Edelman 2019). That was then the first motivation. Soleimani was the second most powerful person in Iran, being the leader of the Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force, an elite Iranian unit that carried out covert military operations abroad. The importance of the Iranian leader can be observed in the speech of President Trump, who made the following statement to the American population after the operation: "Soleimani was plotting imminent and sinister attacks on American diplomats and military personnel, but we caught him in the act and terminated him." (U.S. Embassy in Georgia 2020). Other U.S. political and military actors followed Trump's statement. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said the operation was necessary to prevent 'imminent attacks' that would lead to the deaths of countless Americans (Forgey, Oprysko and Orr 2020).

As a second motivation, we identify President Trump's electoral ambition. To increase his popularity, it was important to present a victory in the military field, as successful military operations have produced this effect throughout American history. The selective assassination of General Soleimani occurred in the year that Trump was going to run for his re-election. Prior to the execution, the Republican President maintained an approval rating by around 40% (Kahn 2020). Combined with the strong approval around his economic management, it was likely that the President had the perception that the military operation would be an important element in securing his election.

Taking into consideration the possible electoral impact in terms of popularity, similar to the killing of bin Laden ordered by former President Barack Obama, President Trump decided to go ahead with the operation. If during his term Trump advocated the withdrawal of the American military presence abroad and had a large number of soft power initiatives, the action for the assassination of General Soleimani also showed that he would be capable of the use of extreme military actions if necessary.

Repercussions of the selective assassination of Qassem Soleimani

After the confirmation of Qassem Soleimani's death, resulting from the successful American military operation in Iraq, there were mixed reactions both nationally and internationally, sharing a common fear of Iranian reprisals and a possible war conflict, essentially motivated by Iranian threats of retaliation after the American action. Crises in foreign policy traditionally lead to an increase in the ruler's popularity, such a phenomenon being known as "rallying around the flag". Since the publication by John Mueller (1973), it has been well established that dramatic events that propel a country onto the international stage create a temporary effect that rallies the country's population around its government leader.

Despite expectations of repeating the positive electoral effect that Obama achieved with the killing of bin Laden, the execution of Soleimani caused an opposite effect for the Trump government. As can be seen from the data of a poll conducted days after the operation, public opinion expressed negative reactions. The results showed a strong disapproval of the Americans regarding the management of the Republican President in relation to Iran and the expectation of a possible war in the short term (Kahn 2020).

Unlike Obama, Trump's approval rating remained stable. Only 41% of Americans approved of his rule as President. According to the poll, more than 53% of Americans disapproved (39% strongly disapproved) of President Trump's handling of Iran, an increase by 9 percentage points over the poll conducted the month before the operation. Moreover, some 71% of Americans believed that the USA would soon start a war against Iran, 20 points more than in a poll that was conducted in May the year before the operation. Days after Soleimani's death was confirmed, 41% of Americans saw Iran as an imminent threat to the United States. This is 17% higher than in a similar opinion poll carried out at the end of the previous year (Kahn 2020).

At the international level, the repercussions following the news of Soleimani's targeted assassination were varied. The Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) António Guterres demonstrated, through a spokesperson, concern over the American decision. The statement said that "The world cannot afford another war in the Gulf" (Dwyer 2020). At the same time, fearing rapid Iranian retaliation, countries in Europe such as the Netherlands and France issued warnings to their citizens, asking them to avoid crowds on the days following the U.S. operation (BBC News 2020). Russia, which has a history of collaborating with Iran in fighting ISIS,

criticized the operation through a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman, saying that the United States wanted to change the balance of power in the region. The Iranian nation reacted to the death of their top general through its supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and their President Hassan Rouhani, promising “severe retaliation”. In Iraq, the nation where the operation took place and birthplace of anti-American Iraqi Shiite militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, one of the victims of the air operation, Iraqi militias also promised revenge on the USA (Dwyer 2020).

Not all reactions urged caution, the operation having been praised by some international leaders. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, a cooperating nation, praised the operation, emphasizing America’s right to self-defense, and Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, offered support for the American raid, saying it was the result of Iranian military provocations, but stressed the need to reduce tensions (BBC News 2020).

Consequences of the selective assassination of General Soleimani

The selective assassination of General Soleimani, contrary to initial expectations and fears, did not result in an armed conflict between the United States and Iran, despite the Iranian leadership’s promise of reprisals. However, Iran, in its regional surroundings, chose two American bases located in Iraq as targets for attacks. Most of the missiles missed their targets, with no deaths, only material damage. The failure made Iran’s military fragility evident. A few days after the American military operation, the Iranian Revolutionary Force took the blame for accidentally hitting a passenger plane, being another embarrassing act. The initial tension gradually subsided and the global community relaxed their alert regarding an attack by Iran (Chulov 2020). With the election of the current Democrat American President Biden, the negotiation of a nuclear agreement with Iran was once again considered, broadening the perspective of a diplomatic solution to the conflict.

Final Considerations

From the theoretical reflection on drone use, foreign policy, and public opinion, we can present two key contributions of the article. Firstly, the use of drones to carry out political assassinations, in these two cases, apparently did not indicate strategic gains for the USA. However, this foreign policy

strategy did impact the Presidents' domestic popularity, bringing political and electoral gains to the White House. The killing of bin Laden boosted Obama's popularity and facilitated his re-election, as the polling data point out.

The success of the Democrat President encouraged Trump to repeat the strategy, but with a fundamental difference: the Republican's target was a State actor. The repercussions in the international community were not positive and Trump was unable to capitalize politically as Obama had managed to. In summary, the use of drones in foreign policy is a potential alternative to leverage presidential popularity within the USA, but the type of target - State or non-State - seems to have an intervening effect on the final political outcomes.

Finally, the second contribution of this article discusses how the use of technology in military missions produces a reduction in its cost as a foreign policy activity, as well as a decisive reduction in the number of casualties, a factor that directly impacts public opinion and the popularity of Presidents. This set of positive factors allows military operations such as political assassinations, which were previously carried out in a secretive way, to be incorporated into the electoral political process of supporting the President in the re-election period. According to the cases analyzed here, the electoral results were positive for Obama, but negative for Trump.

References

- Annamalai, G. 2011. "The Impact of Osama Bin Laden's Death on the Landscape of Global Jihad". *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 3 (8): 10–13.
- BBC News. 2020. "Qasem Soleimani Killing: World Reaction as It Happened". January 3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-middle-east-50980663/page/2>.
- Bergen, Peter, David Serman, and Melissa Salyk-Virk. 2021. America's Counterterrorism Wars: Tracking the United States' Drone Strikes and Other Operations in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya. *New America*. <https://www.newamerica.org/insights/americas-counterterrorism-wars/>.
- Bodderly, Stephen, and Graig Klein. 2021. "Presidential Use of Diversionary Drone Force and Public Support". *Research & Politics* 8 (2): 1–7.
- Bowden, Mark. 2012. *The Finish: The Killing of Osama Bin Laden*. Atlantic Monthly Press.

- Canetti, Daphna, Jennifer Gubler, and Thomas Zeitzoff. 2021. "Motives Don't Matter? Motive Attribution and Counterterrorism Policy". *Political Psychology* 42 (3): 483–499.
- Ceccoli, Stephen. 2022. "Foreign Policy Orientations and US Counterterrorism Support". *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 45 (11): 1–16.
- Chulov, Martin. 2020. "Impact of Suleimani's Death Is Playing Out in Unexpected Ways". *The Guardian*, January 12. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/12/impact-of-qassem-suleimanis-death-is-playing-out-in-unexpected-ways-iran>.
- CNN Films. 2020. *President in Waiting*. Directed by Jeffrey Roth. Produced by Paul Basta. Atlanta: CNN Films. <https://tv.apple.com/us/movie/president-in-waiting/umc.cmc.21l45di6tf7l9p4hveyibuykp>.
- Dao, James, and Dalia Sussman. 2011. "For Obama, Big Rise in Poll Numbers after Bin Laden Raid". *The New York Times*, May 4. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/05/us/politics/05poll.html>.
- Doucet, Lyse. 2020. "Qassem Soleimani: US Kills Top Iranian General in Baghdad Air Strike". *BBC News*, January 3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50979463>.
- Dwyer, Colin. 2020. "How the World Is Reacting to the U.S. Assassination of Iran's Qassem Soleimani". *NPR*, January 3. <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/03/793289176/how-is-the-world-reacting-to-the-u-s-assassination-of-irans-qassem-soleimani>.
- Edelman, Adam. 2019. "Trump Pushes Nationalism in U.N. Speech: 'The Future Does Not Belong to Globalists'". *NBC News*, September 24. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/future-does-not-belong-globalists-trump-pushes-nationalism-u-n-n1058171>.
- Fisk, Kerstin, Jennifer L. Merolla, and Jennifer M. Ramos. 2019. "Emotions, Terrorist Threat, and Drones: Anger Drives Support for Drone Strikes". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63 (4): 976–1000.
- Forgey, Quint, Caitlin Oprysko, and Gabby Orr. 2020. "Trump: 'We Took Action Last Night to Stop a War'". *Politico*, January 3. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/01/03/mike-pompeo-us-war-iran-093149>.
- Ganor, Boaz. 2014. "Identifying the Enemy in Counterterrorism Operations: A Comparison of the Bush and Obama Administrations". *International Law Studies* 90: 341–360.
- Grieco, Kelly A., and Julia Hutto. 2021. "Can Drones Coerce? The Effects of Remote Aerial Coercion in Counterterrorism". *International Politics* 58 (4): 1–25.

- Haykel, Bernard. 2016. "ISIS and al-Qaeda—What Are They Thinking? Understanding the Adversary". *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 668 (1): 71–81. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716216662606>.
- Jenkins, Brian Michael. 2016. "Five Years after the Death of Osama Bin Laden, Is the World Safer?". *RAND Blog*, May 2. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2016/05/five-years-after-the-death-of-osama-bin-laden-is-the.html>.
- Kahn, Carrie. 2020. "Americans Increasingly Critical of Trump's Record on Iran, Most Expect War: Reuters/Ipsos Poll". *Reuters*, January 7. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-iran-poll-idUSKBN1Z62KF>.
- Leffler, Melvyn P. 2011. "9/11 in Retrospect: George W. Bush's Grand Strategy, Reconsidered". *Foreign Affairs* 90 (5): 33–44.
- Lian, Bradley, and John R. Oneal. 1993. "Presidents, the Use of Military Force, and Public Opinion". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 37 (2): 277–300.
- Mueller, John E. 1973. *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*. John Wiley & Sons.
- NPR. 2011. "World Reaction to Osama Bin Laden's Death". May 2. <https://www.npr.org/2011/05/02/135919728/world-reaction-to-osama-bin-ladens-death>.
- O'Dwyer, Emma, and Ahmet Çoymak. 2020. "Basic Human Values and Their Contexts: A Multilevel Analysis of Support for the Use of Armed Drones in the United States, United Kingdom, and Turkey". *Political Psychology* 41 (2): 249–264.
- Page, James, and John Williams. 2022. "Drones, Afghanistan, and Beyond: Towards Analysis and Assessment in Context". *European Journal of International Security* 7 (3): 283–303.
- Pew Research Center. 2011. "Public 'Relieved' by Bin Laden's Death, Obama's Job Approval Rises". May 3. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2011/05/03/public-relieved-by-bin-ladens-death-obamas-job-approval-rises/>.
- Pew Research Center. 2015. "Public Continues to Back U.S. Drone Attacks". May 28. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/05/28/public-continues-to-back-u-s-drone-attacks/>.
- Phillips, Macon. 2011. "Osama Bin Laden Dead". *The White House Blog*, May 2. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-dead>.
- Ryan, Missy, Josh Dawsey, Dan Lamothe, and John Hudson. 2020. "How Trump Decided to Kill a Top Iranian General". *The Washington Post*,

- January 3. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/how-trump-decided-to-kill-a-top-iranian-general/2020/01/03/77ce3cc4-2e62-11ea-bcd4-24597950008f_story.html.
- Schaeffer, Katherine. 2022. "A Year Later, a Look Back at Public Opinion about the U.S. Military Exit from Afghanistan". *Pew Research Center*, August 17. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/08/17/a-year-later-a-look-back-at-public-opinion-about-the-u-s-military-exit-from-afghanistan/>.
- Schilling, William R., and Jennifer L. Schilling. 2016. "Decision Making in Using Assassinations in International Relations". *Political Science Quarterly* 131 (3): 503–539. <https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.12487>.
- The New York Times. 2011. "How Osama Bin Laden Was Located and Killed". May 3. <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/05/02/world/asia/abbottabad-map-of-where-osama-bin-laden-was-killed.html>.
- U.S. Embassy in Georgia. 2020. "Remarks by President Trump on the Killing of Qasem Soleimani". January 3. <https://ge.usembassy.gov/remarks-by-president-trump-on-the-killing-of-qasem-soleimani-january-3/>.
- International Committee of the Red Cross. 2022. "United States of America: The Death of Osama Bin Laden". Accessed January 3, 2022. <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/united-states-america-death-osama-bin-laden>.
- Waxman, Matthew C. 2009. "Police and National Security: American Local Law Enforcement and Counterterrorism after 9/11". *Journal of National Security Law & Policy* 3: 377–408.

ABSTRACT

What were the motivations, repercussions, and consequences of the Presidents' use of selective assassination as a foreign policy strategy in the War on Terror? The main objective of this research is to assess the similarities and differences in the decision-making process of Presidents Obama and Trump in the selective assassinations of Osama bin Laden and Qassem Soleimani. The descriptive research design proposes a comparative analysis of official documents, speeches, and literature. The findings point out different decision-making styles of both presidents and expose how this tool enhances political and electoral gains in the short and medium terms.

KEYWORDS

Foreign Policy Analysis; Presidency; Selective Assassination; Barack Obama; Donald Trump

Received on June 20, 2025
Accepted on March 26, 2026

AVAILING THE CAPACITY OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO ADVANCE AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES

Jovhar Museyibzada¹
Bahrriddin Usmonov²

Introduction

Since independence, Azerbaijan has made strides in strengthening its international profile and expanding its engagement on the global stage. Through its membership in various international organizations (IOs) and strategic partnerships, Azerbaijan has pursued its interests, advocated for its independence and statehood, and sought solutions to regional security challenges. This article explores Azerbaijan's dynamic involvement in international organizations. Additionally, Azerbaijan's partnerships with key regional organizations are highlighted, underscoring its commitment to mutually beneficial cooperation and the pursuit of common goals. By analyzing Azerbaijan's foreign policy, diplomatic efforts and its contributions to international cooperation, this article sheds light on the country's adaptation to the evolving nature of international relations and the country's role in addressing regional and global challenges.

Azerbaijan, as many other countries, has recognized the importance of establishing close and comprehensive relations with regional and international organizations. For this purpose, Azerbaijan participates in the UN, the Council of Europe, the EU Eastern Partnership (EaP), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Islamic Cooperation Organization (ICO),

¹ Fergana State University, Fergana, Uzbekistan. E-mail: jovharmuseyibzada@pf.fdu.uz. ORCID: 0009-0001-6059-2613.

² Fergana State University, Fergana, Uzbekistan. E-mail: b.usmonov@pf.fdu.uz. ORCID: 0000-0003-2062-5991.

the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and other regional bodies. Azerbaijan's multilateral cooperation has also emerged in the cultural sphere, another productive avenue for its international engagement, enabling the country to effectively link cultural and historical aspects of various challenges (i.e. Karabakh conflict) to present political and international relations. This approach has enabled Azerbaijan to establish contacts with organizations such as UNESCO, ISESCO, TURKSOY, among others.

One of Azerbaijan's key priorities has been to counter the Armenian narrative and convey Azerbaijan's truth to the world community about the heavy losses inflicted upon Azerbaijan with the occupation of Karabakh. Azerbaijan has consistently expressed its readiness to cooperate internationally in combating all forms of terrorism, highlighting the need for collective action, including in the Karabakh conflict. To this end, Azerbaijan has participated in global and regional platforms, including the GUAM, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and OSCE³.

This article is divided into four main sections, each underlining aspects of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. In the first section, initiatives undertaken by Azerbaijan within traditional international organizations were discussed. Authors name those IOs 'traditional' to which Azerbaijan has had membership since independence in 1991. The second section illustrates new memberships that Azerbaijan gained in the years following the independence due to the urge that the country needs to expand cooperation, build an image, and gain support. The third section depicts the role Azerbaijan assumed in the international arena as a founder and initiator of international organizations. Lastly, this article observes a strain of cooperation, which is establishing close ties with IOs without full-fledged membership. That's to say Azerbaijan actively seeks tailored partnership schemes with international organizations as an ally, rather than a full member. These sections aim to shed light on Azerbaijan's strategic approach to international cooperation and explore various aspects of Azerbaijan's engagement with international organizations. Considering the nation-states' desire to assert a role in international relations to serve their very own interests, Azerbaijan is not an exception to this tendency.

Initiatives Taken Within Traditional International Organizations

³ As we will see in the following heading of this article, cooperation with OSCE degraded gradually due to Azerbaijan losing confidence in the Minsk Group process under the auspices of OSCE, which has done little to help resolve the regional conflict within principles of international law.

The United Nations has certainly facilitated Azerbaijan's collaboration with nations worldwide in addressing the country's challenges. The primary focus of Azerbaijan's collaboration with the UN in the area of peace and security was to secure international support in calling off Armenia's claims and persistent use of force against Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.). Since its first engagement with the UN, Azerbaijan has sought to bring international attention to the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict and find peaceful and meaningful resolution, wielding UN's influence and resources.

The UN Security Council adopted resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884 in 1993 in response to the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and other adjacent territories by military groups affiliated with the Armenian Armed Forces. These resolutions reaffirmed Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, demanded the immediate cessation of armed hostilities and complete withdrawal of occupying forces from Azerbaijani territory, condemned all hostile actions in the region, and urged for negotiations for the resolution of the conflict (UN Security Council 1993).

President Heydar Aliyev attended the UN General Assembly sessions in September 1994, October 1995, and September 2000, using these platforms to expose Armenia's aggressive presence in Azerbaijan, which contradicted the UN resolutions. At the UN General Assembly (UNGA) session on October 29 of 2004, Azerbaijan's delegation took the initiative to include the issue of "the situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan" on the meeting's agenda. The issue addressed to the UNGA highlighted the illegal activities of transferring new settlers to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan (UN General Assembly 2004). In following years, Azerbaijan also managed to pass a resolution in the 60th session of the UN General Assembly, in which it is stressed "to urgently conduct an environmental operation to suppress the fires in the affected territories [of Karabakh]" since Azerbaijan did not have direct access to the region (UN General Assembly 2006).

Despite the adoption of several resolutions in the highest organ of policy-making in the world, Armenia rather disregarded international law, thus the implementation of the UN resolutions. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan has consistently sought international attention to the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict by utilizing UN platforms where the need for diplomatic resolution of the conflict and restoration of the occupied territories were emphasized.

Azerbaijan's non-permanent membership⁴ in the United Nations

⁴ The UNSC is composed of 15 members, of which five are permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and ten are non-permanent members elected by the UN General Assembly for two-year terms. Non-permanent members have the

Security Council (UNSC) from 2012 to 2013 is regarded as one of the most significant international achievements of the Republic (Habibbeyli 2017, 36)⁵. Representing the Eastern European group with extensive support, Azerbaijan's membership reinvigorated the government's efforts to bring the Karabakh conflict to the forefront agenda of the international community once again. During this time, the diplomatic outreach and the potential of Azerbaijan had improved, encouraging Azerbaijan to demand Armenia to withdraw from the occupied territories, as stated in the four existing UNSC resolutions. It is worth mentioning that Azerbaijan, during the chairmanship of the UNSC, organized a high-level meeting called "Strengthening international cooperation in the implementation of counter-terrorism obligations". For Azerbaijan, terrorism has been closely linked with the illegitimate regime in Karabakh that forced thousands out of their homes and impeded the state apparatus from functioning.

Moreover, during its second chairmanship of the UNSC, Azerbaijan enhanced the partnership between the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) through another high-level meeting, which took place on October 28, 2013 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.). As part of its efforts to strengthen collaboration between the UN and various international organizations, Azerbaijan proposed initiatives and put forth a proposal to develop relations between the UN and the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking States – later named as the Organization of Turkic States (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b.). These efforts demonstrated Azerbaijan's commitment to promoting international institutionalism and fostering cooperation among diverse global entities.

Azerbaijan has also taken on the role of the sponsor for several resolutions endorsed by UN bodies. These resolutions encompass topics such as "Missing Persons" and "Release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts." In addition to advocating for the establishment of universal human rights standards, Azerbaijan emphasizes the need for heightened focus on instances of mass human rights violations, particularly in the context of armed conflicts

same rights and responsibilities as permanent members except for the veto power. They can vote on resolutions and participate in discussions on matters related to international peace and security.

5 Azerbaijan is the first country from the South Caucasus and Central Asia region to be elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Among the countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region, Azerbaijan is the second nation to have achieved this status in the Security Council.

(Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan s.d.).

Besides constructing its position along the axis of the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict, Azerbaijan also takes on different missions in the UN. In December 2020, a special session of the UN General Assembly took place in New York, devoted to combating the COVID-19 pandemic. Azerbaijan, representing the Non-Aligned Movement, proposed this special session dedicated to addressing the global health crisis caused by the coronavirus. Subsequently, on December 16, 2021, Azerbaijan, together with the organization of the Non-Aligned Movement, led the way in introducing a resolution⁶ at the UN General Assembly. This resolution aimed to ensure fair, affordable, prompt, and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines for all nations. The resolution received support from an overwhelming number of 179 member countries.

Aside from these main activities in the UN Headquarters, Azerbaijan closely engages with various UN agencies and assumes chairmanship and governance responsibilities in them. In 2017, for the first time in its 25-year membership since independence, Azerbaijan secured a membership in the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization (ILO), occupying an influential role in the ILO's decision-making processes and initiatives (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.). Furthermore, Azerbaijan has demonstrated its leadership capabilities by assuming vice-presidency positions in bodies of UNESCO in 2011 and by becoming a member of the UNHCR's Executive Committee in 2012.

Azerbaijan strategically hosts various international events in collaboration with the UN Agencies, including the World Forum on Inter-Cultural Dialogue in 2011, the 28th FAO Regional Conference for Europe in 2012, the first Global Forum on youth policy in 2014, the 7th UN Alliance of Civilizations Forum in 2016, the 4th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue in 2017, 2018 Baku Forum on Sustainable Development, and the conference titled "Towards Sustainable Development Goals, Sustainable Development and Promoting Decent Work" in 2018 and more. These forums serve to consolidate Azerbaijan's image as a committed state which devotes itself to promote inclusive societies, multiculturalism, regional cooperation, sustainable development, peace, and active participation in UN activities.

Cooperation with UNESCO has been defined as a top-priority area of Azerbaijan's cultural policy since its membership in 1992. This cooperation

6 The resolution is called "Ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access for all countries to vaccines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic."

has been extensive and fruitful, leading to the wider recognition of Azerbaijan's cultural heritage, preservation of historical sites, and participation in international cultural events. The country has organized numerous joint events of international prominence with UNESCO, including the commemoration of Azerbaijani poet Fuzuli's 500th anniversary, and the observance of the epic Dede Korkud's 1300th anniversary. Over the years, several historical and cultural sites such as Icherisheher and the Shirvanshahs Palace have been included in UNESCO's World Heritage List, while Azerbaijan's intangible cultural heritage, including mugham music, Ashug art, Novruz holiday and Dolma⁷ making and sharing tradition, has been recognized by UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b.). Azerbaijan consciously directs its efforts in a race to own as many items on the list as possible, knowing passiveness could lead to cultural dispossession for the country.

Azerbaijan became a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation⁸ in December 1991 and has since played an active role within the organization. Azerbaijan attaches great importance to the OIC due to the commonly shared Muslim identity and similarly oil-exporting status of many member states (Baylarov 2023, 17). Collaboration within the OIC takes place through various committees, such as the Committee on Science and Technology (COMSTECH) and the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC). In November 2011, Baku hosted the 29th meeting of COMSTECH, furthering cooperation in the field among OIC member states (Mincom.Gov.Az n.d.).

In April 2013, Baku hosted the second conference of Labor Ministers of OIC member states, focusing on labor, employment, and social protection. During the conference, the establishment of the OIC Labour Center was proposed by President Ilham Aliyev, receiving unanimous approval from the heads of delegations. Moreover, Azerbaijan's active participation and influence within the OIC have increased over the years, as demonstrated by its election as a member of the Executive Committee on Labor Issues for the OIC for the period of 2018-2020.

Most notably, the OIC Parliamentary Union recognized the Khojaly tragedy as an act of genocide in January 2012, marking the first time in history that an international body officially acknowledged the Khojaly massacre as a

7 "Dolma tradition is a set of knowledge and skills relating to the preparation of the traditional meal 'dolma'." It is crucial to perceive the genuine effort of Azerbaijan against the backdrop of the unsettled dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding the origins of the meal.

8 Established in 1969, with 57 member states, the OIC aims to protect the interests of the Muslim world, promote economic development, and maintain international peace.

genocide. This clear stance by the OIC regarding the decades-long conflict has further strengthened Azerbaijan's alignment and rapprochement with the organization and its commitment to promoting Islamic values and cooperation among member states (Baylarov 2023, 17). Baku was declared the capital of Islamic culture by the decision of ISESCO in 2009, and similarly in 2018, the city of Nakhichevan received the same prestigious title from the organization.

Despite joining the Commonwealth of Independent States, Azerbaijan considerably retained its focus on engaging in bilateral cooperation with each member state separately⁹. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan remains interested in participating within the CIS framework on issues of national interest in political, economic, and humanitarian spheres, considering the organization as yet a useful platform for dialogue among member states, although dialogue more of a bilateral nature (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b.). In October 2011, at a meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of States in St. Petersburg, an agreement on the CIS free trade zone was signed, but Azerbaijan did not become a signatory, illustrating Azerbaijan's refraining attitude towards the organization with the ultimate aim of maintaining CIS as a discussion forum.

Azerbaijan's participation in the CIS has had its own dynamics and challenges. In fact, Azerbaijan's accession to the CIS was seen to be significant in preventing certain developments that could alienate Azerbaijan in the post-Soviet space and in turn create favorable conditions for Armenian rhetoric to gain prominence. Azerbaijan effectively utilized its position to veto many CIS documents that protected solely Armenian interests (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b.). The country's strategic approach has allowed it to safeguard its national interests in the organization and prevent developments that may put its independence or security at risk.

Azerbaijan actively participates in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) with a policy focus on liberalizing the region's economy in various areas such as trade, investment, transport and energy (Mincom. Gov.Az n.d.; Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan n.d.)¹⁰. Azerbaijan hosted the

⁹ The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is an organization focused on developing multilateral cooperation among its member states in various areas, including the economic, military-political, and humanitarian spheres. It consists of 8 charter bodies, 69 sectoral cooperation bodies, and 15 other bodies, totaling more than 90 entities.

¹⁰ The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) is an intergovernmental organization established in 1985 with the objective of enhancing economic, technical, and cultural cooperation among its member states, which include Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Azerbaijan joined ECO in November 1992.

organization's summits in 2006 and 2012. During these events, member states adopted documents that reflected key principles, priorities, and regional directions of socio-economic and political relations among them. The Baku Declaration, issued at the end of the 2012 summit, highlights the member states' stance on the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict; criticizes Armenia for its violation of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity; and supports Azerbaijan's internationally defined interests (Economic Cooperation Organization 2012).

In 2002, former president of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, proposed the establishment of an ECO Research Center in Baku to enhance the organization's effectiveness. Finally, after years, in March 2021, the Charter of the ECO Research Center was signed at the 14th ECO Summit. The center's main objective is identified to be the facilitation of regional cooperation between member states based on economic research and empirical evidence. Furthermore, significant energy-related meetings of the organization were held in Baku in June 2021. The 4th ECO High-Level Experts Group Meeting on Energy was followed by the 4th ECO Energy Ministerial Meeting. The "Baku Declaration", which was adopted at the conclusion of the meeting, aims to intensify energy cooperation within the ECO. Additionally, the meeting resulted in the adoption of the ECO Energy Strategy 2030 and its Action Plan, the Charter of the Clean Energy Center, and the Regional Electricity Market Roadmap.

Within the framework of the ECO, official reports have recently referred to the concept of a 'corridor' in relation to the documents signed by Azerbaijan, Russia, and Armenia following the Second Karabakh War in 2020. This demonstrates Azerbaijan's successful foreign policy in promoting the term "Zangezur corridor" within the ECO region and drawing the attention of key regional players to this transportation route (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b.)¹¹.

Lastly, among traditional organizations, we should also note Azerbaijan's membership in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) since 1992 and analyze the complicated and entangled nature of the relations. Admittedly, the OSCE has been actively cooperating with the government of Azerbaijan in projects related to the rule of law, democratic institutions, legislation improvement, migration, gender equality, and more (Azərbaycan beynəlxalq aləmdə [Azerbaijan in the international arena] n.d.). However, even more importantly, the OSCE established the OSCE Minsk Group in 1994 to lead the peace process and negotiations for the Nagorno-

¹¹ Zangezur corridor is a transportation route that passes through the southernmost borders of Armenia and connects Azerbaijan to Türkiye, which became dysfunctional after the First Karabakh War (1988-1994).

Karabakh conflict. The Minsk Group consists of three co-chairs, namely Russia, France, and the United States.

Undeniably, the Minsk Group and parties to the conflict managed to adopt, although not fully, the “Madrid Principles” as a working document outlining the basic principles for a peaceful resolution of the conflict during the period of intensive engagement between 2007 and 2008¹². However, tensions peaked between Azerbaijan and the Minsk Group in 2008, after co-chairs voted against the United Nations General Assembly resolution number S/62/243, which reiterated Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and called for the immediate withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied territories (Shiriyev 2016 445). This move caused disappointment in Baku and called the sincerity of the co-chairs into question.

Azerbaijan criticized the Minsk Group due to perceived stagnation in the negotiation process perpetrated by the group. President Ilham Aliyev stated that “the co-chairs of the Minsk Group have received a mandate to engage directly in this issue, but are serving the freezing of the conflict by their destructive activities” and that “(...) the destructive activities of the OSCE Minsk Group serves to strengthen the status quo” (Aliyev 2016). Considering the fact that Azerbaijan’s top foreign policy priority is the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, it is clear how failed mediation efforts and lack of willingness shown by the Minsk Group caused resentment (Mammadov 2015, 32).

Azerbaijan has called for more tangible results and sought to increase international support for its position on territorial integrity through political/peaceful means. Therefore, Baku has explored alternative paths such as forging a new partnership with the Non-Aligned Movement to communicate its position in a different platform, and even considered the possibility of transferring the mediation responsibility from the OSCE to the United Nations, as the UN holds more political and legal authority (Shiriyev 2016, 454–55; Ismayilov 2014, 97–98). Azerbaijan’s decision to join the NAM and its activity within the organization will be discussed in the next heading below.

Cooperation and Image Building through Securing New

¹² Basic principles: Evacuation and demilitarization of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh; an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance; a corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh; future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will; the right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence; and international security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation.

Memberships in International Organizations

Membership in international organizations certainly strengthens a state's position, recognition and legitimacy in the global arena. It signifies the state's commitment to international norms, values, and principles, which can positively influence its image and standing among the international community. International organizations, on the other hand, provide a platform for states to voice their concerns, advocate for their interests, and contribute to shaping global agendas and policies. By actively engaging in discussions in IOs, states promote their own perspectives, values, and interests. This active participation helps to build the state's reputation as a constructive and responsible actor, willing to engage in a dialogue above all. In addition, international organizations can create opportunities for states to expand cooperation beyond politics – in fields like trade, investment, economy and military.

In this respect, Azerbaijan has made symbolic gestures by joining several international organizations. In contrast to Armenia, Azerbaijan joined the Non-Aligned Movement on May 26, 2011, becoming the fourth former Soviet republic to do so, which was welcomed by unanimous support of the NAM states. As mentioned earlier, this decision was driven partly by Azerbaijan's disappointment with the OSCE's inability and/or unwillingness to effectively address the Karabakh conflict. By joining NAM, Azerbaijan aimed to cultivate functional partnerships and access an additional platform to voice its concerns rather than relying solely on singular allies (Strakes 2013, 40). Azerbaijan felt it necessary to diversify its ties away from traditional Western partners and engage with new allies in the international arena (Ismayilov 2014).

Membership marked a significant shift in Azerbaijan's foreign policy strategy, emphasizing the importance of multilateral diplomacy. Importantly, Azerbaijan viewed NAM as a potential ally in resolving the Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijan's former Foreign Minister, Elmar Mammadyarov, openly acknowledged that "membership in the Non-Aligned Movement would give his country 'an additional platform' to pursue and seek support for a solution to the conflict - meaning not just any solution but a solution on Baku's terms" (Fuller 2013, 10). Azerbaijan's efforts within NAM to address the Karabakh conflict have been fruitful. The inclusion of a paragraph on the conflict in the Final Document of the NAM Coordinating Bureau's ministerial meeting in May 2012 and the 18th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the NAM in 2019 demonstrated support for resolving the conflict based on principles such as respect for territorial integrity, non-use of force, and the

inviolability of internationally recognized borders (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.; UNIDIR 2019, 160).

Azerbaijan hosted and organized various meetings and initiatives within NAM. The country held the 18th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Movement in October 2019, which involved high-level representatives from 120 UN member states and 42 international organizations. As a result, Azerbaijan assumed the Chairmanship of the Movement for the period of 2019-2022. Recognizing Azerbaijan's effective chairmanship, member states appealed for an extension of its leadership for another year until 2023. Azerbaijan has gained valuable experience during its leadership, empowering the movement as a formidable global actor (Huseynov 2023).

The distinctive character of Azerbaijan's leadership is its coincidence with the onset of COVID-19 and, in turn, its decent management of the global health crisis via organization. Azerbaijan took the initiative in organizing the Online Summit-level Meeting of the NAM Contact Group in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This meeting assessed the impact of the pandemic on NAM member states and identified states' needs for potential remedies and follow-up measures at the highest decision-making level (Azərbaycan beynəlxalq aləmdə [Azerbaijan in the international arena,] n.d.). The outcome of the meeting was the adoption of the Declaration and the establishment of the Task Force on Combating the COVID-19 Pandemic. Consequently, Azerbaijan, on behalf of the NAM, proposed a resolution entitled "Ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access for all countries to vaccines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic" at the 76th session of the UN General Assembly. This resolution highlighted the pivotal role of the NAM, under Azerbaijan's leadership, in global efforts to combat the pandemic.

As a continuous effort, Azerbaijan hosted another summit-level meeting of the NAM Contact Group to address post-pandemic recovery. In the same meeting, President Ilham Aliyev outlined the duty of the NAM as "to perform a more visible and effective role in the international arena and actively participate in the transformation of the new world order" (Huseynov 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.). Furthermore, Azerbaijan took the initiative to organize the first-ever NAM Youth Summit on the sidelines of the NAM Baku Summit in 2019. This event aimed to facilitate the exchange of ideas, visions, and perspectives among youth representatives from NAM member states, focusing on current challenges and sustainable development (UNIDIR 2019).

Another organization in which Azerbaijan has a relatively recent membership is the Council of Europe. In 2001, Azerbaijan joined the Council of Europe, a leading human rights organization in Europe, signaling

its willingness towards Western integration. Since 2002, Azerbaijan has signed the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which is a key legal instrument of the Council of Europe for human rights protection. Azerbaijan also ratified around 60 human rights conventions of the Council of Europe, primarily focusing on social rights (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.). Membership in the Council of Europe helped Azerbaijan to expand its diplomatic ties and diversify partners with the ultimate goal of defending Azerbaijan's national interests and impeding power imbalance in the region against the country (Valiyev and Mamishova 2019a, 279).

Azerbaijan has actively participated in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) since becoming a full member. The Azerbaijani delegation countered Armenia's arguments during sessions and managed to circulate documents demanding condemnation of the war crimes committed by Armenia against the Azerbaijani population during the Karabakh conflict (i.e. Khojaly massacre) and information about the situation of detainees in Armenia and Karabakh (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.). In 2005, the PACE adopted Resolution 1416 and Recommendation 1690 urging Armenia to "withdraw military forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan, and for the peaceful settlement of the conflict in accordance with the resolutions of UNSC" (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2005a; Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2005b). A similar standpoint was reiterated in the motion document 13546 and report document 13930, dating back to 2014 and 2015, respectively. The Assembly condemned the occupation of foreign territory by a member state as a serious breach of state obligations under the Council of Europe (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2014).

On the other hand, Baku played a pivotal role in fostering cultural exchange between the West and the East thanks to hosting the conference of the Council of Europe's Culture Ministers in 2008, inviting colleagues from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Habibbeyli 2017, 41). This initiative was followed by Azerbaijan hosting the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Culture Ministers' Conference in 2009, allowing European countries' culture ministers to take part. The World Intercultural Dialogue Forum, held every two years, further promotes intercultural dialogue and understanding between two organizations and civilizations.

Founder and Initiator of International Organizations

The Organization of Turkic States, formerly known as the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States or Turkic Council, was established in 2009 as an intergovernmental organization with the main objective of fostering comprehensive cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries. The Turkic Council was created based on the Nakhchivan Agreement signed during a summit held in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan. The organization tries to achieve cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries in various areas. Efforts are being made “to strengthen mutual trust; establish peace in the region; promote a common approach to foreign policy; coordinate the fight against international terrorism, separatism, extremism and transnational crime; create favorable conditions for trade relations and investment; expand mutual relations in the fields of science, technology, education and culture” (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.a.).

Its founding members are Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey. Relations of these countries go beyond political and economic cooperation and are determined by shared roots, religion, history, culture, and values (Habibbeyli 2017, 41). Particularly, the bond between Azerbaijan and Turkey, in particular, is often described as “one nation, two states.” To achieve the abovementioned objectives, the organization operates related/affiliated organizations such as TURKSOY, Turkic Academy, TURKPA (Parliamentary Assembly), Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation. For instance, TURKSOY engages in various activities, including implementing joint programs and projects, preserving and researching shared cultural values, and promoting cultural exchanges. President Ilham Aliyev and the National Assembly of Azerbaijan actively support and prioritize the developments in this organization. Institutionalization and structuralization of political and economic relations among Turkic-speaking states is considered important for Azerbaijan that can be further advanced through TURKSOY’s initiatives.

Azerbaijan has also been a founding member of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) – established in 1992. The country’s participation in the organization aims to demonstrate and strengthen its special role in the Black Sea region, showcase a constructive approach, integrate into European structures, enhance Azerbaijan’s transportation and transit potential, establish multilateral cooperation, extend its influence to neighboring regions, and safeguard strategic interests (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b.). Azerbaijan has chaired the BSEC on multiple occasions, particularly in 2003, 2004, 2009, and 2018, and hosted more than 20 events at various levels of the organization. During these meetings and the country’s chairmanship period, cooperation projects in transportation, energy, communication, and trade have been implemented. Azerbaijan

emphasizes the development of cooperation within the organization based on mutual interests in various priority areas, including trade, customs, transport, energy, environment, information and communication, scientific research, and technology. Azerbaijan has actively supported initiatives to enhance the efficiency of the BSEC.

The Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM) is another organization founded by Azerbaijan in alliance with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine¹³. The Charter of GUAM emphasizes the importance of regional cooperation based on respect for the sovereignty of states, with the goal of promoting democracy, security, stability, economic development, and social prosperity against separatism, extremism and conflict in the region (GUAM 2019). GUAM has undergone various stages of institutional restructuring, starting with the GUAM Advisory Forum in 1997, followed by the establishment of the GUAM Association in 2001, and finally the creation of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development in 2006, which was formalized through the adoption of the Organization's Charter at the Kyiv Summit.

As a founding member state, Azerbaijan actively participates in GUAM and supports the organization's efforts to become a more project-oriented institution. Azerbaijan places special importance on mutually beneficial cooperation in various areas such as trade, transport, customs, energy, tourism, technology, and agriculture. The country is also an initiator and active participant in projects aimed at facilitating and digitizing trade and transport routes of the region. Azerbaijan has chaired GUAM on several occasions, precisely in 2007-2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020.

The organization aims to address important issues for the participating countries through joint efforts, especially promoting peaceful conflict resolution, combating separatism, developing secure transportation corridors, and collaborating with European and trans-Atlantic institutions (Baylarov 2023, 18). The Presidents of GUAM member states have emphasized the need to strengthen quadrilateral cooperation based on principles such as respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, the inviolability of state borders, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and humanitarian cooperation (Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan n.d.). Founding principles and the starting point for GUAM cooperation imply the common concerns of member states, which ultimately urge GUAM states to take common stand and show solidarity against foreign threats to their state security.

13 Uzbekistan later joined in 1999 but withdrew its membership in 2005.

Cooperation Without Membership: Tailored Partnership Schemes with International Organizations

Azerbaijan's relationship with the European Union (EU) has evolved and grown closer since gaining independence in 1991, although Azerbaijan does not seek to join the EU formally (Chufrin 2019, 17). Initially, the focus was on technical assistance due to the country's economic challenges and the conflict with Armenia over Karabakh (Van Gils 2018, 740). Azerbaijani-EU engagement reached its comprehensive form with the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in 1996. Subsequent policy frameworks such as the 'European Neighbourhood Policy' (ENP) in 2004 and the Eastern Partnership Program (EaP) in 2009, further emphasized European values such as democratization, good governance and market reforms, and aimed at multilateral cooperation.

Integration into European institutions is a key priority in Azerbaijan's foreign policy (Valiyev 2017, 136). Since joining the Council of Europe in 2001, Azerbaijan has taken significant steps to align its legislation with those of EU standards. Close relations have been established with the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, which targets democratization in legislation. Azerbaijan also signed the Protocols and Convention on Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Humanity in 2001 and 2002, respectively.

After Azerbaijan's accession to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), a new policy framework for Azerbaijan-EU relations was adopted with the name of the "Republic of Azerbaijan-EU Action Plan" in 2006. This Action Plan, which replaced the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, outlined 10 priority areas for further development, including a peaceful resolution to the Karabakh conflict, strengthening democracy, improving the business and investment climate, enhancing customs services, and promoting energy and transport cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan (Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan n.d.).

Azerbaijan is one of the six former Soviet republics participating in the Eastern Partnership program to support political and economic reforms and foster closer ties between the countries of the region and the EU. Azerbaijan gained EU support for the construction of pipelines to transport Azerbaijani gas to Europe. Baku also negotiated a visa facilitation and readmission agreement, which simplified the visa process for Azerbaijani citizens. For instance, thanks to the visa facilitation agreement, a vast number of students gained the opportunity to pursue their education in European higher

education institutions with less obstacles and paperwork.

Azerbaijan-EU relations are often seen as primarily driven by pragmatic considerations. Azerbaijan particularly focuses on cooperation in the economic sphere, which does not stipulate legally binding political commitments (Rasizade 2003). The EU states are the country's largest foreign trade partners and investors, while Azerbaijan is considered an important strategic partner in the energy sector, providing resources to meet a considerable portion of the EU's oil and gas needs (Chufrin 2019, 17). Azerbaijan serves as Europe's link to the wider Caspian region, where it lays energy-rich fields, and plays as a "key partner on Caspian regional energy projects" (Makili-Aliyev 2013, 10).

Indeed, the energy sector has been a defining factor in mutual cooperation between Azerbaijan and the EU since the early 1990s (Mammadov 2015, 33). The energy relations have revolved around the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC). The SGC consists of three pipelines that connect Azerbaijani energy to Georgia, Turkey, Greece, Albania, and then to Italy¹⁴. The main supplier for the SGC is the Shah Deniz field – located in Azerbaijan's sector of the Caspian Sea. The EU signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Azerbaijan in 2006, and later the Joint Declaration on the South Corridor in 2011, reiterating the union's commitments to energy projects. Moreover, in 2016, these foundations were further expanded under a new EU program, thanks to which Azerbaijan was entitled to take advantage of the EU's technological and financial resources to solidify the energy policy (Chufrin 2019, 17).

While the energy-trade-investment triangle is a strong determinant of the relations, there is a non-economic area where Azerbaijan demands further engagement from the EU – the Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijan believes that the EU should play a more assertive role and aim at greater involvement in resolving the Karabakh conflict. The conflict is Azerbaijan's primary security concern to a degree of defining the Azerbaijan-EU relations. The EU addresses the conflict within the framework of regional security led by OSCE, the organization judged as biased in the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict (Van Gils 2018, 747–48). At some point Azerbaijan suggested the inclusion of an EU representative in the Minsk Group (Van Gils 2018, 747–48). The EU's limited role in the conflict contradicts Azerbaijan's desire for increased EU support in Azerbaijan's call for justice and territorial integrity – values that EU seemingly cherishes.

¹⁴ Those three pipelines are the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) passing through Azerbaijan and Georgia, the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) crossing Turkey, and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) connecting Greece, Albania and Italy.

Nevertheless, the EU does not refute the fact that Karabakh is an integral part of Azerbaijan and has officially condemned the self-proclaimed republic's presidential and parliamentary elections as illegal and obstructive to conflict resolution (Fuller 2013, 9). The European Parliament (EP) has adopted three specific resolutions in 2010, 2012 and 2013 calling for the abandonment of the status quo created by force in the Karabakh region, the withdrawal of Armenian forces from occupied territories, and the resolution of the conflict in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions and the OSCE Minsk Group principles (Ismayilov 2014). Both the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the EP have condemned the occupation of Azerbaijani territories through resolutions, but no sanctions have been imposed as a result to meet Azerbaijan's expectations (Makili-Aliyev 2013, 6–7).

NATO is another 'Western' organization that Azerbaijan has actively pursued (military) cooperation with since its participation in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council – a consultative forum which was succeeded by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997¹⁵. The Partnership for Peace Framework signed in 1994 laid the foundation for Azerbaijan's engagement with NATO, encompassing political dialogue, participation in NATO-led operations, and cooperation on defense reform. Azerbaijan also joined the Planning and Review Process in 1997, aiming to achieve military connectivity and exchangeability with NATO troops, thus aligning its armed forces with Western standards. Azerbaijan has demonstrated its commitment to international security by participating in NATO-led operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo. The country's involvement in these operations has signaled its willingness to assume wider security responsibilities (Valiyev and Mamishova 2019b, 279).

Due to broader security concerns that equally address the South Caucasus region, NATO attaches strategic importance to Azerbaijan and has increased its engagement with the country. In addition to cooperation on various security issues, such as providing training and assistance to Azerbaijani armed forces, Azerbaijan also proved indispensable for the Alliance in the Northern Distribution Network, which was crucial for NATO's military efforts in Afghanistan. Azerbaijan's military was involved in NATO's non-combat mission "Resolute Support" in Afghanistan, with a contingent of military personnel working alongside NATO forces (Government of the

¹⁵ The council members "regularly exchange views on current political and security-related issues... Longer-term consultation and cooperation also takes place in a wide range of areas. These areas include crisis-management and peace-support operations; regional issues; arms control and issues related to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; international terrorism; defence issues such as planning, budgeting, policy and strategy; civil emergency response; armaments cooperation; nuclear safety; civil-military coordination of air traffic management; and scientific cooperation" (NATO, *Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council*, 2023).

Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.).

Last but not least, Azerbaijan actively participates in NATO's efforts related to disaster response coordination and the protection of important energy infrastructure. "Azerbaijan is the only country among NATO's partner countries involved in the important issue of energy infrastructure" (Mammadov 2015, 33). The country contributes to intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism training, and the improvement of border and infrastructure security in collaboration with NATO allies (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan n.d.b).

However, Azerbaijan's entry into the Non-Aligned Movement in 2011 implied the country's intention to pursue pragmatic and mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of security without committing to join any military alliance, including NATO. Azerbaijan seeks partnerships that bring advantages without the commitment of membership in specific military blocs. The country maintains a balanced approach and military neutrality in the region, though focusing on increasing its defense capability and developing its armed forces by any means be it collaboration with NATO. Azerbaijan does not regard joining NATO or the Collective Security Treaty Organization for that matter as a realistic plan (Azərbaycan beynəlxalq aləmdə [Azerbaijan in the international arena] n.d.). Instead, it prioritizes integration into the European security system while maintaining its own independent line of military security.

In order to prevent any possible isolation in the energy field, Azerbaijan never overlooks energy-related organizations and cooperation formats. Azerbaijan, a non-OPEC country, closely cooperates with OPEC in the 'OPEC Plus' format. The main objective of this cooperation is to establish a consensus on the global oil market, overseeing demand and supply ends. Azerbaijan hosted important meetings of the Joint Technical Commission and the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee in 2019, where progress in commitments and global trends in the oil market were discussed. The country's significance in the energy sector is also evident through its observer status in the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF). Azerbaijan's involvement in the GECF allows for the development of transit and export gas pipelines, regulation of sustainable gas production, exploration of Caspian gas pipeline interconnections, and the introduction of innovations to ensure energy security in the Caspian region (Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan n.d.).

Conclusion

Azerbaijan's active participation in various international organizations has been instrumental in promoting its interests and enhancing cooperation on multiple fronts. For instance, "UNSC Resolutions 822, 856, 874 and 884, the UNGA Resolution, as well as decisions and resolutions adopted by the NAM, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, the OIC, and other international institutions, constitute the international legal grounds for the resolution of the Karabakh conflict" (Habibbeyli 2017, 43). Even though authors rather avoid adopting still imprecise and arbitrary term "small state/power" to theoretically frame this article, they agree with the argument set by scholars like Asle Toje and Tom Long that small states, in this case Azerbaijan, attempt to gain influence and achieve their political objectives – named as foreign policy in this research – through active engagement with international organizations, seeing those organizations, among other factors, as a shortcut to minimize the higher costs of one-to-one diplomacy with each country in foreign policy¹⁶. Within international organizations, Azerbaijan has actively engaged in committee activities, hosted summits, proposed resolutions, and advocated for initiatives to foster dialogue, cooperation, and address global challenges. Azerbaijan's participation in international organizations has played a crucial role in projecting its image as a responsible global actor and advancing its interests on the international stage.

Azerbaijan has taken several initiatives within the UN, OIC, CIS, ECO, and the OSCE – what authors call traditional organizations for Azerbaijan – to promote its national interests, raise awareness about the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict, and seek support for the resolution of the Karabakh issue. Through its involvement in these organizations, Azerbaijan has been able to bring international attention to its territorial integrity, garner support for its position, and advocate for peaceful solutions. Azerbaijan's diplomatic efforts, sponsorship of resolutions, hosting of international events, and active participation in decision-making processes have solidified its role as a proactive global player and a contributor to international cooperation and dialogue.

Azerbaijan has always been in pursuit of new memberships in international organizations, taking a strategic and proactive approach in advancing its national interests, enhancing its global recognition, and actively participating in shaping global agendas. By joining organizations such as the NAM and the Council of Europe, Azerbaijan has diversified its diplomatic ties, engaged with new allies, and utilized platforms to voice its concerns

¹⁶ Read Asle Toje's "The European Union as a Small Power" (<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02128.x>) and Tom Long's "Small States, Great Power? Gaining Influence Through Intrinsic, Derivative, and Collective Power" (<https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viwo40>)

and advocate for its position. The country's active involvement in the NAM has allowed Azerbaijan to address the Karabakh conflict, while Azerbaijan's leadership within the organization during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated its ability to manage global health crises and contribute to the international response. Moreover, membership in the Council of Europe has provided Azerbaijan with opportunities to strengthen its commitment to human rights and engage in parliamentary discussions to highlight Armenia's aggression and advocate for the resolution of the conflict.

Azerbaijan promotes its national interests by investing in the creation of new fronts of cooperation. As a founding member of the Organization of Turkic States, Azerbaijan demonstrates its commitment to enhancing cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries in various areas, guided by shared roots, history, and culture. Azerbaijan, as one of the initiators of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, showcases its constructive approach and regional role, contributing to transportation and transit potential, and safeguarding strategic interests. Additionally, as a founding member of GUAM, Azerbaijan actively engages in promoting democracy, security, economic development, and conflict resolution in the region. Through its active participation, chairmanship, and support for initiatives, Azerbaijan continues to play a key role in shaping and advancing regional cooperation within these organizations.

On the other hand, Azerbaijan has been proactive in seeking partnerships with Western institutions, such as the Council of Europe, NATO, OSCE, and the European Union. Throughout its engagement with these international organizations, Azerbaijan has strategically pursued partnerships and cooperation schemes tailored to its interests, emphasizing pragmatic and mutually beneficial collaboration rather than pursuing full membership. Azerbaijan has established close cooperation with NATO, aligning its defense capabilities and participating in various areas such as military reform, defense sector, energy security, cyber security, and humanitarian assistance. Regarding energy-related organizations and cooperation formats, Azerbaijan demonstrates its commitment to staying informed, influencing narratives, and fostering regional and global energy cooperation.

References

Aliyev, Ilham. 2016. *Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Nationwide Festivities on the Occasion of Novruz Holiday*. Speech delivered March 19, 2016. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. <https://president.az/en/>

articles/view/19436.

Economic Cooperation Organization. 2012. *12th Summit and 20th COM*. <https://eco.int/12th-summit-and-20th-com/>.

Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan. n.d.a. *Azerbaijan - Organisation of Turkish States*. Accessed June 13, 2023. <https://azerbaijan.az/en/related-information/201>.

Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan. n.d.b. *Azerbaijan - UN*. Accessed June 22, 2023. <https://azerbaijan.az/en/related-information/191>.

Azərbaycan beynəlxalq aləmdə. n.d. *Presidential Library*. <https://files.preslib.az/projects/azerbaijan/gl9.pdf>.

Baylarov, Mehrban. 2023. "Analysis of Challenges and Opportunities for Azerbaijan in the International Arena." *Electronic Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 5 (II): 11–23.

GUAM. 2019. *Charter of Organization for Democracy and Economic Development*. <https://guam-organization.org/en/charter-of-organization-for-democracy-and-economic-development-guam/>.

Chufrin, G. 2019. "Международные организации экономического сотрудничества на постсоветском пространстве." *ПРОБЛЕМЫ ЕВРАЗИЙСКОЙ ИНТЕГРАЦИИ*: 9–20. <https://doi.org/10.20542/2073-4786-2019-4-9-20>.

Mincom.Gov.Az. *Cooperation with International Organizations*. Accessed July 22, 2023. <https://mincom.gov.az/en/view/pages/70>.

UNIDIR. 2019. *Final Document of the 18th NAM Summit*. <https://unidir.org/node/6072>.

Fuller, Elizabeth. 2013. "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict." *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, April. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09668>.

Habibbeyli, Arastu. 2017. "Reconsidering Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy on the 25th Anniversary of Restored Independence." *Perceptions XXII* (1): 29–48.

Huseynov, Vasif. 2023. "Azerbaijan Empowers the Non-Aligned Movement as a Formidable Global Actor - EU Reporter." *Eureporter*, March 6, 2023. <https://www.eureporter.co/world/azerbaijan-world/2023/03/06/azerbaijan-empowers-the-non-aligned-movement-as-a-formidable-global-actor/>.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan. n.d. *International Organisations*. Accessed June 5, 2023. <https://mfa.gov.az/en/category/xin.gov.az>.

- Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan. n.d. *International Organizations*. Accessed June 1, 2023. <https://minenergy.gov.az/en/>.
- Ismayilov, Murad. 2014. "Power, Knowledge, and Pipelines: Understanding the Politics of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy." *Caucasus Survey* 2 (1): 79–129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2014.11417304>.
- Makili-Aliyev, Kamal. 2013. "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy: Between East and West." *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, January. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep09669>.
- Mammadov, Farhad. 2015. "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy – A New Paradigm of Careful Pragmatism." *The South Caucasus Between Integration and Fragmentation*, May, 29–36.
- NATO. 2023. *Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council*. Accessed June 28, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20231203204223/https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49276.htm.
- Rasizade, Alec. 2003. "Azerbaijan in Transition to the "New Age of Democracy". *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 36 (3): 345–72. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X\(03\)00043-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0967-067X(03)00043-6).
- Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan. n.d. *Relations with International Organizations*. Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://www.sosial.gov.az/>.
- UN Security Council. 1993. *Resolution 822 (1993) / Adopted by the Security Council at Its 3205th Meeting, on 30 April 1993*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/165604>.
- Shiriyev, Zaur. 2016. "Azerbaijan's Perspectives on the Osce Minsk Group: Complicity in the Status Quo?" *Security and Human Rights* 27 (3-4): 442-466. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02703016>.
- Strakes, Jason E. 2013. "Situating the 'Balanced Foreign Policy': The Role of System Structure in Azerbaijan's Multi-Vector Diplomacy." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 15 (1): 37-67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2013.766085>.
- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. 2005a. "The Conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh Region Dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference." *Resolution 1416*, January 25, 2005. <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/17289>.
- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. 2005b. "The Conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh Region Dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference." *Recommendation 1690*, January 25, 2005. <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/17290>.

- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. 2014. "The Armed Occupation of Azerbaijani Territories by Armenia." *Doc. 13546, Motion for a Resolution*, June 24, 2014. <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/21042>.
- UN General Assembly. 2004. "The Situation in the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan - Letter Dated 11 Nov 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the UN Addressed to the President of the GA (A/59/568)" *Reliefweb*, November 11. <https://reliefweb.int/report/armenia/situation-occupied-territories-azerbaijan-letter-dated-11-nov-2004-permanent>.
- UN General Assembly. 2006. *The Situation in the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan: Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1493339>.
- Valiyev, Anar. 2017. "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy: What Role for the West in the South Caucasus?" In *Eastern Voices: Europe's East Faces an Unsettled West*, edited by Daniel S. Hamilton and Stefan Meister. Center for Transatlantic Relations. <https://transatlanticrelations.org/publications/eastern-voices-europes-east-faces-an-unsettled-west/>.
- Valiyev, Anar, and Narmina Mamishova. 2019a. "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy towards Russia since Independence: Compromise Achieved." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies by Routledge*, February, 269–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2019.1578053>.
- . 2019b. "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy towards Russia since Independence: Compromise Achieved." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 19 (2): 269–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2019.1578053>.
- Van Gils, Eske. 2018. "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy Strategies and the European Union: Successful Resistance and Pursued Influence." *Europe-Asia Studies* 70 (5): 738–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1479733>.

ABSTRACT

Active participation in international organizations allows states to advocate for their interests, contribute to global agendas, and build constructive relationships with other countries. Azerbaijan cooperates with international organizations to cultivate functional relations, diversify its partnerships, open up to new platforms, take crucial initiatives, coordinate global policies, embrace universal values and norms, facilitate collaboration in areas such as transportation and energy, and address specific challenges. This article argues

that Azerbaijan, despite being a small state, achieves foreign policy priorities by

- 1) setting the agenda and taking initiatives within international organizations;
- 2) engaging in new memberships with existing international organizations;
- 3) participating in the establishment of new international organizations; and
- 4) reaping the benefits of partnership schemes that require no membership.

KEYWORDS

Azerbaijan, international organizations, foreign policy, cooperation, membership, partnership

Received on April 15, 2024
Accepted on March 26, 2026

PARTNERS

NERINT

The Brazilian Centre for Strategy & International Relations (NERINT) was the first Centre in Southern Brazil to focus its study and research exclusively on the field of International Relations. It was established in 1999 at the Latin American Advanced Studies Institute (ILEA) of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and is currently part of the university's Centre for International Studies on Government (CEGOV). Its objective has always been the critical and innovative study of the international system's transformations after the end of the Cold War, from the perspective of the developing world. In parallel, NERINT has also sought to contribute to the debate on a national project for Brazil through the understanding of the available strategic options for the autonomous international insertion of the country.

The exploratory studies developed by NERINT on the new emerging countries since the threshold of the 21st century experienced remarkable expansion. Cooperation with state, business, academic and social institutions was intensified, as well as the direct contact with centres in Latin America, Africa and Asia, in addition to the existing ones in Europe and North America. An outcome of the Centre's activity was the creation of an undergraduate course in International Relations (2004) and a Doctoral Program in International Strategic Studies (PPGEEI, 2010). Two journals were also created: the bilingual and biannual *Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations* and the bimonthly journal *Conjuntura Austral*. In addition, since 2016, NERINT offers a bilingual Research Bulletin, published by graduate and undergraduate students and researchers of the Centre. NERINT is also partnered with UFRGS's Doctoral Program in Political Science (PPGPOL), established in 1973. Thus, besides the advanced research and intense editorial activities, NERINT is also the birthplace of innovative undergraduate and graduate programs.

PPGEEI

The Doctoral Program in International Strategic Studies (PPGEEI) started in 2010, offering Master's and Doctorate degrees, both supported by qualified professors and researchers with international experience. It is the result of several developments on research and education at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS).

Its roots can be traced to the Brazilian Centre for Strategy and International Relations (NERINT), established in 1999, established in 1999 and now affiliated with the Centre for International Studies on Government (CEGOV) at UFRGS.

The research tradition that gave rise to PPGEEI was based on a prospective analysis of the trends of the 1990s. The remarkable expansion of Brazilian diplomacy and economics from the beginning of the century confirmed the perspective adopted, which allowed the intense cooperation with the diplomatic and international economic organizations in Brazil. The Program is already a reference in the strategic analysis of the integration of emerging powers in international and South-South relations.

The Program's vision emphasizes strategic, theoretical and applied methods, always relying on rigorous scientific and academic principles to do so. For this reason, it has been approached by students from all over Brazil and several other countries, and it has established partnerships in all continents. Thus, PPGEEI is a program focused on understanding the rapid changes within the international system. Alongside NERINT, it publishes two journals: *Conjuntura Austral* (bimonthly) and *Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations* (biannual and bilingual). PPGEEI has three research lines

International Political Economy

It focuses on the international insertion of the Brazilian economy and other major developing countries in South America, Asia and Africa; discusses the characteristics and effects of globalization; and develops comparative and sectoral studies concerned with the effects of the internationalization of companies and productive sectors. Special attention is paid to international financial crises and its effects on Brazil and other countries of the South.

International Politics

It emphasizes the analysis of the process of formation, implementation and evaluation of foreign policy. It seeks to confront patterns of international integration of strategic countries in South America, Africa and Asia, considering institutional patterns, trade policy, structures of intermediation of interest, governance, International Law and the role of actors of civil society in the South-South axis of contemporary International Relations.

International Security

It approaches the defense, strategy and security issues in the international

system from a perspective that takes into account the most powerful states at the global level, but systematically introduces the question of the regional balances of power, the South-South axis, the existence of regional security complexes, military issues and the impact of information technology in the Digital Age.

CEGOV

The Centre for International Studies on Government (CEGOV) located at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) develops studies and research projects on governmental affairs from a comparative perspective. The Centre gathers researchers from several departments of the University, such as Political Science, International Relations, Law, Economics, Administration, Education, Urbanism and Computer Science. It encompasses scholars from the most traditional research groups at UFRGS, such as NERINT and CEBRAFRICA, specialised in a broad range of public policy areas.

CEGOV is chaired by a Director, and its policies and priorities are determined by an Advisory Board and a Scientific Board. The activities of the Centre are undertaken by working groups, which take the responsibility for specific projects. Currently, CEGOV has eight fully established and operating working groups. The Centre's researchers work on multidisciplinary projects covering the fields of international politics and governance, monitoring and evaluation of public policies, institutional development, Brazilian and South-American economy, comparative institutional design and decision-making processes, as well as public management, democratic controls and decentralisation of public services.

The Centre is a place for interaction among scholars from UFRGS and other academic institutions, highlighting its multidisciplinary and open nature, as well as its vocation to collaborative applied research. Being a reference for research on comparative governmental studies, CEGOV offers a wide range of extracurricular activities such as extension and specialisation courses, and advisory activities.

CEBRAFRICA

The Brazilian Centre for African Studies (CEBRAFRICA) has its origins in the Center of Studies Brazil-South Africa (CESUL), a program established in 2005 through an association between the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) and the Alexandre de Gusmão Foundation (FUNAG) of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its research activities are developed

in cooperation with the Brazilian Centre for Strategy and International Relations (NERINT).

In March 2012, CESUL was expanded into CEBRAFRICA. At the same time, the South African series, which published five books, was transformed into the African Series, with new titles. The Centre's main objectives remain the same as before: to conduct research, support the development of memoirs, thesis and undergraduate works, congregate research groups on Africa, organize seminars, promote student and professor exchanges with other institutions, establish research networks and joint projects with African and Africanist institutions, publish national and translated works on the field, and expand the specialized library made available by FUNAG.

The numerous research themes seek to increase knowledge of the African continent and its relations with Brazil on the following topics: International Relations, Organizations and Integration, Security and Defense, Political Systems, History, Geography, Economic Development, Social Structures and their Transformations, and Schools of Thought. CEBRAFRICA counts among its partners renowned institutions from Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, Canada, South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Senegal, Cape Verde, Egypt, Nigeria, Morocco, Portugal, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Sweden, Russia, India, and China. Current researches focuses on "Brazilian, Chinese, and Indian Presence in Africa", "Africa in South-South Cooperation", "African Conflicts", "Integration and Development in Africa", "African Relations with Great Powers", and "Inter-African Relations".

SUBMISSION STANDARDS

1. AUSTRAL: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations publishes only Scientific articles;
2. The research articles must contain a maximum of 12 thousand words;
3. The footnotes should be of complementary nature;
4. The bibliography must follow the rules of the Chicago system (Author-date or note-bibliography), specifying the used literature at the end of the text;
5. Contributions must be original and unpublished, and can be submitted in Portuguese, English or Spanish;
6. Contributions must contain the full name of the author, their titles, institutional affiliation (the full name of the institution) and an e-mail address for contact;
7. The complete filling of the submission form by the authors is mandatory;
8. Contributions from undergraduate or graduate students are allowed, as long as in partnership with a Professor or PhD, which will appear as the main author of the paper;
9. Manuscripts from only one author must be written by a Professor or PhD;
10. There is a limit of three (3) authors per article;
11. Contributions must be accompanied of: three keywords in Portuguese or Spanish and three keywords in English; title in English and in Portuguese or Spanish; abstract in English and in Portuguese or Spanish, both with up to 100 words.
12. Submissions must be made through the journal's website: <http://seer.ufrgs.br/Austral>

SUBMISSION PREPARATION CHECKLIST

As part of the submission process, authors are required to check off their submission's compliance with all of the following items, and submissions may be returned to authors that do not adhere to these guidelines.

1. Submitted manuscripts must constitute the authors' own original intellectual work. The use of generative artificial intelligence tools is prohibited in the preparation, in whole or in part, of submitted manuscripts. This includes, among other aspects, text generation and the creation of bibliographic references. All manuscripts will be screened using Plagius software. Any manuscript showing indications of the use of generative artificial intelligence tools in text production or research sources will be rejected.
2. Contributions must be original, and shall not have been submitted for publication in another journal; otherwise, it must be justified in "Comments to the Editor".
3. Submitted files must be in Microsoft Word, OpenOffice or RTF (as long as their size is up to 2MB) format.
4. URLs must be informed in the references when necessary.
5. The text must be single-spaced; Times New Roman typeface 12 pt must be used for the body of the text; italic is to be used instead of underline (except in URL

addresses); Figures and Tables must be embedded in the text.

6. The text must follow patterns of style and bibliographical requirements described in the About the Journal section.
7. The identification of authorship of the work must be removed from the file and the Properties option in Word, thus ensuring the confidentiality criteria of the journal, accordingly with available instructions in the website.

PREVIOUS ISSUES

Available online on:
www.seer.ufrgs.br/Austral

Volume 14, Number 28 (Jul./Dec. 2025)

Editor's Note

Brazil-China Relations under Lula and Bolsonaro: Rapprochement and Distancing Through Discourse (*Paulo Afonso Brardo Duarte and Lucas Braga Dutra*)

Changing Place: The New International Order and Brazil (*Luiz Augusto Faria*)

Foreign Policy in the Bolsonaro Government for Israel: The Two-Level Game and Pentecostal Influence (*Mohammed Nadir and Pedro Henrique Thuler de Oliveira*)

Mainstreaming Security Norms as Japanese Strategy to Gain Its Global Power (*Surwandono Surwandono, Ratih Herningtyas and Rizkii Dian Nursita*)

East Asian Cooperation Approaches towards Latin America and the Caribbean: The Cases of Japan, China, and South Korea (*Carlos David Zavarce Velasquez*)

ECOWAS Freedom of Mobility and Its National Security Implications for Nigeria (*Ayodeji Aduloju and Abimbola Opanike*)

Political Impasse and UN Intervention in Cote D'Ivoire (*Henry Kam Kah*)

Can Social Constructivism in IR Shape Foreign Policies? A Case of North Korea-China Relations (*Anmol Mukhia*)

Volume 14, Number 27 (Jan./Jun. 2025)

Editor's Note

Sino-Russian Cooperation and its Impacts on Central Asia (*Giorgio Romano Schutte and Diego Noveli Valadares*)

Disinformation in International Relations: Examining the Vulnerabilities of Brazil (*Leandro Loureiro Costa*)

Reflections on Brazil and Defense Cooperation: Between Historical Advantages and Challenges (1822-present) (*Kamilla Raquel Rizzi and Danielle Jacon Ayres Pinto*)

The Ukrainian War as an Anti-Systemic Imperative and its Geopolitical Consequences: the Rise of the BRICS Influence (*Charles Pennaforte*)

Canada's Contributions to Peacekeeping in Lebanon: Preserving Peace and Stability (*Mohamad Zreik*)

The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in the European Union: Causes and Consequences (*Adrian Cuevas Talens*)

A New Scramble? Geopolitical Economy of Multi-polarity in the Sahel and its Implications for Africa's Economic Sovereignty (*Al Chukwuma Okoli and Abdulkareem Alhassan*)

Energy and Natural Resources in the Argentina-China Relationship: Interests, Cooperation and Challenges (*Julián Bilmes*)

Ecopolitics and Ecological Trends in the Middle East. Realism or Utopia? (*Katarzyna Czornik*)

Volume 13, Number 26 (Jul./Dec. 2024)

Editor's Note

Mackinder's Heartland Thesis and the One Belt, One Road Initiative: Russia's Growing Dependence on China and the Ukraine War (*Hanna Samir Kassab*)

Hybrid Multilateralism: Greenpeace in the Global Climate Governance (*Ninda Soraya, Ali Muhammad and Sitti Zarina Binti Alimuddin*)

Astropolitics and USA-China's New Geopolitical Rivalry Area (*Syedmohammad Seyedi Asl*)

Kangaroo Concerns About Swimming Dragon Ambitions (*Saira Aquil and Waheed Ur Rehman*)

From Soft Balancing to Bandwagoning: Contemporary Brazil-US Relations in South America (*Augusto Leal Rinaldi*)

Russia's Deterrence Strategy in Nagorno-Karabakh: Implications for the Ukraine Invasion (*Miguel Paradela López*)

Options of Jordan Foreign Policy in Light of "Deal of the Century" Regionally and Internationally (*Sahar Tarawneh*)

Security Sector Reform and Peacebuilding: Analyzing Yemeni Civil Conflict Deadlocks (*Felipe Duran and Marcial Alécio Garcia Suarez*)

ASEAN People-Centered Regionalism and Strategy to Build Its People's Identity through Social Media Discourse (*Sugito Sugito*)

Book's Review of "A theory of global power", by José Luís Fior (*Helio Caetano Farias*)

Volume 13, Number 25 (Jan./Jun. 2024)

Editor's Note

Turkey's Dilemma And Strategic Stability (*Jean-Pier de Vasconcellos Esquia and José Miguel Quedi Martins*)

India's Strategic Choices in the Multipolar World (*Surendra Kumar Yadawa*)

Indonesia's G20 Presidency and Middle Power Diplomacy: Building Bridges between Developed and Developing Countries (*Tatok Djoko Sudiarto, Febry Triantama and Bimantoro Kushari Pramono*)

The Great Reset and the near-term implications for the Chinese economy: a post pandemic outlook (*Ramnath Reghunadhan and Joe Thomas Karackattu*)

U.S. Grand Strategy in the Early Cold War: Priorities, Concerns and Policy Actions (*Humayun Javed*)

The Impact of the Ukraine War on Antarctic Geopolitics through Fuzzy Cognitive Maps (*Luiz Octavio Gavião and Michael Bilac Barbosa de Oliveira*)

Development and metric validity of "Logistic Friction Scale (LFS)" for assessment of military border organizations' supply (*Tássio Franchi, Angela Nogueira Neves, Luis Fernando Tavares Ferreira, Eduardo Xavier Glaser Migon*)

Chinese migrant workers in Indonesia: a contested security issue (*Ali Maksum*)

Three Truly Realist Perspectives on the Russo-Ukrainian War (*Paulo Fagundes Visentini*)

Volume 12, Number 24 (Jul./Dec. 2023)

Editor's Note

Tribute to Samuel Guimarães

Global South versus Geopolitical South: a debate on the analytical relevance of the con-

cepts (*Rubens de Siqueira Duarte and Hugo Bras Martins da Costa*)

The twilight of US dollar hegemony and the coming multipolar world (*Armin Krishnan and Hanna Sammir Kassab*)

Contemporary British Politics in Africa (*Alisa Shishkina and Nikolay Medushevskiy*)

Analysis of Sweden's Attempt to Join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization After the Earthquake in Turkey: A Disaster Diplomacy Perspective (*Rista Herjani, Indianti Aghina Habiba and Surwandono Surwandono*)

New enemies, old strategies: Barack Obama's foreign policy from the perspective of the two presidencies thesis (*José Francelino Galdino Neto and Marcos Aurélio Guedes de Oliveira*)

Different global contexts of the Confucius Institute: a systematic literature review (*Ademir Macedo Nascimento and Kerou Xu*)

The governments of Mauricio Macri and Jair Bolsonaro: ideology, pragmatism and foreign policy (*André Coelho, Mariano Treacy and Beatriz de Mello*)

Review of the book "O Pensamento Autoritário Brasileiro e a Crise Mundial", by Paulo Fagundes Visentini (*José Miguel Quedi Martins*)

Volume 12, Number 23 (Jan./Jun. 2023)

Editor's Note

Latin America and the international scene: changes, dilemmas and challenges:

The Consolidation of the Brazilian Space Program: Changes and Challenges in the Third Space Age (*Marco Aurélio Chaves Cepik, Jaíne Garcia de Souza and Vanessa Redel Dal-Berto*)

The Crossroads between Actors, Norms, Practices and Institutions: mass migration from Venezuela in South America (*Sérgio Luiz Cruz Aguilar*)

MERCOSUR and post-COVID 19 exit strategies in terms of sustainable development: renewable energies and climate change (*Amalia Margarita Stuhldreher and Virginia Morales Olmos*)

Latin America and China's Belt and Road Initiative: Challenges and proposals from a Latin American perspective (*Victor Ramiro Fernandez, Juliana Gonzalez Jauregui and Gabriel Esteban Merino*)

Framing conditionality of foreign aid: a critical approach to international cooperation processes (*María Eugenia Vega and Oscar Parra*)

Articles:

When the Earth is not enough: the role of Outer Space in China's Grand Strategy (*Paulo Afonso Brardo Duarte, Neslihan Topcu and Daniel Santos*)

Unavoidable Clashes: Exploring the Implications of a China-Russia Alliance on Global Geopolitics (*Sanjar Yakhshilikov*)

The blind spot of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan relation with India: The second reign since August 2021 (*Mohammad Khalid Khawrin*)

The Belt and Road Initiative and the fate of Presidential mega infrastructures in Africa (*Amabilly Bonacina and Mamoudou Gazibo*)

A Tale of Two Jihads: Unraveling the Atrocities of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) in the Sahel (*Frederick Appiah Afriyie*)

NERINT Strategic analysis: The Brazilian challenge of reactivating Unasur and strengthening Mercosur (*Leonardo Granato*)

Volume 11, Number 22 (Jul./Dec. 2022)

Editor's Note

The Putin Doctrine: What is It? The Russian Strategic Issue and the Enlarged National Security (José Alexandre Altahyde Hage)

Political Analysis of the Purchase and Technology Transfer Process for Gripen Fighters (Francisco Pôrto Júnior e Marco Antônio Alves)

The East Mediterranean Gas Forum: Convergence of regional and energy security concerns (Stefy Joseph e Aneetta Thomas Peedikayi)

United States Foreign Policy towards Jordan from the Political and Security Dimensions from 1990 to 2017 (Ala Alkhawaldeh e Ayman Hayajneh)

The Foreign Policy of Post-revolutionary Iran: Expediency at the Crossroad of Supra-Nationalism and Sovereignty (Hamoon Khelghat-Doost)

The Belt and Road Initiative: Dynamics for Latin America and the Caribbean region (Anurag Tripathi, Abhishek R.L. e Arun Teja)

Maritime Diplomacy in the Indian Ocean: A Way Forward for Pakistan (Zaeem Hassan Mehmood e Ramla Khan)

Toward an Effective Asean Mutual Legal Assistance in Combating Non-Traditional Security Threats in the Southeast Asia Region (Syafinaldi Syafrinaldi, Rendi Prayuda and Syafri Harto)

Volume 11, Number 21 (Jan./Jun. 2022)

Editor's Note

The Systemic Cycles of Accumulation in the Work of Giovanni Arrighi: The 2008 Crisis, the End of US Hegemony and the Role of China (Analúcia Danilevicz Pereira and Igor Estima Sardo)

US Power and the Multinational Tech Companies of the Digital Era: An Analysis of the Obama and Trump Governments Oligopolization (2009-2021) (Cristina Soreanu Pecequilo and Francisco Luiz Marzinotto Jr.)

China's Contribution to the Stabilization of 'Democratic' Afghanistan (Lukasz Jureńczyk)

The Sultanate of Oman's Foreign Policy Towards the Yemeni Crisis: Pillars and Limitations (Khamis bin Ali Al-Sunaidi and Sahar Tarawneh)

Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific Region: A View from the Geostrategic Position of the Malacca Strait (Nguyen Tuan Binh, Tran Xuan Hiep and Tran Hoang Long)

The European Community's Contradictory External Behaviour: The Promotion of Integration in Latin America in the Late 1980s (Mayte Anaís Dongo Sueiro)

Fault Lines in Civilizations and Right-Wing Extremism: Germany's Experiment with Domestic Responsibility Vs. International Obligation (Stefy Joseph and Rhea Anthony)

Mozambique: A Comparative Study of the Foreign Policy of the Samora Machel and Joaquim Chissano Governments (Ercílio Neves Brandão Langa)

NERINT STRATEGIC ANALYSIS (2021/2) (various authors)

Volume 10, Number 20 (Jul./Dec. 2021)

Editor's Note

AUSTRAL: 10 Years of South-South Cooperation (Paulo Fagundes Visentini and Guilherme Thudium)

The Sino-Russian Geopolitics in Eurasia and China-USA Disputes: Asia-Pacific-Greater

Eurasia vs Indo-Pacific (*Marcos Cordeiro Pires and Lucas Gualberto do Nascimento*)

China and Russia: The Naval Projection of Land Powers (*Paulo Fagundes Visentini*)

Revitalization of Maritime Silk Road Based on the Security Implications and Cooperation (*Hélio Henkin, Rafael Pentiado Poerschke and Ricardo Dias da Silva*)

The Dynamics of the Succession of Currencies in the 21st Century – A Case of Chinese Financial Leadership? (*Gustavo de Moraes and Leonardo Giacomini*)

The Enduring Relevance of Naval Power: Defence, Security and Power Projection at Sea in Changing Strategic Environments (*Samuel Oyewole and Abiodun Duyile*)

Prioritization of Multilateral Agreements on Export Control of Defense Products and Sensitive Technologies by Hierarchical Analysis Process (*Luiz Octavio Gavião, Luciano Dias Dutra and Sergio Kostin*)

Defense Expenditure and Strategic Capabilities: Dissimilarities Among South American Countries (*Angela Nogueira Neves and Tássio Franchi*)

Globalization and the Changing Concept of NATO (*Umair Pervez Khan and Kashaf Sohail*)

Failed Strategy? The Legacy of Barack Obama's Presidency in The Middle East and North Africa (*Magdalena Lewicka and Michal Dahl*)

Security Studies in International Relations: Evolution, Approaches and Contemporary Challenges (*Ali Muhammad and Sugeng Riyanto*)

Regional Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy in West Africa: Issues And Challenges (*Enoch Ndem Okon and Dodeye Uduak Williams*)

New Dawn or Eternal Twilight? (*Vladimir Shubin*)

NERINT STRATEGIC ANALYSIS (2021/2) (*various authors*)

Volume 10, Number 19 (Jan./Jun. 2021)

Editor's Note

Taking Stock of the Thirty Years of Mercosur (*Leonardo Granato*)

National Defense and Development: Dialogues Between the Meaning of Hélio Jaguaribe's "Autonomy" Concept and the National Strategy of Defense (*Luiz Felipe Brandão Osorio*)

The Reform of the Brazilian Anti-Dumping Regime: A Partial Review of the Determinants and The Implications of Decree 8,058/2013 (*Pedro Nogueira da Gama Correio*)

A Zone of Twilight? Peace and Conflict in Latin America and the United Nations

(*Sezai Özçelik*)

The Dragon's Footprints in the South Pole: A Study on Chinese Strategies and Actions in Antarctica and its Implications for Brazil (*Alana Camoça Gonçalves de Oliveira*)

Colombian Military Transformation: Strategic Reality and Overcoming Resistances

(*Víctor M. Mijares and Paula Alejandra González*)

The Development of Geo-economics: A Path Towards an Institutional Liberalism Approach (*Ricardo Vega Perez*)

Revisiting the Us-China Trade War: A Strategic Assessment (*Ramla Khan and Zaeem Hassan Mehmood*)

The US Strategy for Short-Term Military Artificial Intelligence Development (2020-2030) (*Daniel Barreiros and Ítalo Barreto Poty*)

The Importance of the Middle East in Russian Foreign Policy (*Seyed Javad Emam Jomehza-deh, Sanaz Rostamjabri and Mahnaz Goodarzi*)

Africa and the 'Globalization Bargain': Towards a Collective Economic (*Al Chukwuma Okoli and Atelhe George*)

War and Conflict in the African Sahel as the Result of an Historic and Permanent War Between Two Empires: The Arab-Islamic Empire and The Western Empire

(*Mamadou Alpha Diallo*)

NERINT STRATEGIC ANALYSIS (2021/1) (*various authors*)