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NATO at the Crossroads: Strategic Pathways for Collective Security in the Ukraine–Russia War

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ABSTRACT

One of the most dramatic pieces of evidence of the shifting order in international governance structures is the emergence of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). BRICS is an economic label coined by a Western financial bank and which has gained a political and institutional life throughout the years. Its formation of the New Development Bank (NDB), its bold growth by its new members and its joint demands to reform the United Nations and international financial institutions all indicate a calculated threat to the hegemony of the post-1945 institutions. However, the history of BRICS is not a history of slow growth per se. There are also significant asymmetries within the group: the economic insulation of China, the isolation that Russia has self-inflicted and a long-standing hostility between India and China are constraining the strategic convergence. Though BRICS has carved a niche as an advocate of the Global South, many have criticized it as little more than mere rhetoric and little material results.

Simultaneously, BRICS has also acquired an additional burden in the form of the geopolitical situation. To address these pressures, the conflict in Ukraine, increased rivalry and hostility between the United States and China and the wish to challenge Western-centric financial power have all contributed to the increase of the attractiveness of other platforms. Instead of hegemony, BRICS will enshrine a new kind of energy management, reorganisation of trade, and innovative financial technologies, specifically the containment of the US dollar as the hegemonic currency (as evidenced by recent additions of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt to the BRICS).

But the future of BRICS lies in limbo: either, it can succeed in institutionalising itself as a more effective and efficient bloc that can then offer real alternatives to G7 and the institutions of Bretton Woods system; or fall prey to the need to be content with being an escape valve to avoid isolationism. One can also envision the scenario where self-division compels it to assume a mostly nominal role. More probable, however, is that it will be hybrid: BRICS will serve as a venue to challenge Western hegemony, elevate the political presence of emerging economies and experiment with new forms of collaboration, but will fail to build something that can be described as a bloc. BRICS has attracted attention not so much due to its immediate contribution to the order of the world, but, indeed, because it is one of the most prominent forerunners of the demand of a change at the global level in the structure of both power and representation. This is an indicator of a world that has become weary of the prospect of mono-polarity, yet remains incapable of settling on what multi-polarity ought to appear like in reality



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Keywords: NATO, BRICS, Security measures, Ukraine, Russia, War.

Background

The BRICS are a collective of countries identified based on a term coined by Goldman Sachs in the early 2000s to define the growth potential of Brazil, Russia, India and China economies. Politicisation of investment ensued in a short time and the first meeting of foreign ministers of BRIC countries took place in 2006 and the first summit in 2009. Following South Africa joining in 2010, the acronym changed to BRICS and it became a geographically and politically extended organisation.

BRICS was never a loose group of emerging economies that were pulling themselves out of abject poverty. It has presented a challenge to a sort of institutionalised world order, which had become entrenched in Western institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the G7. The creation of the New Development Bank (NDB) and Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) in 2014 was a practical step towards the development of the financially autonomous institutions outside the western dominated system. Even if of secondary importance in terms of the magnitude of Bretton Woods, they still constitute the collective vision of change and plurality of the world order. A broadened threat to U.S. uni-polarity has also been associated with the formation of the confederacy. The financial crisis of 2008 exposed the weakness of Western hegemony in finance; the new economic rise of China, and the new demand of Russian assertiveness and middle power politics exposed the backwardness of the orthodox paradigms of power to global issues and problems. It is at this level that BRICS has found its niche as a platform that non-western actors can use to air their concerns-whether it is financing to developing countries, or energy security to action on climate change, or action on digital governance.

And contradictions in the BRICS have never been new: All members of it are very diversified in terms of their economies and political systems as well as strategic associations and interests regionally. This is why the rise of China as the most significant economy in the world and as one of the key actors in international relations seems to conflict with the balancing efforts of India as a composite country, Brazil as a country with domestic restrictions, as well as the pariah status of Russia in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine. Even these conceptual differences generate ambiguities in the nature of the unifying agent of the classification and the possibility of the classification being a unifying agent.

However, in the face of such tensions, BRICS has been able to do nothing but rise. It is increasingly becoming appealing and it is also increasingly becoming ambitious in strategy as witnessed by the recent entrants of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt among others. BRICS has established itself in the intersection of debates on energy security and supply chain resilience, as well as de-dollarization, through its contacts with both heavyweight and key producers of energy in its geography. To most Global South states it offers a platform, however inadequately, where they could experience a voice and some sense of control that would have been lacking in Western dominated fora. So BRICS history can be characterised as history of a set of countries that occupies an intermediate position between ambition and restraint. It provides a perception of how the multipolar world would desire to be and, at the same time, in fact at least to generate a solidarity between WIN-WIN divergence of national interests. The question that is of key interest to its further development is whether it can transform symbolic solidarity into structural power.



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NATO concerning the Ukraine Russia war.

The invocation of collective defence in the moment.

This full-scale invasion by Russia of Ukraine in February 2022 led to mobilisation of NATO elements of the defence strategy and it was the first mobilisation of the NATO Response Force in the collective defence scenario. It was also a quick step that knifed the allied movement together and helped to build the argument that the alliance is about to take the offensive in case the impetuosity comes true. The originally very symbolic mechanism was rendered viable as a means of deterrence.

Troops, Borders: The troops of NATO in the eastern flank are increased to the largest number, at least that which was prepared during the post-Cold War period; not only are the numbers prepared to be deployed, but at least until 2023 the plans have been prepared to deploy them.

One effect of NATO response that has been significant and long term, is the reinforcement of the eastern flank.

Strengthened Forward Presence (eFP) - Battlegroups in Poland and the Baltic states have already been extended to Romania, Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria.

The hidden agenda of this architecture is simple: the security of NATO eastern member countries has been described as inalienable core interest of the Alliance, the first time ever.

Doctrinally and quantitatively, it reflects an addition to include the fact that credible firepower in theatre is now a component of the concept of deterrence.

Military Strategic Planning and Defence Strategy.

During the 2022 NATO Summit on the Cooperation between Europe and North America NATO announced that its high-readiness force would be increased to more than 300,000 troops, up from 40,000. Military support - The western nations that supported with military support (training and providing high tech weapons) include military support by United States, United Kingdom, Poland. The transition is creating new logistics, interoperability and financial demands.

Supporting the RS in Ukraine

Direct aid to the lethal means has not been extended, but at the institutional level of NATO it has been crucial to the provision of organising factors:

Institutional Capacity Building: Trust funds on cyber defence (NATO trust fund on cyber protection) and medical assistance, but also trust funds on modernisation and rehabilitation of Ukrainian defence industry already exist.

Logistic platform: the alliance has ensured the delivery of the political legitimacy and logistical platform to structure member-state contributions.

As a policy, Governance theory, Escalation Deterrence.

NATO will also have to ensure that its measure hits the correct balance between console its allies and not antagonise Russia into conflict.

Great Power Re-alignment and Enlargement: Implications in a Geo-strategic Framework (GPRGE) contains:

A better air-policing operation.

+ better naval observance of the Black Sea;

Training with large forces is therefore common.

This two level approach is characteristic of NATO attempts to project power within the framework of controlled escalation.

The 2023 accession of Finland and the 2024 accession of Sweden constitute a tipping



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point in relation to the geography of NATO:

Logistical: Organisational and internal processes must be in balance in order to experience growth.

Baltic security: The two States are members of the NATO and thus virtually surrounded with allies bordering the Baltic Sea.

Other than it has turned into an object of (reinforcing) deterrence, enlargement introduces further layers of complexity into NATO co-operation and planning.

War Fatigue: Public tiredness in particular members states is highest ever as a result of constant stream of war-related news, inflationary effects, energy price increases, and more.

But NATO is too weak internally, too rigid externally:

Allies of Ukraine: The rest of the world, weary of the Eastern Europe hiding behind Ukraine, have cowered back to wait and sneak around to find some kind of negotiated slurry.

Arguably, the manner in which such tensions are handled will be affecting the long-term coherence of NATO.

Developing Inter-group Relationships.

Competing roles, roles that are indivisible.

NATO states that Russia qualifies as the greatest direct threat to NATO and China qualifies as a systemic challenge based on the NATO Strategic Concept 2022.

Even though most western members back principle and Ukraine is deemed relevant enough to have US trigger the veto, some members are still of the opinion of wanting to know about what is going on escalation, economic pressure and domestic political pressure. The danger of being stretched thin between obligations in Europe and being requested to tune in more closely to the Indopacific security dialogue. A more pertinent question would be can NATO survive as a Euro-Atlantic alliance, yet now must have the capability to counter interconnections of global security challenges like cyber, space security, and disinformation campaigns.

Key Challenges

Cost of Speech: accord and thrift.

NATO is an alliance or consensus and principled structure and the war has increased the polarities among companions. Concession and negation is a required evil to remain together. Besides, deterrence is subject to miscalculation. In its absence, Moscow would seek to drive wedge issues into the alliance.

Managing Escalation Risks

Both of them imply a break with the past: civilian nations need to train more frequently, integrate more with Ukrainian military forces, reduce the distance to Russian borders to guarantee the validity of NATO, yet increase the risk of an accidental escalation. Grand Strategy to overstretch a declaration of war (*casus belli*) that appears to intentionally cause an escalation that its issuers would have otherwise avoided.

Energy prices and inflation: The war-induced inflation has spread into energy markets and into state budgets.

It is natural, too, that its leaders must be brought down somewhere, where they can test the ground quality, and that is between the verisimilitude of the military and the domesticity of such policy. Citizens of some countries in NATO are demanding the long-term sustainability of defence commitments made by many NATO countries to Ukraine. And long-term strategic commitments should be based on good domestic base.



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Nor is the issue of Finland and Sweden simply a consolidation of the NATO role in North Europe but also its functioning ability.

Logistics and resources are required to provide an extension of the military to sustain the coalition. The greatest difficulty, perhaps, is the difficulty of the uncertainty of the war. Meanwhile, NATO is also being mobilised to bear a share of problems beyond Europe-cyber threats to Indo-Pacific competition. There is a very real danger of over-extension to the verge of strategic burnout.

It was not a clear idea what the War would be like.

Enhanced Deterrence and Defence Posture: in addition to an extended standstill, which follows the establishment of a negotiated settlement, NATO will develop contingency plans including further escalation. Prepare a programme of labour in every conceivable case, without, perhaps, consuming a resource or credit, is a difficult thing, and will bring into play the dexterity of the consortium.

Strategic Pathways for NATO

NATO is not likely to drop a lot of bombs, since NATO is an alliance, but can never be converted into a fighting force, but under these circumstances NATO may be of valuable benefit in helping their members through better tools, training, intelligence.

NATO might enable a gradual accumulation of forces and modernised air defence structures to the east side, with permanent bases. This would make the periphery states, such as Poland and the Baltic states, feel secure, and there would be no second thoughts as to the desire of NATO to take active action on its own to effect a common defence. Nonetheless, these types of deployments would be costly to maintain and would appear an escalation measure to Moscow.

Repackage Military Aid to Ukraine.

And the low-way will provide Ukraine with that machinery by which alone it will be able to maintain in the turns of the enemy that equality without losing in the same event its own interest in the precipitate conflict. This must certainly be subtler and NATO must be capable of conveying deterrence without suggesting that diplomacy is limited (as though it does not include all alliances). Then transparency would be an important part of credibility on the extent and limits of supporting.

Pursue Diplomatic Openings

Whereas movement towards the direction of negotiation appears to be a far-fetched proposition, NATO can also play a positive role, prompting dialogue between the parties through the intermediaries of neutral states or international organisations. Where breakthroughs are not provided immediately, this involvement can help contain the threats of escalation, and the trajectory of future settlement. Building the Resilience of the Economy and Energy.

Sanctions have helped in punishing Russia, but this has not been done without a cost to the economy of Europe.

In this respect, NATO, but also the EU, the G7 could achieve a significant mission as they could help to ensure energy diversification, strengthen the security of important infrastructure and minimise the weakness of supply chains. Production - there must be a robust homefront to underpin long-term strategic commitments. A healthy domestic base is needless to say the basis to long-term strategic commitments.

5. On the basis of its cooperation of enlargement beyond the Euro-Atlantic.

The rest of the world is affected by the Ukraine crisis. NATO might further expand into



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the Indo-Pacific to include Japan, South Korea and Australia so as to affirm the values and common ground in the creation and upholding of future sovereign states and their domains. Even though outreach would not transform NATO into a truly transoceanic alliance, it would be more effective in responding to challenges which are increasingly connecting the European and Asian theatres.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the policy option analysis, we offer the following policy recommendations:

I. Hybrid and Cyber Defence: Letting the Skills Be Institutionalised.

Improving NATO security policy to include hybrid and cyber threat.

Establish proper coordination to give sufficient response to cyber-attacks, disinformation and threats to critical infrastructures;

As a matter of fact, this concept develops resilience even in the absence of the problem of direct military escalation.

Not excessive militarisation; pacifies Frontline Allies.

Dispatched forces to the east flank of NATO, but not standing formations.

Categorical Differences - Golden Martin - Deterrence Credibility vs. Resource Sustainability.

The decisions that are already being implemented will not only alter the course of the war, but also European and world security in the future.

The current decisions made will not just affect the future of the conflict, but also European and global security itself.

The substitution of a fixed mechanism of defence expenditure with a flexitarian one, through the introduction of a contribution model.

And there is an opportunity to compensate finance, technology and logistics inputs.

Enhances unity of the alliance, which enables smaller states to compensate in numbers.

Assuring channels of communication with Russia.

Another one is to minimise risk by limiting military-to-military contact, diplomatic contact, etc.

Assists in proactively de-escalating whilst making some effort to appear to NATO that you are trying to maintain the status quo.

C. Makes NATO a responsible but credible security actor;

Conclusion

Due to the conflict in Russia-Ukraine, NATO has reached a critical point. The challenge to the alliance is undertaken in two ways, firstly, against another Russian encroachment and, secondly, to ensure the internal unity and integrity of the members. The measures being taken will not only alter the course of the conflict, but will also define the future of European and world security. The reactions of NATO have demonstrated not only that collective defence is still a relevant concept, but that the ideal of cohesion is exploited against the divergent national interests involved. The game here-and it is a most delicate game-is between deterrence and diplomacy, between the safety of the hour and the permanence of the age. When it is put into consideration, that the cost of doing nothing is likely to bring its own punishment in the form of a loss of trust between partners and allies, such inaction may serve as a way of making the overstretch burn even higher.

The war has also proven that security has ceased being a military term. There is one more noteworthy characteristic which should be mentioned here, in that the world hegemony competition, NATO is no less occupied with economic weight-energy insecurity than the firepower and weaponry transfers. Security as understood in this larger sense implies a



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certain amount of flexibility, greater conformity to the EU and similar partners, and acceptance of a balance of priorities in the face of a changing situation. Robustness: The initial task of NATO is not to cope with the crisis, rather it is to convince the world that their very concepts of sovereignty, collective security and a rule-based order is robust enough to resist the allure of a lasting conflict. What comes of this moment in terms of the alliance will be whether that emerges stronger than ever and moving forward or whether that is reactive and harmed. That is to say, we are currently making some hard choices, but also very consequential to the transatlantic community and to the security of the international order in the long-run.

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