

BRICS IN THE GLOBAL GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION: CHALLENGES TO NATIONAL SECURITY OF RUSSIA

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***Abstract.** In the article, the most probable scenarios for BRICS development have been analyzed, a list of specific steps for ensuring geopolitical “flexibility” and effectiveness of the BRICS in addressing global governance issues has been provided. Currently, a multipolar world order is forming, but developed Western countries are trying to restrain the growing multipolarity, prevent the growing influence of developing countries and maintain their leadership in the system of global governance institutions by various means. In such circumstances, challenges to national security of Russia are substantially transformed, multiplied and increased. According to the authors of this article, under these conditions a consistent, balanced development strategy, which implies its own logic, a model of further institutionalization of the association, should most comply with the national interests of five BRICS countries. BRICS is a new phenomenon in the international life: in its structure and organizational form it does not resemble any military-political alliances that were traditional for the era of bipolarity. “Deterrence of multipolarity of the international system” and “BRICS-corporation” are the most probable vectors of BRICS. The author proves that the “BRICS-corporation” scenario most clearly reveals all the existing diplomatic, economic and technological potential of the five countries, as it implies not a passive policy of response to the actions of the West, but an active and forward strategy, where the focus is on the implementation of large-scale economic, investment, scientific and infrastructure projects in various regions of the world.*

***Keywords:** BRICS, a development scenario, a bipolar world, a multipolar world, geopolitics, national security, geopolitical competition, international relations.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the new millennium, the USA could become the most powerful center of attraction in the world, concentrating enormous economic, financial, military, scientific and technical resources and expanding its cultural influence around the world. However, contrary to the expectations of some Western futurologists, "world history" does not end here: it turned out that only a few countries and peoples took full advantage of globalization, while others were forced to adapt, "embed" in a new unipolar system of relations that was known to be unfair and limited their influence in the world.

Some countries, primarily thanks to an enormous national potential, have successfully adapted and today they form the core of BRICS – a kind of "a territory of independence", a coalition of states rejecting hegemony and standing for a multipolar structure of the world [1].

Although experts and politicians from among the BRICS countries regularly stress that activities of the association are not anti-Western, as for global governance issues BRICS contests the status quo formed in the international system and updates deep contradictions between developed and developing countries. The emergence of this organization has strengthened the national security of Russia, helping its positioning in the global geopolitical competition.

In the context of mutual distrust, a further increase in conflicts and strengthening the confrontation between the great powers is inevitable, and this is perhaps one of the few theses that are fully shared by both Russian [2] and Western researchers [3].

Recent events in the international life of the BRICS association evidence the aggravation of the geopolitical competition in global politics: impeachment in Brazil, to the power of which came the Vice President of the country M. Temer, who was convicted of having links with the intelligence services of the USA, [4] a corruption scandal in South Africa, which has affected the country's top leadership and ended almost the same as in Brazil, [5] the condemnation by the Pentagon of a rise of China's military power, followed by a harsh reaction of Beijing, [6] and, certainly, the conduct of military exercises of NATO "Anaconda-16", the most ambitious since the cold war, near the Russian immediate borders [7].

According to the US National Security Strategy of 2015, along with international extremist organizations, China and Russia are among the main threats to US security as revisionist powers that challenge the existing international standards and regional stability [8]. Obviously, the main feature of this period in world politics is that developed Western countries are trying to restrain the growing multipolarity, prevent the growing influence of developing countries and maintain their leadership in the system of global governance institutions by various means.

In such circumstances, challenges to national security of Russia are substantially transformed, multiplied and increased. Such existing internal threats specific, however,

of many developing countries, such as economic and social inequality, corruption, inter-ethnic and religious conflicts, are complicated by various external threats. Primarily these threats include international terrorism and extremism, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, cross-border crimes, as well as political instability and regional conflicts in Eurasia: Ukrainian crisis, a Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, an Afghan problem, an increase in aggressiveness [36].

In the Russian political establishment and expert community there is a prevailing view that Russian geopolitical opponents make efforts for the country's international isolation, creating around it "a necklace" of local conflicts and instability in neighboring countries, organization of coups and "orange revolutions" in these countries with the aim of bringing pro-Western and anti-Russian politicians to power.

Ultimately, these measures would disrupt Moscow integration initiatives in Eurasia, dent its "reformist enthusiasm" in matters of global governance, as well as force the country's top leadership to solve internal problems in the conditions of the general political and economic instability.

It is obvious that in the globalized world Russia can effectively counter such threats only in cooperation with other states in a non-hostile international environment. In this context, BRICS should be regarded as a tool that allows the five countries to survive and develop in cooperation in the conditions of an increasing geopolitical competition.

2. METHODS

Methodological difficulties related to the study of the national security of Russia are conditioned by the presence of different paradigmatic bases of its scientific studies in which there is a wide variation in perceptions of what is national security in general. "An activity-based paradigm", "a paradigm of interests" and "a paradigm of values" can be identified as such bases.

Strategic national priorities which are the most important areas of national security are the most important national goals [35]. The researchers note that "the system of national goals is a kind of a compromise between three approaches to their definition. The first approach to the formation of the system of goals called "Top-Down" in the Western strategic planning system is based on the national interests. In this case, the definition of goals is aimed at maximum compliance with the "needs and desires of the nation". The second approach is a kind of an antithesis of the first one and it is called "Bottom-Up". It is based on evaluation of actual possibilities of the state to satisfy those or other interests. Finally, a third approach – "upon conditions of the situation" – requires considering not so much the national interests as many threats to these interests and refusal of an active national security policy".

Overcoming paradigmatic one-sidedness of the scientific study of national security also involves the development of a methodological construct within the neoclassical research model, which is based on the principle of constructive realism. Such construct

of the study of national security implies the synthetic use of a methodological potential of “a paradigm of interests”, “a paradigm of values” and “a paradigm of activities” supplemented with heuristic capabilities of the “soft power” theory.

3. RESULTS

Here is one of the most acute and topical issues of the BRICS development. Behind the common aspiration of member states for the formation of outlines of the multipolar world order meeting the national interests of the five countries best of all, there should be a consistent, balanced development strategy, which implies its own logic, a model of further institutionalization of the association.

Some Western researchers have concluded that the BRICS association is lagging behind in terms of creating adequate structures, rules and regulations, collective decision-making procedures, which would significantly increase the effectiveness of political cooperation [30]. Such formulation of the problem often leads researchers astray, forcing them to concentrate on the problems of formal institutionalization, comparisons (often meaningless) of BRICS with other international organizations.

Institutional “looseness” perceived by many critics as a major drawback of the association is considered by many Russian scientists, on the contrary, as a weighty advantage. According to these authors, the lack of a rigid formalized structure ensures the flexibility and dynamism of the group activities, making BRICS an effective mechanism of political coordination and economic cooperation [31]. Such features as novelty, originality and difference from the old schemes can give the association a competitive advantage in the rapidly changing world.

In our opinion, the main problem of BRICS today is not so much a weakness of institutional interaction within the group, but the lack of a strategy. In this case this is not about a cooperation strategy of BRICS, but about a strategy involving the joint development of a model of a new polycentric world order.

It is not a secret that at the back of skepticism of Western researchers to the BRICS project there is often a distrust of the concept of a multipolar world in general. As noted by Z. Laïdi, developing countries have neither a desire and capabilities, nor power and unity to offer a new, fairer system of global governance [32]. Can we imagine a situation in which the West, voluntarily making unimaginable and unprecedented concessions to developing countries, abandons its hegemonic aspirations in favor of the future that is even more instable and uncertain in their opinion? [33] The answer is obvious; therefore, the creation of an attractive, well-thought-out and coherent concept of the multipolar world may be the first and most important step of BRICS towards the implementation of its main geopolitical mission.

Thus, the logic of common interests of the BRICS countries sets out natural outlines of the institutionalization of the association. Today, it is already obvious that BRICS is a new phenomenon in the international life: in its structure and organizational form

this association resembles neither any military-political alliances that were traditional for the era of bipolarity like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact, nor integration economic groups that are specific of the current period (such as the Association of SouthEast Asian Nations or Mercosur). At the same time, the potential of BRICS aspires to create a structure that goes far beyond the format of the discussion club (G7 or G20 type).

How can we imagine the future of BRICS in the global geopolitical competition?

In 2016, a group of authors [2], on the basis of their own strategic forecasting methodology, developed a number of global development scenarios, based mainly on how the collective Western countries “react” to the economic, political and civilizational challenge of the developing world.

Depending on the reactions of the West, which can be figuratively summarized as “adoption-adaptation-cooperation” or “denial-confrontation-competition”, five corresponding scenarios of further development of the system of international relations can be specified. Without going into detail on each one, let us consider the most probable vectors of BRICS development in the context of these forecasts.

As for the first original scenario called “containment of a multipolar international system”, Western countries are trying to prevent the growing influence of developing countries and maintain their leadership in the system of global governance institutions by various means.

The main objective of the West in this scenario is to gain sufficient time in order to regain economic leadership, achieve a decisive military and political superiority or subordinate the developing world to its influence with the “soft power” policy [2].

In this scenario, the political component of the global agenda of BRICS will only grow. The fundamental refusal of the West of the cooperation strategy will encourage BRICS countries to expand cooperation with developing countries and to consolidate their interests around the global governance issues.

However, negotiations on the reforms in the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund will gradually reach a deadlock, which will contribute to the emergence of institutions similar to the BRICS New Development Bank. Although it is more likely that a quantitative representation of countries in BRICS will not increase, there will be new forms of cooperation of five BRICS countries with other countries and international organizations (BRICS + Iran, BRICS + the Association of South East Asian Nations, etc.), which will lead to the legitimization of the association and its actual recognition as a full-fledged actor in the system of international relations.

Meanwhile, the Western countries that do not directly confront with the BRICS countries, will search for the ways to “neutralize” the opponents, creating coalitions against them from among the neighboring countries, organizing coups and supporting the most radical, extremist political groups. All this will lead to deepening of the

cooperation of the BRICS countries in the sphere of security and information policy, the establishment of the relevant inter-ministerial committees.

Priority will be given to the development of regional infrastructure projects designed to ensure the safe international environment of the BRICS countries and promote trade relations. In this regard, a kind of transfer of the primary economic activity into the regional integration associations should be expected, while the BRICS competence will still include the issues related to global governance, security maintenance and the formation of a common strategic agenda of the five countries.

If in the development of this scenario BRICS can resist the pressure from Western countries and preserve its own coherent strategic agenda and the West, for whatever reasons, cannot effectively restrain the growing multi-polarity in the world and focus on significant resources for open confrontation, BRICS will have a historic opportunity to change a predominantly defensive strategy onto an active and offensive one.

We called this BRICS scenario "BRICS-corporation" by analogy with the name of the forecast presented by a group of Russian researchers in 2014. According to the authors of the study, in this case BRICS has the potential to become the main agent for solving the problems of the developing world [34]. In our opinion, the "BRICS-corporation" scenario will most clearly reveal all the existing diplomatic, economic and technological potential of the five countries, as it will mean not a passive policy of response to the actions of the West to a greater extent, but an active and offensive strategy where the main focus will be on implementation of large-scale economic, investment, scientific, infrastructure projects in various regions of the world.

It is very likely that under the BRICS "brand" technologies will be developed in the sphere of space exploration, environmental protection, solution of food security problems, etc., large-scale transport networks linking disparate regions and contributing to the deepening of economic and humanitarian cooperation between the countries will be built.

The BRICS control system will be constructed on the corporate model, where chief executives of the countries may act as "the head of the corporation" and "the Board of Directors" and the Parliamentary Assembly will have a function of the "Supervisory Board" [34].

Through the coordinated information policy and diplomatic efforts the BRICS countries will be able to create a positive image and enhance their credibility in the international arena that will lead to the refusal of the key developed countries of the confrontation and transition to a mutually beneficial cooperation.

Ultimately, the implementation of this scenario will lead to a moderate stabilization of relations with the West and the world will be engaged in the formation of a multi-polar system of international relations.

4. DISCUSSION

Speaking about BRICS as an instrument of the geopolitical competition, it is important to note that the cooperation within this association is based on the principles of priority of national interests of the participating countries. Ignoring this fact often forces some Russian researchers to reassess the geopolitical potential and actual possibilities of BRICS. In particular, ambitious ideas of considering BRICS as a world global governance organization that can make their demands on the other members of the global process in the form of an ultimatum, are put forward [9]. Other scientists suppose that it is possible to create its own model of BRICS global security at the adequate level of institutionalization of the association [10].

In general, despite the recognition of incompleteness of the institutionalization process and lack of comparability of military and political potentials of BRICS and Euro-Atlantic structures, Russian scientists have high hopes for the association, considering BRICS as a possible alternative, a kind of "the second world".

While the current Russian tradition proposes to analyze BRICS from the perspective of classical geopolitics, most foreign researchers create works on issues of "critical geopolitics" – a relatively new scientific field in the study of geopolitical processes. Thus, an Indian researcher K. Meena defines BRICS as "*a geopolitical image that can be implemented as a global geo-strategic project*" [11, p. 35]. In its turn, this geopolitical image is based on consideration of the BRICS countries as powers that are actively included in the processes of globalization, have a great influence on their regions and create the appearance of an alternative to the existing system of global governance for developing countries [11].

In general, foreign researchers recognize BRICS as a major force, which is a union of the most influential developing countries that challenge the Western hegemony. Some scientists, such as S. Vezirgiannidou, believe that the new world order will become more polycentric, where each state will aspire to establish its own regional sphere of influence. According to the author, an increasing fragmentation will not necessarily lead to a greater instability in the system of international relations [12].

Supporting this view, Chinese researchers suppose that the strengthening of the role of BRICS in the world geopolitics will lead to the destruction of the monopoly of Euro-Atlantic countries in the global governance system and, as a result, to the decline of western geopolitical concepts: hegemony, priority of democracy and Western political dualism, etc. [13].

As for the Russian discourse of BRICS, it should be noted that among the researchers cautious optimism in assessments of the prospects and the future of the association is mainly dominated. Scientists have noted that one of the priorities of BRICS should be the creation of such international architecture, in which developing countries would be given more opportunities to defend their interests and the international monetary system would serve the interests of all countries [14].

Further discussing this issue, Vinogradov A.V. thinks that BRICS has the potential to offer a new concept of justice not only in the sphere of monetary and financial relations, but in all areas of activity: trade, provision of natural resources, political and humanitarian links [15].

Russian scientists, unlike their foreign colleagues, tend to regard BRICS as an entrenched and recognized international institution [16]. In other words, the category of BRICS implies not just an association of states, but a kind of ideologically consolidated and organizationally single entity.

However, a distinguishing feature of the Russian approach to the study of BRICS is an emphasis on the role of civilizational features of the countries in the association. In other words, the studies of Russian researchers are focused not only on socio-economic features and models of the BRICS countries, but also on their cultural and value-oriented measurement. Thus, Toloraya G.D. defines BRICS as the first inter-civilization project of the development of rules of the global community [17], while Sadovnichy V.A. and Yakovets Yu.V. consider BRICS as a geo-civilization association of a new generation focused on the dialogue and partnership of civilizations in response to challenges of the new century [18].

In this regard, Martynov B. draws a distinction between "rising countries" and "rising civilizations", which are the BRICS countries, and says that the rise of other developing countries (Mexico, Pakistan, Indonesia) will not have such an impact on world politics [19].

The civilization approach to a varying degree covers virtually all BRICS problematic fields. However, this feature is most clearly evident in the analysis of the author's position on the issue of harmonization of national interests of the BRICS countries.

It should be noted that the incompatibility of interests and economic, political and cultural heterogeneity of the BRICS countries have always been one of the "cornerstones" of the critics of the association. The main arguments of invalidity of the BRICS project put forward by skeptics include a fundamental incompatibility of national interests of the participating countries, [20] different approaches to consideration of the key themes of world politics [21] and even differences in the outlook of the five countries [22].

However, many national researchers, by contrast, tend to view this "difference" as a positive characteristic and diversity in the development models as an undoubted benefit in itself [23]. Describing the BRICS countries, Nikonov V.A. notes that each of these civilizations developed experience of cultural and religious tolerance and the BRICS countries can take their partners as they are.

Moreover, in international affairs the BRICS countries can be distinguished by a number of common principles: opposition to unilateralism, mutual consideration of interests, observing the principles of a multipolar world [19].

Continuing this thought, Lukashik A. supposes that for constructive cooperation it is not necessary to unify positions and “line up” all countries, as this involves imposing opinions. Principal consensus and understanding of the perspectives of movement are enough [24]. According to Uyanaev S.V., the existing contradictions do not prevent cooperation, but should be persistently monitored [25].

Moreover, according to Kiva A.V., differences in levels of development, historical past and culture in the presence of common global interests – this is what “ensures a long life for BRICS” [26].

Consideration of BRICS as an organization of non-Western countries-civilizations naturally raises the question of what kind of value orientations and innovations can be offered by BRICS in the emerging world order. For example, Lunev S.I. [27] indicates that a number of philosophy schools of Chinese, Indian and Russian communities have always paid special attention to the man, his/her harmonious perfection and development of moral qualities.

In his turn, Horos V. notes that the global political practice can be enriched with the Indian idea of satyagraha (nonviolent resistance), as well as with the Chinese cult of knowledge and Confucian ethics [28].

According to Davydov V.M., the idea of BRICS development as an inter-civilization association, which is capable of developing global world order standards, will be implemented only if the institutional framework of the association is properly improved [29].

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the most probable BRICS scenario we described, let us formulate a list of specific steps that will provide BRICS with geopolitical “flexibility” and effectiveness in addressing global governance issues.

1. Intensification of cooperation among the five countries in the sphere of finance, economy, culture, science and security for ensuring a strong foundation of interrelations, deepening of the areas of common interests and resolving existing conflicts;
2. The implementation of large-scale economic, investment, scientific, infrastructure projects in various regions of the developing world under BRICS auspices, aimed at strengthening the credibility of the five states and creating a positive image of the association;
3. Joint development of conceptual, theoretical and value foundations of a new, alternative world order configuration at the level of BRICS expert community;
4. The formation of a common information BRICS policy aimed at promoting the positive aspects of a multipolar world order model and explaining the disastrousness of the way to its unipolar configuration.

In conclusion, the role of dialogue between BRICS and Western countries in ensuring national security of Russia should also be noted. In the light of a growing number of studies predicting a general growth of conflicts in the world and an increase in risks of a global war, understanding of the collective role in this process is fundamentally important for the BRICS countries. In our view, the transition to a multipolar configuration of the international system through bloody wars and full destabilization would mean “the failure” of the historical mission of the association, despite all the advances in the institutionalization and deepening of cooperation between the countries. Therefore, the first priority of BRICS should be the formulation of own concept of an alternative world order and involvement in the discussion of a wide range of researchers and policy makers from around the world. This would help overcome skepticism in the Western countries with regard to the ideas of a multipolar world and would establish a kind of “dialogue of civilizations” – a dialogue, which is necessary in the conditions when the confrontation begins to seem the only way to solve the problem.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The article was financially supported by the internal grant of the Southern Federal University No. 213.01-07-2014/15 PChVG “Threats to the National Security in the Context of the Geopolitical Competition and the Patterns of the Aggressive and Hostile Behavior of the Youth.”

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