COMMENTARY | ECONOMICS

Palestine and an Expanding BRICS: Swaying the Global Order

By: Ahmed Alqarout · March, 2025

BRICS, a bloc of emerging and fast-growing non-Western economies named after its core members (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), has recently extended its reach to the MENA region in pursuit of a multipolar world. Egypt, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) joined the bloc in 2023, while Saudi Arabia has maintained an active role as an invited nation. In August 2024, BRICS invited the State of Palestine to apply for membership—an unusual move considering Palestine is not an emerging economic powerhouse like existing members.

This commentary examines the evolving ties between MENA countries and BRICS, focusing on the prospective Palestinian membership in the bloc and the group's rationale for extending the invitation. It argues that BRICS membership can reconfigure the discussion around Palestinian sovereignty beyond the bounds of US alignment with Israeli policies. As the commentary details, BRICS membership could also greatly benefit the Palestinian economy by bolstering cooperation among members in areas driving economic development, including the energy and logistics sectors and artificial intelligence (AI).

BRICS's MENA Expansion

Since its official inauguration in 2009 as a trade bloc, BRICS has primarily focused

on economic collaboration. Recognizing the need for collective Global South action to tackle macroeconomic and currency challenges following the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, the group's key achievement was establishing alternative non-Western financial institutions, namely the Contingent Reserve Arrangement and the New Development Bank (NDB). Over time, BRICS has widened its agenda to address other pressing political issues, including climate change, anti-terrorism, and cybersecurity. At the 2023 BRICS summit, the bloc expanded its outreach and welcomed new members, including Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, and the UAE. It also invited Argentina and Saudi Arabia to join the grouping, but their membership remains unconfirmed. Nevertheless, BRICS's expansion reflects its ambition to foster multilateral South-South cooperation and challenge the US-dominated world order.

BRICS's growing interest in the MENA region dates back over a decade but gained momentum following the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine. Both exposed vulnerabilities in BRICS's supply chains, prompting the bloc to seek greater resilience. Because BRICS countries lacked access to US-manufactured vaccines, they turned inward, producing and exporting their own to support global supply chain stability. Indeed, the UAE was among the first recipients of Chinese Sinopharm and Russian Sputnik V vaccines. BRICS aims to strengthen MENA ties to bolster supply chain security and mitigate future crises. Beyond supply chain resilience, BRICS expansion into the MENA region also reflects economic realignments, particularly regarding currency policy.

Economic strains in MENA countries, such as Egypt and Tunisia, highlighted by dollar shortages, have made collaboration with BRICS members attractive—if not essential. Bilateral agreements in local currencies reduce dependence on Western financial institutions, which benefits struggling emerging economies of the MENA region. Meanwhile, the strategic geographic location of MENA states

offers immense value for the BRICS countries' economic security and trade networks. Despite internal divisions, BRICS achieved significant geopolitical gains by expanding into the MENA region and securing access to critical global shipping routes, including the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. This expansion has enhanced trade resilience, reduced geopolitical shock risks, and strengthened economic stability. Moreover, BRICS members gained access to networks such as the Greater Arab Free Trade Area and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, reducing US leverage over their supply lines. BRICS leaders, especially China and Russia, have also increased their sway in the region to secure energy supplies and foster cooperation in this sector.

Energy cooperation between BRICS and MENA countries has intensified, particularly following Western sanctions on Russia in the context of the Ukraine war. The UAE significantly increased its Russian crude oil import flow, while Tehran and Moscow established a gas hub to diversify energy sources. As an invited nation, Saudi Arabia doubled its imports of Russian fuel oil for its power stations while saving its crude reserves for exports. MENA countries are also now considering partnering with BRICS countries to develop civilian nuclear power projects. The bloc's increased use of non-dollar currencies benefits the region's energy trade by offering flexible pricing mechanisms and breaking the Western monopoly of the world monetary system.

Chief among BRICS's plans to strengthen cooperation between its members is a system for exchanging commodities that reduces emerging markets' dependence on the dollar and promotes the use of local currencies. Under Russia's 2024 BRICS presidency, the bloc has prioritized de-dollarization—the process of reducing reliance on the US dollar in global trade and finance. Initiatives like the BRICS Pay system challenge the dominant US dollar-based bank transfer network, SWIFT. This initiative, part of a broader effort to mitigate dependency on the Western-dominated financial system, opens new economic opportunities and

pathways to Global South communities, including Palestinians, to break their dependency on the West, especially the US.

Unpacking BRICS Support for Palestine

In the 2024 Kazan Summit, BRICS countries reaffirmed their support for the State of Palestine and the two-state solution, expressing grave concern over the Israeli regime's genocidal violence. However, BRICS's position on Palestine is best understood through the individual policies of each member state rather than as a unified, cohesive bloc. Indeed, while BRICS takes positions as a bloc, they are not legally binding on its member states, unlike in the EU. For example, while BRICS supports the two-state solution, its members differ in the way they engage with the various Palestinian factions and the Israeli regime.

BRICS's interest in the State of Palestine's membership reflects broader geopolitical shifts and a growing disillusionment with US mediation. In June 2023, the Palestinian Authority (PA) signed a strategic partnership with China, in which the latter reaffirmed its support for a two-state solution. For its part, China has advocated for full UN membership for the State of Palestine and recognition of East Jerusalem as its capital. China has also expanded its diplomatic engagement with internal Palestinian reconciliation efforts. It facilitated the Beijing Declaration of July 2024, where 14 Palestinian factions, including Fatah and Hamas, committed to a reconciliation path. While the Beijing talks affirmed recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative body of all Palestinians, the declaration emphasized the participants' commitment to establishing an independent State of Palestine following UN resolutions. Most importantly, the talks resulted in Palestinian factions agreeing to form a national reconciliation government focused on rebuilding Gaza, though this has yet to come to fruition. The Beijing Declaration,

supported by Russia, Egypt, and Algeria, underscores China's commitment to Palestinian statehood and aligns with BRICS's collective stance.

Similarly, at the start of the genocide, Russia advocated for more robust support for Palestine. It played a key role in fostering Palestinian unity by hosting reconciliation meetings between Palestinian political parties. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov engaged with Hamas leaders in Moscow in October 2024 to push for a unity government. South Africa, meanwhile, has solidified its position as an influential force by taking the strongest pro-Palestine position, pursuing legal actions against the Israeli regime, including charging it with genocide at the International Court of Justice.

Motivations Behind BRICS's Support for Palestine

BRICS's position on the Palestinian struggle reflects its broader commitment to regional stability, global peace, and shared prosperity. However, given BRICS's fragmented approach to policy implementation, understanding the bloc's interest in Palestinian membership requires a closer look at individual members' motivations.

- China's interest in the Palestinian struggle stems from its regional and global ambitions. Following its diplomatic success in brokering a normalization of ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Beijing aims to extend its mediation efforts to Palestine. China's aspirations to become an international mediator challenge US primacy and safeguard its growing investments in the Middle East by promoting regional stability. By engaging in such high-profile diplomacy, China also seeks to counter Western scrutiny over issues like Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, as well as deflect attention from its support for Russia in the Ukraine war amid looming EU sanctions.
- Multiple strategic objectives, including diplomatic influence and

realignment, drive Russia's interest in Palestine. First, Russia seeks to reaffirm its status as a global power by mediating high-profile international conflicts. Second, it aims to divert criticism away from its war in Ukraine by highlighting Israeli violations in Palestine. Third, Russia wants to move away from the negative perceptions of its role in the Syrian civil war by presenting itself as a moral broker in the Palestinian cause. It also seeks to secure its foothold in the region after the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime.

- South Africa's historical struggle against apartheid informs its solidarity with Palestine. Analysts have framed its decision to take Israel to court for genocide as part of a broad movement of Global South activism against atrocities committed by the Global North.
- Brazil ratified a free trade agreement with the PA in July 2024 as an act of solidarity with Palestinians. President Lula da Silva's Workers' Party has traditionally defended the Palestinian right to self-determination and statehood as part of its commitment to anti-colonial struggles. In the current polarized political environment, however, analysts have perceived Brazil's support for Palestine as a strong comeback of Lula's global activism to override his predecessor's right-wing policies.
- While India maintains strong ties with the US and the Israeli regime, it has backed Palestine's UN membership and reiterated its long-standing support for the establishment of an independent and viable State of Palestine. India subscribes to what analysts call the post-Cold War "new nonalignment," a strategy that seeks to position major Global South countries as leaders in shaping the global agenda and exploring alternative paths for peace.

This imminent recalibration of the world order, including the threat to the US dollar primacy, has led President Donald Trump to threaten BRICS member

countries with tariffs. Trump's plans for the MENA region have also driven Arab nations, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE, to voice staunch solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. In a strong reaction against Trump's plan to forcibly displace Palestinians in Gaza, Arab countries have been scrambling to find alternative plans for rebuilding Gaza. Trump's plan poses an existential threat to Arab regimes, prompting them to solidify their commitment to Palestinian statehood. Fueled by self-interest, Arab countries, including the UAE, remain vocal in their commitment to Palestinian statehood as part of their desire for regional peace and stability despite normalization with the Israeli regime under the Abraham Accords. Meanwhile, the Saudi regime has taken steps towards a new rapprochement with Israel's historical enemy, Iran—a move that benefits regional stability and fosters solidarity with the Palestinian struggle.

Reflected in the policies of its member states and its collective stance, BRICS's growing involvement in the Palestinian struggle speaks to a broader recalibration of its regional strategy, which challenges Western domination of global affairs. The bloc's geopolitical interest in the MENA region has grown along with its Arab membership, and its outreach allows it to push forward an alternative Global South agenda for stability and development.

BRICS Membership Benefits Palestinians

Economically, BRICS membership offers the Palestinian economy significant opportunities to overcome Western sanctions and isolation. The bloc's emphasis on development cooperation and South-South solidarity provides a meaningful alternative to the US-led international order. Palestinians can benefit from financial innovations like BRICS Pay QR for retail transactions and BRICS Pay B2B for businesses, both of which could reduce dependence on Israeli-controlled financial systems. BRICS Pay's decentralized cross-border messaging system offers an alternative to the US-dominated SWIFT system, further decreasing restrictions

on Palestinian economic activity. Engaging with the NDB would support Palestinian development needs beyond Western aid conditionality and debt traps. Trading in BRICS national currencies in the future could likewise mitigate the impact of Israeli sanctions.

BRICS membership also opens markets for Palestinian technology start-ups, fostering innovation and job creation. BRICS's Special Economic Zones offer opportunities for economic recovery and growth in Gaza and the West Bank, countering Israeli-imposed isolation measures. The bloc's focus on inclusive use of AI provides Palestinians with opportunities to counter the Israeli regime's technological domination and stranglehold on Palestine's digital scape through data sharing, policy development, and innovation. Health collaboration is another area in which BRICS can support Palestine. Membership in BRICS's vaccine research center would bolster Palestinian resilience against future pandemics, ensuring timely access to life-saving vaccines, among other public health benefits.

Culturally and socially, BRICS offers numerous avenues for the State of Palestine to engage internationally. Tourism, educational exchanges, and participation in initiatives like the BRICS Youth Council and vocational training programs foster people-to-people connections. The BRICS Alliance of Museums and other cultural initiatives can help protect Palestine's heritage from the threat of erasure. Palestinian civil society can benefit from stronger ties with BRICS experts through participation in its global forums, countering Israeli efforts to isolate Palestinians.

BRICS membership or partner-country status could significantly enhance Palestine's international standing and resilience. Engaging with BRICS allows the Palestinian leadership to advance statehood ambitions, lessen economic and political dependence on the Israeli regime and the US, and unlock new opportunities for cooperation, growth, and development. Cooperating with

individual BRICS members (and the bloc collectively) offers a multifaceted strategy to strengthen Palestine's position on the international stage and achieve long-term political, economic, and social goals.

Crucially, BRICS could also play a leading role in Gaza's reconstruction. Rebuilding Gaza and developing the Gaza port, a long-disrupted project, aligns with BRICS's interests and would enhance Palestinian economic viability. A reconstructed port in Gaza would strengthen BRICS's supply chain security and establish Palestine as a Mediterranean trade hub. Still, any such effort remains contingent on Israel loosening its stranglehold over Gaza, which remains under siege. Although BRICS's involvement in Gaza's reconstruction may face US and Israeli opposition, the bloc has enough leverage to make such efforts feasible.

Challenges to Palestinian Membership

Palestinian membership in BRICS is expected to face significant opposition, especially from Western powers. Historically, the US has opposed unilateral moves by Palestinian leadership to gain international recognition. This stance aligns with the Israeli regime's position, which has warned of retaliatory unilateral measures. A Palestinian BRICS membership would likely be perceived by the US as a provocative unilateral act, potentially triggering further Israeli sanctions.

Palestinian membership in BRICS could also legitimize Hamas's involvement in a national unity government, an outcome vehemently opposed by both the US and the Israeli regime. During the Kazan Summit, where the bloc discussed Palestine's membership application, Hamas urged Russia to pressure President Mahmoud Abbas to accept a power-sharing arrangement. The summit highlighted the urgency of Palestinian unity, with China defending Palestinians' right to self-determination and making a clear distinction between resistance and terrorism. China's active role in fostering Palestinian reconciliation suggests it would support a unity government, though the US will likely oppose such developments.

The EU's stance on Palestine diverges from that of the US and officially endorses Palestinian statehood aspirations within the framework of a two-state solution. Unlike the US, which has threatened to cut funding to the PA for pursuing statehood unilaterally, the EU has provided financial support to prevent a government collapse amid worsening economic conditions caused by Israeli sanctions, including restrictions imposed on Palestinian workers and the seizure of clearance revenues. Still, only ten out of 27 states have formally recognized the State of Palestine, with Spain, Norway, and Ireland most recently doing so in 2024. As a result, Palestinian membership in BRICS is likely to be met with mixed reactions across Europe.

Potential BRICS membership offers Palestinians new economic and diplomatic cooperation pathways, opening up possibilities while mitigating dependency on Western-led systems. Palestinians must capitalize on this momentum to unite and shift their collective focus toward leading Global South blocs to advance the quest for liberation and fight back against the US-sponsored Israeli chokehold on the Palestinian economy. As part of the Global South realignment, the bloc's expansion benefits the Palestinian path to liberation by posing the most significant challenge yet to US global dominance and unipolarity.

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