

The Global Brazil Imperative in the Face of Southern Deceptions

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I do not know whether it is good to be in BRICS, but not being in BRICS is not a good thing.
Marcos Azambuja (1935-2025)

Executive Summary

Brazil's presidency of the BRICS in 2025 placed value on the defense of multilateralism, the revitalization of interaction among the group's members, and an emphasis on the revisionism of international institutions, notably the United Nations, the Security Council, and the International Monetary System (Lyrio 2025).

This valuation stemmed from a particular conception of Brazilian foreign action anchored in the need to harmonize the aporias of the BRICS countries with their alter ego, the Global South (Vieira 2025).

Not by chance, the motto of the Brazilian presidency was "Strengthening cooperation in the Global South for a more inclusive and sustainable governance" (BRICS Brasil).

The procedural achievements of this presidency were unquestionable. However, on a substantive level, it tended to shy away from the most pressing discussions of the moment—discussions concerning the understanding and confrontation of contexts of volatile stability marked by conflicts of high and very high intensity that emerged after the sanitary crisis of the 2020–2021 biennium. These include the new phase of the Russo-Ukrainian tension, the

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reorientation of the Russian economy toward Asia and the Middle East, the political, economic, and social acceleration of entropy within the European Union, the new phase of Middle Eastern tensions amid the martyrdom of Gaza, and the return of President Donald J. Trump to the presidency of the United States.

These contexts have greatly increased the complexity of the latent global insecurities of the present century, transforming the temptation of the Global South into a dangerous intellectual, political, and moral trap—especially for Brazil (Tetrajs 2023a).

Introduction and Analysis

Hemispheric awareness of the reality of the South began to take shape in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, under European Enlightenments and colonialisms, when populations in colonial spaces started to develop a sense of living in colonies and soon forged their identities and national independences throughout the nineteenth century. In the following century, the disintegration of the Russian, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian empires, and the imposition of the principle of self-determination of peoples after the total wars of 1914–1945, further amplified this awareness in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These southern continents were conceptualized by Alfred Sauvy as the Third World when he defined it by stating that “*Ce tiers-monde ignoré, exploité, méprisé comme le Tiers-État veut, lui aussi, être quelque chose*” [this ignored, exploited, and despised Third World, like the Third Estate, also wishes to be something] (Sauvy 1952).

In the postwar period, this idea of the Third World came to underpin the actions of United Nations agencies in virtually all underdeveloped countries. *Pari passu*, UNESCO commissioned a study from Claude Lévi-Strauss on the cultural diversity of these global spaces, which resulted in the influential *Race et Histoire* (Lévi-Strauss 1952) and served as guidance for the first major meeting of Third World countries, organized in Bandung in 1955.

From the interactions at Bandung emerged severe criticisms of Western supremacy over world affairs, as well as the imperative to construct alternatives. As a result, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of 77, and UNCTAD were established between 1961 and 1964 (Soutou 2011).

In this interim, on the one hand, the Vietnam War erupted, and on the other, the processes of decolonization in Africa and Asia accelerated. Additionally, India moved toward greater autonomy; China remained immersed in Maoism;

Latin Americans absorbed the shock of the 1959 Cuban Revolution; Africans continued their struggles for independence; and Middle Eastern peoples resisted accepting the state of Israel (Soutou 2011).

In this context, the American activist Carl Preston Oglesby (1935–2011) proposed the image of the Global South as a replacement for the idea of the Third World, in order to generate and foster greater solidarity among underdeveloped countries in support of Vietnam (Tetraï 2023a).

This image, however, remained dormant in the years that followed until, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in the wake of the creation of the BRIC acronym in 2001 and the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2008, it was rehabilitated as a supposedly safe passport to better days for the formerly underdeveloped countries of the Third World. At the same time, however, its incongruence came to the fore, and *southern globalism*—also understood as *meridionalism*—began to be challenged by facts (Tetraï 2023b). Initially, cartographic ones.

China, Russia, and India—the major flagships of the BRICS and of the Global South—are, cartographically, located in the Northern Hemisphere, whereas Australia and New Zealand, indisputable components of the extreme West, are situated in the Southern Hemisphere.

In addition, it became more than evident that neither North nor South possesses unity in itself or for itself—much less political, economic, historical, cultural, emotional, or spiritual coherence.

On top of that, there's the fact that China—which is in the North, not in the South—has been a member of the United Nations Security Council since 1971, when Beijing supplanted Taipei. The peculiarity of this condition precludes its normal and natural participation in any other grouping, since its political superiority, in these terms, generates unquestionable constraints on potential partners. Russia, for its part, also belongs to this select group that emerged in 1945, and nothing succeeds in mitigating its imperiousness. India is not a permanent member of the Security Council and, as it gains demographic and economic prominence, increasingly claims an identity as “non-Western, but not anti-Western” (Gourdant-Montagne 2023).²

2 Gourdauld-Montagne, Maurice. 2023. “D’une certaine manière, les Indiens sont les derniers gaullistes: une conversation avec Maurice Gourdauld-Montagne.” *Le Grand Continent*, September 13, 2023. <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2023/09/13/les-indiens-sont-les-derniers-gaullistes-une-conversation-avec-maurice-gourdauld-montagne/>.

Syria and Iran align themselves with the Russian ideological tone. Saudi Arabia seeks in every possible way to Americanize itself without Westernizing. Malaysia, in full economic takeoff, follows Saudi Arabia's path. Zambia, with a per capita product ten times lower than Malaysia's, seeks shelter in the Sino-Russian environment. Democratic Uruguay rejects any linkage to the ideologies of a supposedly Global South and, if it could, would even leave Mercosur. South Sudan, despite being in the South, would give anything to be, mentally, anywhere else that might offer a minimum of amenities. Tunisia, Liberia, and Kenya participate in the contact group of neutral countries mediating relations between Ukraine and Russia in the conflict. Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, and Sudan, by contrast, supply Ukraine with weapons. A greater contradiction could hardly exist—yet it does (Tetraais 2023b).

The long-standing Sino-Indian rivalry was made explicit in the negotiations for the expansion of the BRICS. The latent tensions between Brazilians and Argentines, Moroccans and Algerians, Ethiopians and Eritreans, Iranians and Saudis—which have never been denied nor overcome—render any more consistent revisionist modification of the institutions that emerged from 1945 unfeasible. Even if the five permanent members of the Security Council were to offer greater openings, which is not on the horizon, none of these countries of the so-called Global South would receive support from their continental neighbors (Tetraais 2023b).

The return of President Lula da Silva to power reinforced the intention to better position Brazil within the BRICS and Global South groupings. However, these groupings have projected more traps than solutions. The most eloquent examples can be observed in Brazil's hesitations regarding the situations in Eurasia and the Middle East, where President Lula da Silva's foreign policy sometimes leans toward a tradition of neutrality, non-intervention, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and at other times attempts to condemn—without carrying that condemnation through to its ultimate consequences—the actions of Russia and Israel.

Recommendations

It thus appears imperative to recognize that

1. BRICS and the Global South are, above all, simplified representations of the world.
2. Brazil and the contemporary world are far too complex to accommodate simplifications embodied by the BRICS and the Global South.

3. A deep reflection on the nature of the BRICS and the Global South *vis-à-vis* Brazilian national interests is urgently needed.

Policy Implementation Proposals

There are numerous forums for discussion on the BRICS and the Global South. This idea was widely disseminated between 2005 and 2013, but it disappeared amid Brazil's internal entropies, from the nights of June 2013 to January 8, 2023.

Now, more than ever, it is necessary to resume discussions about Brazil's place in the world, and not merely within the BRICS or the Global South.

It would therefore be appropriate to rehabilitate the idea of a Global Brazil (Trinkunas 2014).

Conclusion

Brazil's temptation to focus its global insertion through the BRICS and the Global South constitutes a dangerous intellectual, political, and moral trap. There is neither unity nor synchronicity within these groupings. In light of the complexity of Brazil and of the contemporary world, it would be more consistent to return to thinking in terms of a Global Brazil.

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