

Shifting Sands: Implications of Turkey and Saudi Arabia Joining Brics

Introduction

BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) which began as a loose economic coalition, has transformed into a formidable geopolitical and geoeconomic force today, acting as a voice of the global south, particularly with the 2023 Johannesburg declaration of expanding the membership.¹ The potential entry of Turkey and Saudi Arabia into BRICS reflects more than a shift in membership—it underscores how regional powers with deep-rooted ties to the West are now exploring new strategic alignments. Their move hints at a growing desire to diversify partnerships and play a more autonomous role in shaping the global order. This paper aims to assess the implications of this possible entrance, in the context of both regional dynamics and India's interests in the West Asian region.

Shifting Alliances? Turkey's Bid for Strategic Autonomy

Turkey occupies a very crucial strategic position at the juncture of Europe, Asia and middle east, and controls important routes to black Sea, Mediterranean and Eurasia. A long-standing member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance it has shown keen interest in joining the BRICS bloc since 2018 and submitted a formal application to become its member in October 2024. Its potential inclusion would mark a significant shift—bringing a NATO member in an alliance which pushes back against a west dominated global order.²

Experts say that this move is an accumulation of multiple long-standing factors. Erdogan has stated that, “Turkey can become a strong, prosperous and effective country if it improves relations with east and west simultaneously. Any other method other than it will not benefit Turkey but will harm it”.³ Despite repeated attempts Turkey has not been granted full membership of the European Union (EU) due to concerns of democratic backsliding in the country. Seeing this as an attempt to constrict the development and influence of Ankara, Erdogan seeks to diversify partnerships beyond traditional partners and perform a balancing act among the west and the rest of the world. The rift between Ankara and the West has further widened following Turkey's acquisition of the Russian S 400 missiles which led to United States (US) barring Turkey from getting its coveted F35 jets and citing that, “this move will have detrimental impacts on Turkish interoperability within the alliance”.⁴ By joining BRICS, Erdogan might be aiming to leverage a greater negotiating power (as demonstrated by its bid to have access to the EU defence funds)⁵and pursue a more independent foreign policy, reducing its dependence on the West.

Economically, Turkey stands to gain from joining the BRICS alliance. Being a formal member of BRICS would give a diversified trade portfolio to Turkey, reducing its dependence on Western countries which form a bulk of its export portfolio. BRICS membership would allow access to South-South investment flows either through the New Development Bank or from like-minded economies like China, which has invested in Turkish ports, railways and energy grids. Building long term alliances with key resource rich countries like Russia and Brazil through BRICS also helps Turkey secure its energy interest as it imports roughly 92 per cent of its energy

requirements from Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan.⁶ The TurkStream pipeline, which is already up and running, stands as a key symbol of this cooperation. If Turkey were to join BRICS, it could open the door to long-term energy deals on better terms—giving Ankara more stability and helping shield it from the uncertainty of Western sanctions or sudden global price hikes. Brazil could play an equally important role in helping Turkey broaden its energy options. Through Liquefied Natural Gas exports and innovative biofuels, Brazil offers Turkey a chance to reduce its dependence on a few key suppliers. Even more promising is Brazil's leadership in hydropower and renewables, areas that could directly support Turkey's push toward cleaner energy. Thus, broadly it can be summed up that Turkey aims to join BRICS in order to maintain a balancing act as well as gain autonomy in international order.

The Kingdom's Calculus: Saudi's Role in a Changing Order

Saudi Arabia, a key player in west Asian politics and one of the world's largest oil exporters, was invited to join the BRICS group in the Johannesburg summit. Joining the alliance would align with its larger interest of strategic autonomy and especially VISION 2030 of diversifying its economy.⁷ Traditionally an US ally, Riyadh is looking to expand its alliances as seen from increasing engagement with India, China and Russia. But it has shown a hesitant stance on accepting full membership and has adopted a strategic hedging by neither confirming nor rejecting this invite. Saudi Arabia, with its strong financial support and the possession of huge reserves of gold and foreign currency (at the end of 2022 reaching USD 693 bn), can be a significant weight in BRICS.⁸

Saudi Arabia's entry into BRICS supports Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's efforts to transform the Kingdom's global image. VISION 2030 aims to reduce dependence on oil and build a diversified, knowledge-based economy. Based on official data, Saudi Arabia's foreign trade compass was focused eastward, with three Asian countries leading the Kingdom's trading partners. China ranked first with a trade volume of 139.7 bn Riyals, representing 19.1 per cent of Saudi Arabia's foreign trade. India came in second with a trade volume of 55.8 bn Riyals, representing 7.6 per cent, followed by Japan with a trade volume of 55.3 bn Riyals, equivalent to 7.55 per cent. Saudi Arabia aims to raise the share of non-oil exports to 50 per cent.⁹ Joining BRICS would open up emerging consumer markets of the developing countries as well as open up the road for increased Chinese imports. It looks forward to attracting investments from the major economies of the global south such as through China's Belt and road initiative and India-Middle East- Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

BRICS offers a balanced platform where Saudi Arabia can maintain ties with all major powers while promoting South-South cooperation. One of the biggest advantages of BRICS for Saudi Arabia is its informal, non-binding nature. Unlike NATO or the EU, BRICS does not demand strict commitments or shared ideology and is a multilateral alliance encompassing a broad range of ideology. This suits Riyadh's preference for flexibility and non-interference. The membership would also allow for enhanced rapprochement with Iran, strengthen domestic image, build a stronger mediating power in the Arab nations group and backing from regional powers like United Arab Emirates and Egypt. There is also dissatisfaction with the US who is seen becoming increasingly transactional and unsupportive of their interests and security. Especially after the

-muted American response to attacks on Saudi oil facilities (e.g., the 2019 Aramco drone strikes allegedly linked to Iran).¹⁰

BRICS includes top energy consumers like China and India, which are also Saudi Arabia's largest oil buyers. This makes BRICS a natural platform for deepening energy ties and reshaping oil trade away from Western-dominated systems. Within BRICS, Saudi Arabia can explore oil trade in non-dollar currencies, such as the Chinese yuan. This supports long-term efforts to reduce reliance on the petrodollar system and respond to growing interest in de-dollarization across the Global South. The bloc also allows space for greater coordination on energy pricing and supply, outside of traditional platforms like Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC+). While Saudi Arabia will not abandon OPEC+, BRICS adds another layer of influence in global energy politics. BRICS provides direct access to large emerging economies—especially China and India, which are among the world's top investors in infrastructure and smart technologies.

A Stronger BRICS? And What Does This Mean for India?

The inclusion of Saudi Arabia and Turkey would place BRICS as an economic and geopolitical heavyweight in the global order. On one hand Turkey brings in a dynamic economy and control over strategic routes linking Europe, Asia and Middle East such as Bosphorus and Dardanelles strait and the Middle Corridor. On the other hand, if Saudi Arabia joins the bloc BRICS would control around 42 per cent of global oil supply¹¹ and immense sovereign wealth capital through Saudi's Public Investment (PIF) valued at approximately USD 900 bn.¹² With these developments there is an increased potential of the bloc to establish alternative trade mechanisms in order to bypass the dollar on the global stage. However, their entry could increase internal complexity. There is risk of heightened tension due to strained relations with existing BRICS members. India-Turkey relations have been tense due to Ankara's support for Pakistan on Kashmir and during Operation Sindoor.¹³ Turkey and Saudi also clash on regional topics such as support for Muslim Brotherhood and Iran.¹⁴ These strains can spillover to BRICS discussion and cause difficulties in reaching consensus. Despite these challenges, the expanded BRICS plus platform as a concrete voice of the Global South.

The inclusion of Saudi Arabia and Turkey in BRICS has mixed implications for India, combining new opportunities with strategic challenges. Saudi Arabia's entry into BRICS has strong advantages for India. As a long-standing energy partner, Riyadh brings a promise of deeper collaboration across trade, infrastructure, and finance. For India, this means new opportunities to advance energy security, possibly through rupee-based oil trade, and greater access to financing from the New Development Bank for shared infrastructure or renewable energy projects. Beyond energy, the Kingdom's inclusion fits well with India's vision for connectivity and economic integration, especially through initiatives like the IMEC—which positions India as a key link between Asia, the Gulf, and Europe¹⁵. Turkey's potential entry into BRICS is more nuanced for India. While economic ties between the 2 countries have grown in recent years, New Delhi remains cautious of Ankara's vocal support for Pakistan and its criticism of India on issues like Kashmir. Despite these tensions, Turkey's inclusion could open the door

for pragmatic engagement in areas such as infrastructure development, regional connectivity, and counterterrorism, especially within the structured setting of a multilateral forum like BRICS.

More broadly, the addition of independent regional powers like Turkey and Saudi Arabia may actually work in India's favor. Their presence helps balance China's influence within the bloc, offering India potential partners that, like itself, follow multi-aligned foreign policies. These new members are unlikely to back Beijing unconditionally, giving India greater room to build issue-based coalitions and shape BRICS's agenda in ways that reflect its strategic interests.

ENDNOTES

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Archita Sarangi is an intern at the Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (CS3) at the United Services Institution (USI). She's currently pursuing a graduation degree at Pondicherry University and has a keen interest in geopolitics and international relations.

Uploaded on 28-07-2025

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