

## BRICS AND THE ARAB WORLD

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Without pretending to present a well-grounded theoretical coverage of this topic here, I would only like to emphasize several lines, along which the relations of BRICS with the Arab world may be built and have already started forging. And they are necessary, taking into account the growing weight of this region, to form the successfully operating global economic, cultural and civilization cooperation platform of the countries of the Global South (GS), which we are speaking about.

**First line:** via the process of development by the Arab states (AS) that joined the association (we'll use this neutral word for it for a while, just for convenience) of the economic opportunities provided by membership in it, including participation in various integration projects. The AS such as Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia that joined BRICS in the early 2024 have big economic potentialities, resources, developed basis and experience, and one can suppose with assurance that their having all that will most likely help the evolution of BRICS itself in deepening cooperation between the AS as well as combining their efforts to develop collective cooperation with countries not being BRICS members. These are, first of all, the GS states interested in development of cooperation with them as well as shifting towards joining BRICS in future. Evidently, the consequences of limitations and restrictions related to the sanctions imposed by the states of the collective West against certain member states of the association will be overcome within the framework of this process. At the same time, BRICS membership does not suppose infringement of international obligations undertaken by the AS. Some collective projects, including in investing, are reviewed in the reports of some of the participants of the Conference. I'd like to mention that even those AS the status

of which is determined as *neutral with friendly signs* as the UAE. Further in my report, I'll speak about the Emirates as an example of the country that did not join American and European sanctions against Russia, continuing their partnership with Russia.

**Second line:** via the use of the BRICS potentialities for normalization and development of relations between the AS-members of the association, on the one side, and conflicting with them other states – BRICS members or not being BRICS members, on the other side. A lot had already been done for resolving conflict situations and addressing conflicts even before the AS joined BRICS, but they will have to intensify their efforts using new, recently opened opportunities in some areas and just launch them in some others. One should also mention that BRICS membership may help to prevent turning the existing disagreements in economic, political, cultural and civilization fields into conflicts, to find the necessary solutions. In this context, one should mention, for example, the respective processes in the Saudi-Iranian relations initiated and supported by the People's Republic of China, though in general there are still unresolved issues in the relations between Iran and the Arab states of the Gulf. Anyway, the potential of BRICS in this sector may be in demand.

**Third line:** via the use of BRICS potentialities for achieving assuredness and easing the balancing in relations with such global partners as simultaneously the United States (they are the guarantor of security for the UAE to a considerable degree, to say nothing about the role in trade and investments), and Russia and China, and for decrease of dependence on the former.

**Fourth line:** via optimization of the priorities in cooperation with certain BRICS states on the two-way track, including with other new partners, to achieve the maximum profits from the realized projects. Review of the UAE relations as a new member of the association and India as an "old" member as an example gives an opportunity to show how successfully the asymmetry of their interests and potentialities is being overcome. But before moving to this

part of my report, I'll touch upon several general questions. I'll mention, for example, that if there are no serious disagreements between member states in the field of values, the level of dissociation in politics may be fairly high. This is certified in particular by voting of their representatives at the UN General Assembly (detailed examination of this issue is not one of my tasks).

Usually the construction and real estate market (notwithstanding several elements of overheating) is named among the promising fields of the UAE cooperation with other states within BRICS. Joining the association expands the horizons for investment projects and helps their renewal.

As for the intensive development of relations between India and the UAE, it began about 10 years ago when Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister of India. In 2015, he became the first head of the Indian government in 34 years to visit the UAE (before that, in 1981, the country was officially visited by Indira Gandhi). In 2015, the relations between New Delhi and Abu Dhabi were elevated to the level of *strategic partnership*, and since then the UAE have been one of the most often visited by Modi countries – 7 visits already (with only the United States visited more – 8 times). The last Modi's visit to the UAE took place recently – on February 13–14, 2024.

My colleagues studying the issues of cooperation of the AS that joined BRICS in the beginning of this year, with the founders of the association, usually attract attention to the fact that the status of strategic partnership given to them was supported by a number of agreements, one of the most important of which is the *Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement* (CEPA) signed in 2022. According to this agreement, both countries agreed to cancel over 95% import duties, which led to a considerable growth of the two-way trade that in 2023 amounted to USD 85 billion. At the same time, the UAE supported the association's trade de-dollarization course, in which trading with India occupied an important place. The Local Currency Payments (LCP) Agreement was signed

with India in 2023 and already in December 2023, India confirmed the first in history settlement of payments in Rupees for the oil that came from the UAE.

The two countries striving for diversification of trade and other ties that clearly characterizes their position, did not limit themselves by the BRICS framework and even before that they in particular had joined another association, to wit I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE, USA), which had been announced in the course of the meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of the four countries in October 2021. Encouragement of investments in such sectors as energy sector, transport, space, public health and food safety was announced as the group's aim. Notwithstanding the versatility of the association, I2U2 was often called "The Near East QUAD" in foreign mass media. For some reason, this event did not cause a loud information resonance like in case of BRICS. Thus, the I2U2 project was not even mentioned in the course of Modi's last visit to the UAE. By the way, in the course of the Indian Prime Minister's visit, a bilateral investment agreement was signed, it is expected to increase the flow of investments from the UAE to India. Now, Abu Dhabi is becoming the fourth in size source of direct foreign investments into the Indian economy, and the BRICS organizers may enter it into the list of the association's achievements.

I'll add that during that visit another "inter-governmental framework agreement" was signed referring to the launched during the G20 summit in New Delhi in September 2023 economic corridor India – Near East – Europe. This inter-regional initiative is aimed at the integration of the trade routes from India to Europe via the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel to provide a quicker transit of goods.

But this agreement is a challenge for BRICS to a certain extent, the analytics view it as an alternative to the Chinese project "One Belt and One Road". Nevertheless, it should be noted that the statement by the Indian minister of foreign affairs after the Prime Minister's visit as to the results, contains unimportant details about certain agreements, other countries – participants of

the project were not mentioned. The project as such is at the primary stage of development now, and the conflict in the Near East will most likely interfere with the implementation of the project.

The general picture is improved by measures to develop military interactions of New Delhi and Abu Dhabi, first of all, in maritime security in the Indian Ocean. This sector acquires special importance with the deteriorating situation in the region as the background in the context of the going on war in the Gaza Strip, Houthis' attacks on the merchantmen in the Red Sea and potential escalation of the conflict and its expanding to the other parts of the Near East. My colleagues – experts in economics think that proceeding from this longer periods of delivery of energy resources, bigger expenses for charter of vessels and possible growth of oil prices may be a significant risk for the economic growth of India. Because of that it is important for the country to coordinate the activities with the key regional players such as the UAE in order to provide protection of the country's interests.

In order to illustrate the diversified approach of the two partners to military cooperation, one can point at the air force joint exercises conducted on January 23–24, 2024 over the Arabian Sea, “Exercise Desert Knight” in which the Indian Air Force, French Air and Space Force and UAE Air Force took part. After that New Delhi and Paris came to an agreement to activate naval cooperation in the south-west part of the Indian Ocean.

When analyzing the Emirates-Indian cooperation, one cannot fail to take into account the fact that the 3.5-million Indian diaspora makes nearly 40% of the whole UAE population and money transfers of its representatives to India amounted to over USD 20 billion in 2023.

The Emirates diplomats play an important intermediary role in settlements of disputes, in which some new BRICS members are involved. Already in 2018, before the UAE and Ethiopia joined the association, the Emirates helped to settle disagreements between Ethiopia and Eritrea. And on January 1, 2024,

Ethiopia and Somaliland signed the agreement providing Addis Ababa with the access to the Red Sea as an answer to Ethiopia's acknowledgement of Somaliland's independence. It was officially announced that the agreement "will strengthen security, economic and political partnership between countries". In the current situation, experts point at the importance of the forming conditions for the further strengthening of the Abu Dhabi's role in the countries of the Horn of Africa taking into account the exclusive relations of the UAE with Somaliland and their now beginning to strengthen ties with Ethiopia.

The reviewed material allows to judge the giant development potential that BRICS has and the advantages the GS states received from its strengthening and expanding, in particular, the Arab world states. The association gives its members an opportunity to conduct sovereign independent policy and increases the attractiveness of membership in BRICS as well as helps economic growth and preservation of the uniqueness and originality, cultural and civilization identity of its member states.