



Research Paper

Strategic Management and Foreign Policy: A Case Study of Putin's Leadership of the BRICS

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Abstract

Current era in international politics is marked by relative decline of America's power to control political events in various regions of the world without the involvement of regional allies. The present era is also marked with the rise of new world powers in the form of China and India. With Russia as a potential 'center of power' in this context, the present era has rightfully been described as the era of 'emerging multipolarity' in world politics. In such a scenario, Russia has two official foreign policy objectives: a) to achieve the status of a great power and b) to ensure the strategic survival and security of the Russian state. To achieve the above stated strategic objectives, Russia has the following strategic goal: expediting the creation of a 'multipolar world order' and to further hasten the downfall of 'unipolarity' led by the USA. Primary 'strategic management' actions by Putin's regime in Russia for the achievement of above strategic goals revolve around the creation, formalization and strengthening of new institutions created under the aegis of the BRICS alliance. This paper uses the 'case study' method to understand, explore and describe the various 'strategic management' measures initiated and executed under the leadership of President Putin of Russia through the platform of the BRICS alliance. Qualitative methods like analysis of secondary sources like journal articles and online blogs are used for data analysis. This study has found that 'innovative', strategic management measures used by Putin's regime through its leadership of the BRICS platform have expedited the creation of a 'multipolar' world order making this strategic goal of Russia quite successful. It has also hastened the downfall of 'unipolar world order' led by the USA. This study explores, describes and illustrates the same 'innovative', strategic management measures in international politics initiated by President Putin through the BRICS alliance.

Keywords: Strategic Management, Strategic Governance, Foreign Policy, Putinology, Leadership Studies, International Politics, BRICS, Multipolar World Order

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I. Introduction:

In the strategic context of emerging multipolarity in international relations, a major world power in the form of current Russian state under president Putin's strategic leadership is looking towards expediting the creation of a solid, multipolar world order that could effectively challenge the dominance of the United States of America in world politics. Since the USA is not as powerful today as it used to be around the year 2000, the Russians under President Putin's 'strategic leadership' are hoping to create further political and military troubles for the West and the USA through strategic alliance-making with other major world powers. Putin and his regime in Russia seek to achieve this goal by forming strategic partnerships with emerging countries like China, India, Brazil and South Africa. It was this strategic plan of the Russians that led to the formalization of the BRICS alliance in 2009. Since its inception primarily as the result of the personal efforts of President Putin, the BRICS alliance has become the pioneer in spearheading the movement towards challenging the dominance of the Western powers led by the USA in global politics. The BRICS organization has been actively creating various alternative institutions and mechanisms of global governance since 2009 for its strategic goal achievement of furthering the creation of a multipolar world order. The present case study seeks to understand the same strategic mission of the BRICS by exploring the various tactics belonging to the realm of 'strategic management' and 'strategic governance' which were employed by the BRICS leadership to provide an alternative for global governance against the institutions and mechanisms created by the USA after Second World War.

Section A: External Background of International Politics determining Strategic Action of Putin's Administration under the BRICS Platform

Before studying the various strategic measures initiated by Putin's regime in Russia through the platform of the BRICS, it is worthwhile to understand the external, environmental background of international politics that led to the formalization of the BRICS in the first place. This section will briefly summarise the same factors leading to the birth and inception of the BRICS platform in 2009. The BRICS got its inception in 2009 in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg under the chairmanship of the Russian Federation. Russian Federation under Prime Minister Putin (and the de facto head of the Russian state) at that time had briefly fought a war with its former western allies in Georgia in 2008 and the Russian leadership under Prime Minister Putin was deeply disenchanted with the Western powers like the European Union and the USA over proposed EU and NATO expansion in Eastern Europe which extremely worried Russian state's security and survival both from political and military point of view. The Russians under the de facto leadership of Prime Minister Putin decided to look towards other major centres of power in international politics in various regions of the world as possible allies. Russians found the case of China, India, Brazil and South Africa very convincing as a possible alternative to the western allies led by the USA. It was the same time when the world economy was shattered by the 2008 global economic recession and the economies of all Western countries were struggling to recover. But to the astonishment of the international community and economic experts, economies like that of China, India, Brazil et cetera were still growing at phenomenal though at somewhat muted rate. Economies of India and China particularly emerged as the engines of global growth despite global recession. This further prompted the formal institutionalization of the BRICS alliance in the year 2009 in Yekaterinburg summit.

As a matter of fact, the Russian foreign policy has always relied on creating a buffer zone between Russia and the West in the vast East European plains where no natural, geographical barrier exists. This has been the cornerstone of the Russian strategic culture and Russian foreign policy environment since the early eighteenth century (ShirvanNeftchi, 2015) The proposed NATO and European Union expansion into Eastern Europe that started roughly in 2003 had completely left Putin's administration in Russia in shock and they sought to check the western advance through military means which led to the Georgian war in 2008 between the Russians and the West.

Even after the formalization of the BRICS in 2009, the same tensions between the Russians under the leadership of Putin and the Western countries continued. It culminated in the Ukraine war of 2014 and the Russian military intervention in Syria in 2015 against the western forces and interests in those countries. It ultimately led to what political observers like John Mearsheimer of Chicago described as Cold War 2.0 between Russia and the West. It was a situation which was deeply reminiscent of the days of the Cold War. The Ukrainian war of 2022 which is still ongoing is just another example of Cold War 2.0. Thus, it is worthwhile to note that in this external context of international politics, BRICS became the primary foreign policy tool of the Russian Federation to achieve foreign policy goals of Russia during Cold War 2.0.

It is also Worthwhile to note here that present Russian state that came to be controlled by current President Vladimir Putin in May 2000 till date is deeply influenced by the personal impact of its president. Commentators and analysts like Anne Applebaum (2013) of London school of Economics and Political Science state that the economy, polity and foreign policy of entire Russian state of present times is deeply influenced by the leadership of President Putin. Other commentators also agree with this proposition of an Applebaum and describe President Putin as the 'predominant leader' of the present Russian state (Fenghua Liu, 2022). Social scientists observed that the personal traits and emotional impress of Putin determines the major foreign policy of the present Russian state. As far as the leadership pattern and style of President Putin is concerned, scholars like Mark Galliotti (2019) have confirmed that President Putin does not follow any fixed leadership style. Rather, President Putin changes his leadership style according to the needs and requirements of the external environment making him a person with extremely flexible leadership style. As far as the inception of the BRICS is concerned, Putin's administration in Russia correlated the rise of India and China in world economy at the time of 2008 recession in the USA as a possible sign of decline of 'unipolarity' in world politics. Putin's administration started ardently working for the creation of 'multipolarity' and formalized BRICS in 2009. As it is evident today, creation of BRICS and execution of the BRICS' political, social and economic agenda in international politics actually expedited the creation of multipolarity in world politics. It is a process which is still occurring today in world politics. It is no coincidence then that after two years of formalization of the BRICS alliance under the leadership of President Putin, some scholars like Fareed Zakaria (2011) started describing the then prevailing state of world politics in 2011 as the 'post-American era' in international politics.

Section B: Research Objectives and Research Questions of the Study and its Research Methodology

Following are the **research objectives** of the study:

- 1) To explore the various measures belonging to the realm of strategic governance in international politics that were adopted by BRICS under Putin's leadership
- 2) To understand Putin's leadership role in shaping BRICS' collective agenda and foreign policy

- 3) To understand the impact of BRICS under Putin's leadership on global geopolitics and international governance

Following are the **research questions** of the study:

- 1) What foreign policy measures belonging to the realm of 'strategic management and governance' were initiated by the BRICS under Putin's leadership to expedite the creation of 'multipolarity'?
- 2) How has Putin's leadership shaped BRICS' collective policy?
- 3) How has the BRICS alliance under Putin's leadership impacted global geopolitics and international governance?

Research Methodology of the Study: This study seeks to adopt a qualitative research approach as it relies on the 'interpretivist' research philosophy. This study will employ primary sources of empirical data like the official policy documents of the Russian Federation pertaining to foreign policy, military doctrine et cetera. This study will also use secondary sources of empirical data like journal articles et cetera. Think tank reports and online blogs will also be utilized.

Section C: Various Measures belonging to the Realm of 'Strategic Management' and 'Strategic Governance' Initiated and Executed by Putin through the BRICS

This objective of this section is to describe and enumerate the various foreign policy measures initiated and executed by the Putin administration in Russia through the BRICS to achieve the twin foreign policy objectives of the Russian state, that is, a) to achieve the status of a great power just like the former Soviet Union and b) to ensure the strategic survival and security of the Russian state from both external and internal threats. This section is also the answer of the first research question of the study as mentioned in Section B.

The Russian federation under the presidency of Vladimir Putin has been extensively employing various overtures pertaining to the realm of 'strategic management' for the achievement of foreign policy objectives of Russia as mentioned above. For these purposes, Russia first aligned itself with the West led by the USA and the EU. But consequent upon the proposed NATO and EU expansion into Eastern Europe, relations between Russia and the West turned sour. It was around 2007 that the Russians started looking towards other emerging and established powers in world politics as a way to compensate for the loss of the Western allies.

The first 'strategic management' overture by President Putin (then the Prime Minister and de-facto leader of the Russian Federation) was the formal institutionalization of the BRICS platform itself in 2009 in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg. The BRICS was meant to be the main diplomatic tool of Russia to strategically innovate at the level of international organisations in order to challenge the perceived dominance of the USA and the West. In coming years, the BRICS was to be further strengthened through the creation of other parallel institutions of governance under its patronage. This was exemplified by the creation of the New Development Bank or the BRICS Bank to challenge the World Bank led by the West. Similarly, as a counterweight to the International Monetary Fund or the IMF, the BRICS nations created the Contingent Reserve Arrangement. These 'strategic innovations' of new institutional arrangements have gone a long way in increasing the prestige of the BRICS in the non-Western world and in diluting the dominance of various institutions of global, economic governance created and led by the West.

The second 'innovation' belonging to 'strategic management' and 'strategic governance' operationalized by the Russian Federation under President Putin was at the 'tactical' and 'operational' level of 'conflict management'. This is represented by the Russian doctrine of 'Hybrid warfare' which was personally approved by President Putin as per the official document of the Russian Federation pertaining to military doctrine in 2010. The Russian 'hybrid warfare' strategy is basically an assimilation of asymmetric warfare with traditional forms of warfare. It also includes technological improvements in 'war technology' and modernization of the Russian armed forces. In addition, this included aspects of cyber warfare and informational warfare. This doctrine of Russian hybrid warfare was later to be extensively and quite successfully utilized in the Ukraine war of 2014 and Syrian civil war in 2015. Some other measures pertaining to 'strategic governance' by Putin's administration included 'innovation' at the technological level. This included creating Russian versions of Microsoft and Google to reduce dependency on American service providers. This was later further extended to Russian versions of social media like Facebook and Instagram.

The third strategic overture of Putin's administration was in response to the crisis caused by western economic sanctions in the wake of the Ukraine war of 2022 (Richard Wolff, 2023). The Russian dependence on SWIFT payment system of the West meant that Russia could be penalized by the West in case of a conflict. The Russians promptly realized their weakness and initiated talks with other BRICS nations for trade in local currencies by bypassing the US dollar. This eventually became the 'De-dollarisation' agenda of the BRICS and led to the creation of the BRICS currency.

There is one another, noteworthy 'strategic management' overture that was operationalized by the personal efforts of President Putin through the platform of the BRICS. This overture has the potential to shape the very course and direction of the twenty-first century, world politics. It is the 'BRICS Plus initiative' which

involves expansion of the BRICS alliance by including new member states in it in the form of Saudi Arabia, Iran, UAE and Egypt. 'BRICSPlus initiative' is being seen as a way of Putin to co-opt both Saudi Arabia and Iran into a pro-Russia strategic mechanism. There is already talk of a new CHIMS alliance or the 'China, Iran, Moscow, Saudi Arabia alliance' that seeks to create a détente between the two archrivals of the Islamic world, that is, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The CHIMS serves the Russian strategic interests in two ways. Firstly, it gives Russia's Iranian allies much needed strategic maneuverability against common rivals, the USA in the Middle East. An Iran-Saudi Arabia understanding in the Middle-East through the CHIMS adds strategic depth to the Iranian overtures in the region since their scarce, strategic resources may be more efficiently used against other rivals like the Israel and the USA. Secondly, and most crucially, CHIMS is a way of Putin to break the Saudi Arabia-USA strategic bond which is the cornerstone of geopolitics in West Asia since the end of the Second World War. Observers are calling this move of Putin as a strategic masterstroke by trying to remove the Saudis away from the American bloc into the Russian bloc (Gravitas, 2023). In summary, it may be stated that Putin's administration in Russia has been able to 'innovate' at every level of 'strategic management', that is, the institutional, strategic, tactical, operational and the technological levels. All this has served the purpose of increasing the efficacy of the strategic, foreign policy overtures by Putin's administration in Russia.

Section D: Putin's Leadership Role in Shaping Strategic Management of BRICS in International Politics

The primary objective of this section is to present the answer to the second research question as mentioned in section B of the study earlier. This section is dedicated to describing and elucidating the role of President Putin's leadership in shaping and influencing the policy agenda and strategic measures adopted and executed by the BRICS since its inception in 2009. These collective, foreign policy decisions of the BRICS have been in sync with the twin foreign policy objectives of the Russian state as mentioned earlier.

1. Institutional Foundations and Putin's Early Role in BRICS

Putin's influence within BRICS can be traced back to the early discussions leading to the organization's formation. The first BRICS summit in 2009 in Yekaterinburg, Russia, was a response to the global financial crisis of 2008. Putin recognized an opportunity to challenge the dominance of Western financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which he argued unfairly favored the United States and Europe. At the Yekaterinburg summit, BRICS leaders emphasized the need for a multipolar world and advocated for reforms in global financial governance, pushing for greater representation for emerging economies within these institutions. Under Putin's guidance, BRICS leaders made early commitments to economic and financial cooperation, which later led to the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) in 2014. Based in Shanghai, the NDB was designed to provide an alternative source of development funding without the political conditions often attached by Western institutions. Putin saw this as a strategic tool not only for empowering BRICS nations but also for bolstering Russia's regional influence through infrastructure investments in Eurasia and beyond.

2. The New Development Bank (NDB) and Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA)

Putin was a driving force behind the creation of the NDB and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), two institutions that have become pillars of BRICS' economic policy. The NDB, which received initial capital from all BRICS members, has since funded a variety of projects across member states, focusing on infrastructure, renewable energy, and sustainable development. This financing model has allowed BRICS countries to pursue growth without dependency on Western lenders. For Russia, the NDB also serves as a means to support Russian companies in BRICS member states, reinforcing Moscow's economic reach and cementing its leadership within the bloc. The CRA, meanwhile, functions as a collective financial safety net. Putin saw the CRA as a way to foster financial stability among BRICS members, insulating them from balance-of-payment crises often exacerbated by reliance on Western-dominated financial markets. The CRA allows BRICS countries to access emergency funds during financial distress, thereby enhancing their collective economic resilience. Together, the NDB and CRA embody Putin's vision of BRICS as a self-sustaining alliance capable of mitigating external economic pressures and fostering autonomy from Western influence.

3. Strategic Partnerships at the BRICS

As is clear from the recent BRICS summit in Kazan in 2024, it seems Putin has tried to broker some sort of understanding between India and China in order to prevent an Indo-US alignment against China. This latest emerging context in international politics seems to be another case of successful utilization of the BRICS platform by President Putin to operationalize Russia's strategic management actions to achieve the primary foreign policy goal and objectives of the Russian Federation today. This seems to be extremely important political manoeuvre especially given the fact that Russia and the USA have a very tense equation with each other especially after the ongoing war in Ukraine started in 2022. Thus, it seems BRICS platform has helped

Russia greatly in achieving the Russian foreign policy goals. Other strategic partnership through the BRICS-Plus initiative includes the CHIMS strategic partnership in the Middle-East.

4. Security and Counter-Terrorism Cooperation

Beyond economic initiatives, Putin has pushed BRICS to address issues of security and counter-terrorism, reflecting his broader stance on sovereignty and non-interference. Under his leadership, Russia has consistently promoted the notion that BRICS should collectively resist foreign interference in domestic affairs, a principle that has found resonance in the foreign policies of other BRICS nations like China and India. In 2016, the Goa BRICS summit, hosted by India, resulted in the establishment of the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Working Group. Putin's advocacy for a joint approach to counter-terrorism aimed to strengthen internal security mechanisms among BRICS nations, enabling them to confront terrorism without Western intervention.

Moreover, Putin has emphasized the importance of cybersecurity and information security within BRICS, pushing for cooperative measures against cyber threats and data sovereignty. Russia has proposed policies aimed at securing BRICS countries' digital infrastructure, calling for the development of shared strategies to counteract the influence of Western tech companies and protect digital sovereignty. This initiative aligns with Russia's domestic policies on internet control and regulation, demonstrating Putin's intent to shape BRICS' approach to technology and information security in ways that resonate with Russian interests.

5. BRICS Expansion and the BRICS Plus Initiative

Putin has also been a prominent advocate for the expansion of BRICS to include new members from the Global South. The BRICS Plus initiative, discussed since 2017, aims to bring in additional countries, thereby increasing the bloc's geopolitical weight. Putin's vision for BRICS Plus aligns with his goal of creating a broader coalition of non-Western countries that can serve as a counterbalance to NATO and the European Union. Through BRICS Plus, Putin envisions a coalition that extends beyond BRICS' original members, encompassing countries that share a commitment to sovereignty, development, and resistance to Western hegemony.

The inclusion of countries such as Egypt, the UAE, and potentially others in BRICS Plus serves not only to increase BRICS' influence but also to amplify Russia's own role within this expanding alliance. For Putin, BRICS Plus is an opportunity to project Russian influence across a wider network of states, bolstering Russia's geopolitical relevance in regions like Africa, the Middle East, and South America. By championing BRICS expansion, Putin is reinforcing BRICS as a multipolar alternative to Western-led global governance structures.

President Putin's leadership plays a pivotal role in the strategic management of the BRICS organization, significantly influencing its direction and objectives. Under Putin's guidance, BRICS has evolved from a coalition of emerging economies into a formidable platform for countering western dominance and for advocating for a 'multipolar world order'. One of the most notable impacts of Putin's leadership is the expansion of the BRICS, which now includes countries such as Iran, and Saudi Arabia. This expansion reflects an intentional strategy to bolster the block's geopolitical weight and economic influence. Putin has actively promoted BRICS as a counterbalance to western LED institutions, inserting that it represents the interests of the "global majority" against unilateral actions by Western powers (PBS, 2024). Moreover, Putin has emphasized financial cooperation within the BRICS, particularly in developing alternatives to western dominated financial systems. This includes proposals for a new payment system that could bypass the swift network, which has been used to impose sanctions on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (DW, 2024). Such initiatives are designed not only to mitigate the impact of sanctions on Russia but also to provide member states with greater economic autonomy. The joint declaration from the recent BRICS summit in Kazan highlighted concerns over "unlawful unilateral coercive measures" reinforcing the block's commitment to enhancing financial collaboration (CBS News, 2024). Putin's leadership also manifests in his diplomatic efforts to strengthen ties with key member states. His personal rapport with leaders like Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi has facilitated closer cooperation on various fronts, including security and trade (Al Jazeera, 2024). By positioning Russia as a stabilizing force in international relations, Putin seeks to elevate the BRICS as a primary channel for solidarity among the 'global south' nations. In conclusion, Putin's leadership is instrumental in shaping the strategic direction of the BRICS. For expansion efforts, financial initiatives and strengthened diplomatic ties, Putin seeks to position the BRICS as a key player in reshaping global politics.

Section E: Impact of BRICS' 'Strategic Management' Measures on Global politics

The main objective of this section is to present, in a synoptic way, the answer to the third and final research question of the study as mentioned in Section A earlier. It describes and elucidates the impact of the BRICS on global politics and its evolution in the twenty first century.

Since its founding, the BRICS alliance has emerged as a potent force in global geopolitics, challenging established Western-led institutions and advocating for a multipolar world order. Under Vladimir Putin's leadership, Russia has played a pivotal role in steering BRICS policies to confront what he perceives as Western dominance, particularly that of the United States. From establishing economic institutions like the New Development Bank (NDB) to promoting security cooperation and geopolitical alliances, BRICS, under Putin's leadership, has influenced international governance and shifted the dynamics of global power.

The BRICS has emerged as a significant player in global politics, challenging the traditional dominance of Western powers and advocating for a multipolar world order. This block's influence is increasingly felt in various domains, including economic governance, security dynamics and diplomatic relations. One of the primary impacts of the BRICS on global politics is its role in promoting a multipolar world. As articulated in various studies, the BRICS nations collectively aspire to reshape international norms and institutions that have historically favoured western countries. They advocate for greater representation and influence of emerging economies in global governance structures such as the United Nations and the World Bank (Ahmed, 2023 and Kolesnichenko, O., Rozanov, A., & Liu, D., 2024). This shift is indicative of a broader trend where developing nations seek autonomy from western hegemony and strive for an equitable international order. The recent expansion of the BRICS to include new members like Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the UAE has further amplified its geopolitical significance. With this expansion, the BRICS now account for approximately 37.3% of global GDP, positioning itself as a formidable counterweight to western led organizations like the G7 (European Parliament, 2024 and Ferragamo, Mariel, 2024). Economically, the BRICS has established institutions such as the new development bank NDB, which aims to finance infrastructure projects in member countries and beyond. The focus of national new Development Bank on funding projects in local currency challenge the dominance of the US dollar in international trade (Feingold, 2024). This financial strategy not only enhances Economic Cooperation among member states but also signals a shift towards alternative economic frameworks that prioritise the needs of developing nations. Moreover, the BRICS has been active in addressing global security issues. While member nations have divergent views on specific conflicts such as Syria or Ukraine the block emphasizes principles like non-interference and collective security (Kolesnichenko, O., Rozanov, A., & Liu, D., 2024 and Matovska M., Trajkoska J., Siljanovska Z., 2014). This approach allows the BRICS to present itself as a viable alternative for conflict resolution and peacekeeping in regions often neglected by Western powers. In conclusion, the BRICS organization in regions often neglected by Western powers in conclusion, the BRICS organization is reshaping the geopolitical landscape by advocating the BRICS organization is reshaping the geopolitical landscape by advocating for a multipolar world order that reflects the interests of emerging economies. Its expansion and initiatives signal a significant shift in global governance dynamics, emphasizing cooperation among developing nations while challenging established western norms. As the BRICS continues to evolve, its impact on international relations will likely grow, posting a more equitable and representative global political environment. The greatest impact of the BRICS alliance is that its success has made the arrival of multipolarity in international relations a certainty and only its varying permutations and combinations are still to be laid bare.

II. Conclusion:

In conclusion, it may be safely stated that 'strategic management' operations and policies executed by the Russian President Vladimir Putin through the platform of the BRICS have strongly paved the way for a multipolar world order. 'Multipolarity' in international relations is certain to further get a concrete shape in the decade of the 2020's. While the emergence of a 'multipolar world order' was seen by observers as just a mere possibility in 2008 when the economic crisis struck the West, Putin's 'strategic management' and tactical overtures have actually turned this possibility into a reality of the world we live in today. The flag bearer of the future, multipolar world order is indeed the BRICS organization which originally was the brainchild of President Putin of Russia. This pet project of Putin, that is, the BRICS is today a major rival to the G7 organization led by the USA. This is the stark political reality of international relations today even as the collective ability of the USA and the West further decreases to influence geopolitical realities all over the globe. In addition, Putin's 'strategic management' overtures have also ensured that the Russian Federation gets the status of a 'great power' in international politics despite lacking the economic and military resources of the erstwhile Soviet Union. While not underestimating the role of other factors, this study ascribes the reasons for this state of affairs also to the 'strategic management' operations employed by President Putin through the BRICS organization. The study concludes that 'innovative' measures of 'strategic management' led by President Putin through the BRICS have redesigned and reshaped the state of international relations since 2009 when the BRICS first had its inception. Thus, it may also be summarized that 'innovation' and 'research and development (R&D)' at every level of 'strategic management' and 'governance' is crucial for global dominance in twenty first century.

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