

BRICS in the Arctic: The Member-States' Interests and the Group's Disregard

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Abstract

For the last several years Arctic region has been presenting a topical issue for scholars. Climate change and geopolitical shifts among global and regional powers allowed IR researchers to put forward different ideas about the development of the Arctic region. Being one of the forums that gather five emerging and global powers, BRICS has been “nominated” to enter the Arctic domain. In this article, the authors search for evidence of BRICS involvement in the High North issues. Although few facts support this idea, the authors state that cooperation among BRICS and Arctic states may be possible in scientific and investment areas.

Keywords: *regionalization, economic cooperation, New Development Bank, polar, research*

1. Introduction

The Arctic region undergoes significant and rapid changes both environmentally and economically. Over the last few years, climate change has had a considerable impact: temperatures in the area rise two to three times faster than the global average and cause critical changes to marine and terrestrial ecosystems and natural livelihoods. The process of snow and ice melting opens up new opportunities for economic development on a global scale, such as access to natural resources and new sea routes. Given these changes, the Arctic region has become a zone of interest both for Arctic and non-Arctic states.

The Arctic is an area of geopolitical struggle and disputes over the ownership of certain sections of the continental shelf, using transport routes in conditions of improving the ice situation. Non-regional states (including the largest countries in Western Europe, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and India) and a number of international organizations (e.g., NATO and the EU) are involved in the Arctic region. Against the background of deteriorating relations between Russia and the West due to the Ukrainian crisis, Russian-Chinese and Russian-Indian relations have acquired an additional incentive for development, which is also reflected in cooperation in the Arctic region. The prospect of Russian, Chinese, and Indian potential cooperation coincides with the priorities of the BRICS as well: energy, innovative cooperation aimed at reducing dependence on Western technologies, transport infrastructure, and the environment. Therefore, some argue that Arctic cooperation might become the basis for implementing joint multilateral investment projects that would raise economic and environmental cooperation within the framework of BRICS to a new level.

BRICS countries have different Arctic identities: among five countries, Russia is the only Arctic coastal nation and a member of the Arctic Council (AC), China and India received the status of AC

observers in 2013, have contiguous territory in the Northern hemisphere, while Brazil and South Africa are located on different continents in the Southern hemisphere. (Lagutina and Leksyutina, 2020) While there is a high probability of cooperation between the Arctic country Russia and Arctic Council observer countries China and India, it can expect that Brazil and South Africa, which do not have any borders or connections with the region, do not have enough ties to cooperate in the Arctic. For that reason, the degree of participation of BRICS members at different levels of Arctic cooperation. Their interests and goals within the BRICS should be determined, and also, there is a need to name several BRICS projects that correspond to the goals and objectives of Arctic cooperation to analyze the possible engagement of the BRICS into the Arctic region.

2. Comparison of BRICS Members' Arctic Policies and Activities

Russia, which is home to more than half of the polar region's native population, is a historical leader in discovering and developing Arctic territories and resources and has a unique experience of life and economic activities in extreme conditions. Russia attaches great importance to the Arctic region since the region has huge reserves of energy resources and the possibility of intensive use of the Northern sea route and economic potential. In October 2020, speaking at a BRICS meeting, former Russian Minister of Energy Alexander Novak noted that Russia's Arctic zone has an enormous amount of hydrocarbon reserves, estimated at 7.33 bmt of oil and 50.45 tcm of natural gas, or 24.7 and 72.1 percent of Russia's total reserves, respectively. He added that in 2019 Russia became the fifth-largest LNG producing country. (*The Arctic*, 15th October 2020) Russia has the longest coastline in the region. With an increase in the profitability of the NSR, which is the shortest sea route between Europe and Asia, it can realize tremendous opportunities

and profit. Russia can operate the NSR both for import-export operations in the Russian Arctic zone and international cargo transportations relying on the NSR infrastructure and its icebreaker fleet. Other activities related to the logistical prospects of the NSR include fishing, tourist cruises, scientific expeditions, and resource extraction. Among them, resource extraction is a sector that allows for the development of transport operations in the shortest possible time – in the form of transportation of resources from the Arctic region to the world markets. The idea to attract foreign cargo to the NSR became active after May 2018 decree by Russian President Vladimir Putin. According to the document, by 2024, the cargo turnover of the NSR should be increased to 80 million tons. For comparison, that year, the figure exceeded 20 million tons and amounted up to 31.5 mt in 2019. (*Virtual customs*, 9th October 2020)

On 5th March 2020, the Kremlin unveiled its latest development strategy of the Arctic “On the basics of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period until 2035”, which was signed by President Vladimir Putin and outlined Russia’s plans for industrialization and development of energy resources, massively present in the region. According to the document, the Arctic is a zone of national interests of the country. Eight areas of implementation of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic are defined as following: a) social and economic development of the Russian Arctic; b) the development of its infrastructure; c) the advancement of science and technology for the development of the Arctic; d) environmental protection and environmental safety; e) development of international cooperation; f) ensuring the protection of the population and territories from natural and human-made emergencies; g) ensuring public security in the Russian Arctic; h) ensuring military security; protection and protection of the state border of the Russian Federation. This document

also highlights the importance of developing international cooperation, including increasing international economic, scientific, technological, cultural, and cross-border cooperation, as well as cooperation in the field of global climate change research, environmental protection, and effective development of natural resources in compliance with high environmental standards; active involvement of the Arctic and non-regional states in mutually beneficial economic cooperation in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation. (President of Russia, 5th March 2020)

Russia–US confrontation resulting from the Ukrainian crisis and the alienation of Russia and the European Union (EU) countries has sharply narrowed opportunities for cooperation with Western companies in the Arctic development. This situation is likely to persist for a long time. Under these circumstances, Moscow has to look for other partners that can attract advanced technologies, and these partners are located mainly in Asia. In 2019, Japanese companies JOGMEG and Mitsui joined the Arctic LNG 2 project implemented by the private Russian company NOVATEK. In 2020, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that India could become the first non-Arctic state to extract resources in the Arctic. In the meantime, China has become Russia's leading economic and technological partner. After breaking up with the West, Moscow was forced to ease restrictions on attracting Chinese partners to Russian energy projects before 2014. By attracting Chinese companies backed by Beijing, Russia seeks to do so based on Russian interests.

China, a non-Arctic nation, recognizes itself as an “Arctic stakeholder” and has made significant progress in promoting its national interests in the Arctic, primarily through its participation in the Arctic Council. In 2013, China was granted permanent observer status in this important high-level institutional forum that effectively coordinates the governance of the Arctic region by core eight states. (Kienko, 2019) In its official Arctic strategy, published in January 2018, China presented

itself as a “near-Arctic state,” thus shaping its image as a full-fledged actor in the region. According to the official narrative, China is particularly concerned about the Arctic environmental conditions and the potential effect that simulates China’s climate system, environment, and related economic interests. China has recently taken an active role in economic investments with every Arctic nation in key strategic areas, such as oil and gas development, ports, railways, and infrastructure. The White paper on China’s Arctic policy highlights key components for achieving own goals such as deepening the exploration and understanding of the Arctic, protection of the Arctic environment and addressing climate change, utilizing Arctic Resources lawfully and rationally, including natural resources and tourism, participating actively in Arctic cooperation and governance, promoting peace and stability in the Arctic. (Bowman and Xu, 2020: 8)

China’s intentions in the Arctic encompass scientific research, protection of the environment and habitats of Indigenous Peoples, promotion of the region’s development, and participation in its management. China underlines its respect for the regional countries, readiness for cooperation, commitment to sustainable development, and mutual benefit. In the field of security, China intends to promote peace and stability, ensure the safety of maritime trade, and support all states’ rights to engage in activities in the Arctic region. In line with China’s primary position, the strategy offers an inclusive Arctic management system. Of course, in such a system, China, given its weight, will be able to claim one of the leading roles. This provision contains the main contradiction between the strategies of Russia and China. According to Pavel Gudev, the Chinese strategy is “an attempt to lead the process of strengthening the role of non-regional players in the Arctic, successfully disguised the desire to play a leading role among them in shaping the Arctic agenda.” (Gudev, 2019)

China's interest in polar exploration began in the 1980s with the first Antarctic research expedition in 1984 and the establishment of the Institute of Polar Research of China in Shanghai in 1989. The main aims of the Institute of Polar Research of China are conducting the studies on the significant polar issues; formulating the laws, regulations, appropriate standards, and rules concerning polar expeditions; directing the Chinese polar expedition winter training base and the representative offices abroad; organizing and participating in international affairs; cooperating with the overseas national polar programs. In 1991, the Office of the National Antarctic Expedition Committee was renamed as the Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration (CAA). (Lassere and Alexeeva, 2012: 81) In 1994, the MV Xue Long icebreaker (Snow Dragon) was purchased from the Kherson Shipyard (Ukraine), which allowed its operator, the Institute of Polar Research of China, to conduct its independent polar research. Since then, the world's largest non-nuclear icebreaker has delivered at least one research expedition to the Arctic and Antarctica every two years. During one of them, in 2010, Chinese polar researchers landed by helicopter at the North pole. In 2012, the icebreaker sailed along the NSR from Qingdao to Iceland, and in 2013 tried to help the Russian ship Akademik Shokalsky, which was blocked by ice in the Antarctic.

In September 2018, the construction of the MV Xue Long 2 icebreaker was completed. It was the first icebreaker built in China. In 2020, China began designing an even more powerful and potentially nuclear-powered polar icebreaker expected to have twice the icebreaking capability of its newest vessel. With three icebreakers China will have greater access than the United States currently has to the Arctic, its ports, and its resources. China views the Arctic as a component of its Belt and Road Initiative, recently dubbed the Polar Silk Road. (Congressional Research Service, 2021) China is actively developing cooperation with

research centers in Northern Europe and, in general, relies on these countries in this area. On 10 December 2013, the China-Nordic Research Centre (CNARC) was established in Shanghai. (CNARC, no date) The main objective of CNARC is to increase awareness, understanding, and knowledge about the Arctic and its global impact and provide a platform for academic cooperation that has a significant effect on the sustainable development of the Nordic Arctic and China's development in a global context. (Niëlsson, 2019)

In the economic sphere, the Arctic is of interest to China in two areas - transport and energy. Currently, China remains highly dependent on the export of its products to foreign markets and the import of hydrocarbons from other regions of the world. The revitalization of Chinese foreign policy in the Arctic aims to diversify the solutions to these two problems of the Chinese economy. In addition to the economic benefits, the Arctic routes are essential for two more reasons - there are no pirate threats along with them, and they are not controlled by US military vessels, unlike the traditional southern sea lines of communication between Europe and Asia through the Malacca Strait and Suez channel.

Beijing views Denmark, Iceland, and Finland as an essential strategic gateway to the Arctic region while seeking to occupy a niche in the Arctic as a bridge between the West and the East. The Nordic countries played a crucial role in supporting China's bid for the permanent observer status to the Arctic Council in 2013. Iceland became the first Nordic country to sign a Framework Agreement with China on Arctic Cooperation in 2012 and the first European country to sign a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China in 2013. China is also diversifying its economic activity in Finland to be more strongly present in the Arctic agenda. (Lino, 2020) During the former Prime Minister of Greenland Kuupik Kleist (2009-2013), Greenland was close to falling under

substantial Chinese influence by early 2013. The island's government maintained an intensive political dialogue with Beijing, including regular exchanges of high-level visits, and conducted negotiations with Chinese investors, often mediated by companies from the UK, its dominions, or Hong Kong. The following large-scale projects for the extraction of raw materials were (and still are) the readiest for implementation: Isua iron ore project; development of the Kvanefjeld rare earth deposit in Gardar; lead and zinc ore mine in Citronen Fjord. (Krivorotov, 2021) Moreover, China perceives the island as a potential regional logistics and transport hub and attempts to invest in Greenland's airfields and seaports. There are still unresolved questions regarding cooperation around the Arctic and Greenland. Denmark ought to be very interested in promoting Chinese investments in Greenland; the Greenlandic authorities certainly are. However, the Danish government is held back by considerations of growing US feelings of insecurity. (Lino, 2020)

In 2016, Denmark, backed by the US, blocked China's purchase of a former military base in Greenland. Washington also encouraged Denmark to reject Chinese offers to help build the aforementioned international airports in Greenland, promising that they would instead provide such investment in airports that could have dual-use purposes. Ultimately, Denmark undertook the construction of new airports. (ibid.) This infers that against the background of the competition with the US, it will become increasingly difficult for China to expand its political and economic influence on the island.

Most recently, in early April 2021, after the left-wing party won the election in Greenland, the future of the Kvanefjeld mining complex became a point of discussion. Left-wing Inuit Ataqatigiit party (IA) campaigned against the mine, primarily because of the uranium deposits. This campaign against a project to extract rare earth metals from one of

the world's largest deposits does not mean that the party is entirely against mining. Although China, which owns a 9.4% stake in Greenland Minerals via Shenghe Resources, places great emphasis on this project, the election results do not seem to diminish China's interest in the island.

Compared to the Nordic countries, Russia plays a more active role in the Chinese policy towards the Arctic region, specifically in the economic realm. The largest project in the Russian Arctic that uses the Chinese capital is Yamal LNG. This project is implemented in the South Tambey gas condensate field and consists of its development and construction of an LNG plant with a capacity of 18.4 mcm. The reserves of the area are estimated at 926 bcm of natural gas and 550 mb of condensate. The operator of the project is PAO NOVATEK with a 50.1 percent stake; French Total owns 20 percent; China National Oil Company (CNPC) owns 20 per cents and the Silk Road Fund – 9.9 percent. (Yamal LNG, no date) In February 2020, Yamal LNG announced that it has already shipped 13 mt of LNG since the commencement of the project. In Russia, the Yamal LNG project is recognized as a national-scale project. The participation of Chinese corporations can also be considered politically motivated, given the importance that the government attaches to diversifying energy supplies. In April 2014, Gennady Timchenko, the owner of 23 per cents of NOVATEK's shares, was appointed the head of the Russian-Chinese business council and personally introduced to Xi Jinping by Vladimir Putin. The participation of the Silk Road Fund also points to the importance of the Arctic region for the development of the Chinese economy in the light of the Belt and Road Initiative. Chinese Wuchang Shipbuilding Industry Corporation also participated in this project by supplying 36 condensing modules for the LNG plant.

Arctic LNG 2 is another project of NOVATEK located on the Gydan peninsula in Russia. The participants of Arctic LNG 2 – NOVATEK (60 per cents), Total (10 per cents), CNPC (10 per cents), China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) (10 per cents), and the Japan Arctic LNG (10 per cents) – approved the final investment decision (FID) for the project in September 2019. (NOVATEK, no date) Capital expenditures to launch the project at total capacity are estimated at \$21.3 bn. Bilateral cooperation between China and Russia is also developing in the field of education. In September 2016, the Russian-Chinese center for Arctic studies was opened in Primorsky Krai with the participation of Far Eastern Federal University (FEFU, Russia) and Harbin Institute of Technology University (China).

India is a relative latecomer to the Arctic region. According to the Ministry of External Affairs of India, India's presence in the area dates back to 1920 when the Svalbard Treaty was signed, although the Indian Arctic research station at Svalbard was established only in 2008. In 1981, the Ministry of Ocean Development organized the first expedition to the High North. From this moment up to 2013, India's activity in the region focused predominantly on scientific interest. In 2013, India was accepted as an observer to the Arctic Council, and only in 2018, it renamed National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research to the National Centre for Polar and Oceanic Research. (Devikaa, 2019) In 2007 the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) initiated the first scientific northern expedition. The primary purpose was to investigate bacterial life and climate changes in the High North. The second point appears to be highly significant for the Indian scientists within the hypothesized connection between climate change and the Indian monsoon.

The 2007 expedition and the subsequent establishment of research base "Himadri" were supported by the Norwegian Polar Research

Institute of Norway and a Norwegian State Company “Kings Bay.” It is worth remembering the late Mahendra Nath Bose, who set foot on the Arctic in 1962 to collect plant fossils in collaboration with Norwegian scientists. That was the beginning of India’s scientific engagement with the Arctic. Since 2007, India annually sends two expeditions for carrying out hydrochemistry, glaciology, atmospheric, and microbiology investigations. (Pronina *et al.*, 2020) Many national laboratories and universities, viz. Earth System Science Organization, National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, Geological Survey of India, Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and others have been involved in the cryosphere research programs. (Nayak and Chandran, 2020)

Environmental protection is the most critical factor that determines India’s activity in the Arctic. The problem of climate change and global warming, and if the peak of warming occurs in the spring and early summer, then the increase in temperature in the North of India can have devastating consequences. The melting of Arctic ice also affects the state of ice on the Tibetan plateau, where the principal rivers of India originate. It is known that any changes in the form of ice on the tops of the Himalayan mountains can cause severe flooding and have disastrous consequences for the entire Indo-Gangetic valley. Since rising sea levels result from melting glaciers can lead to flooding of a large part of the territory of India with a population of more than 100 million people. Therefore, monitoring the state of ice is one of the priorities of Indian scientists working in the Arctic.

India mainly cooperates with Russia in the area of energy. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the Russian Far East in September 2019 focused on Arctic LNG 2, the Northern Sea Route, and the Arctic Council. Recently, Sergey Lavrov, Russian MFA, stated that India would become the first non-Arctic state to develop an oil field in

the region. India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has entered into agreements with Rosneft, a Russian energy company, to develop Russian hydrocarbon deposits in the Arctic at the Vankor oil field. (*The Barents Observer*, 16th January 2020) The project also includes the construction of a 600 km pipeline to export the oil via the NSR. Other Russian companies interested in cooperation with Indian counterparts are Gazprom and Novatek. Indian companies H-Energy and Petronet LNG signed memorandums of understanding with Novatek. The partnership between the two countries also covers geological exploration, including on the Arctic shelf and Russian energy resource deliveries to India with the possible use of the Northern Sea Route. (Upadhyaya, 2020) Reports show that by 2050, open-water ships and polar class vessels will be able to navigate along the Northern Sea Route. It is expected that in the future Indian ships may carry cargo throughout the world, and hence the Northern Sea Route will be of interest to the country. There will be opportunities for Indian companies to sign contracts to carry out seabed surveys, especially for bathymetry and identifying shipping lanes. (Nayak and Chandran, 2020)

India attaches significant importance to the development of expertise in the Arctic region. Given that India strives to increase its relative global position, it is crucial for New Delhi to engage in regional affairs beyond its proximity. Thus, deepening the relations with the Arctic states and simultaneously raising its voice in the Arctic issues are considered by the Indian authorities as a meaningful purpose of their foreign policy. Maritime security and transportation are other significant issues for India. Being a naval power, India is interested in increasing its maritime capabilities and presence outside the Indian ocean. Engagement into the Arctic ocean presents India a say in the regional discussions not only within the frames of international bodies such as IMO (International Maritime Organization) but also within the frames of

the AC (Arctic Council) and in the bilateral relations with the Arctic states.

While Russia, China, and India are committed to pro-active engagement into the Arctic, another BRICS member state Brazil, has little shown interest in the region. The interest of Brazilians in the sustainable development of the Arctic and obtaining observer status in the AC is due to the partial opening of the Arctic ocean to commercial shipping, global warming, easier access to hydrocarbons and other mineral resources, fishing, and tourism. After nine years of the initial debate, the Brazilian MFA resumed discussion about the country's acceding to the Svalbard treaty of 1925 and application for the AC observer status. According to S. Trindade, the government needs the latter because "Brazil is big." (*High North News*, 22nd March 2019) Though this kind of reasoning is quite simple, it reveals the symbolic role of the Arctic in contemporary politics: every self-respecting state in the top-tier of the world economy needs to be present in the region.

Alessandro W. Candeas, Director of Defense and Security Issues at the Brazilian MFA, distinguishes four areas where the country may engage in the Arctic region – scientific collaboration, energy projects, world logistics, and technological development, mainly related to the subsea mineral activity. (*ibid.*) Brazil has been engaged in scientific research in Antarctica since the late nineteenth century. Using the experience of cooperation in Antarctica, Brazil can move to scientific cooperation with Arctic countries. Brazilian business entities are also interested in the opportunities and prospects for shipping along the Northern sea routes. Brazil ranks 9th in the world as the largest shipbuilding power and, in this regard, sees the opportunity to participate in the construction of the Arctic merchant fleet along with countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore. Besides, the largest Brazilian mining company Vale S. A. is active on one of the Arctic

powers, Canada, where the company owns railway lines and several seaports. The activities of this largest Brazilian company can set an example for other companies in Brazil.

Due to its remoteness, South Africa has not shown any interest in the Arctic region so far. However, the country has developed substantial research potential in the Antarctic area that may be applied to the scientific activities in the Arctic. South African National Antarctic Programme derives from the 1959 South African National Antarctic Expedition (SANAE) that established the country's presence in the region. To this day, South Africa has inaugurated three research stations in the Antarctic and Subantarctic regions and became a member of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR). Thus, the South African researchers' expertise may aid the international community in Arctic research. (<https://www.sanap.ac.za/about>)

When we look at the interests of the BRICS countries in the Arctic region, the most promising partner for the Arctic states is China. As for the other BRICS countries, India is also actively negotiating with the Arctic countries. On the other hand, Brazil could become a reliable and stable partner of the Arctic countries in shipbuilding and mining. However, compared to the other BRICS countries, South Africa has no policy or interest in this region.

3. Russia, China, and India in the BRICS: Interests and Objectives

BRICS is an international forum consisting of five countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – that strive for either retaining or attaining the status of a global power via promoting the multipolar world order. In this part of the article, we will elucidate the main interests and objectives of Russia, China, and India within the BRICS.

BRICS was established in 2006 as BRIC at the first meeting of the foreign ministers of Brazil, Russia, India, and China in New York. (BRICS, no date) During the first years of the forum's existence, the member states leaned towards discussing the economic issues. Later BRIC was transformed into more of a political club, and South Africa joined in 2011. Nowadays, BRICS represents regional powers of every continent but North America and functions as a forum for discussing global political and economic issues.

The formation of BRICS was driven by the long-term common economic interests of the participating countries, strengthening the principles and standards of international law and supporting complementarity in many sectors of their economies. (Protiva, 2014) BRICS is united by shared values on how to build a multipolar and just world system. In the political sphere, these values are embodied in the ideas of multipolarity, equality of sovereign states, non-interference in internal affairs, mutual respect and consideration of each other's interests, and adherence to generally recognized norms of international law. In economic terms, states strive to reject methods of protectionism and unilateral sanctions and build international trade based on transparency, openness, and inclusiveness. (Ryabkov, 2020)

For Russia after 2014, cooperation with non-Western global and regional powers has become a matter of preserving its image as a world power. It was the various tracks of cooperation on the periphery of the Eurocentric foreign policy that Russia needed to develop to safeguard its national interests and objectives. This policy was called "Pivot to the East". However, this policy was promoted before the Ukrainian crisis in the earlier stages. It was aimed at developing the eastern parts of Russia, which traditionally lagged in terms of economic growth. Since 2014 this policy acquired a new – political – dimension to develop closer ties with Asian states, first and foremost, China.

The strategic objectives of Russia's participation in BRICS include reforming the international monetary and financial system and strengthening peace and security in international relations. Respecting countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity and non-interference in their internal affairs are seen by Russia as critical conditions for attaining the BRICS's goals. As for Russia's strategic goals in BRICS, taking into account the state's foreign policy planning, Russia strives to develop a multi-vector foreign policy, deepen relations with the member countries of the association and expand the mechanisms of the "soft power" of the Russian Federation in the international arena.

The political interest of Russia is to uphold the idea of the polycentric world order. This idea, formed in Moscow back in the 1990s, is one of the main directions of Russian foreign policy planning. In the context of increasing conflict potential in international relations, Russia needs to maintain a balance of potentials of individual countries and the distribution of centers of influence across different continents and between representatives of different civilizations.

As a logical consequence of the desire for a polycentric world, Russia is interested in the participation of the BRICS countries in other international platforms with unity. Russia is interested in coordinating and adjusting the member states' foreign policies to create a common approach to global issues. This relates, first of all, to international strategic stability, international and regional security, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and regional conflicts.

Russia's subsequent interest concerns the issue of countering terrorism threats. Clause 33 of the Foreign Policy Concept of Russia 2016 states: "Russia regards the fight against international terrorism as the most important state task and a key priority in the field of international security." (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian

Federation, 2016) The problem of terrorism is considered in Russia as a threat to state security. Simultaneously, the Foreign Policy Concept of Russia 2016 notes that terrorism as a phenomenon cannot be destroyed only by force - it is necessary to fight the sources of its financing and counteract the factors that contribute to its development. Nevertheless, the Russian government emphasizes that creating mechanisms for military cooperation within the BRICS is not envisaged.

Besides, Russia believes in the need for joint actions of the participating countries in the fight against international drug trafficking, threats in the information space, sea piracy, legalization of criminal proceeds, and illegal migration.

In the economic sphere, Russia needs to reform the international monetary and financial system to create a more representative, stable, and predictable method of global reserve currencies. In this case, an increase in the role of national currencies in mutual settlements and international trade plays a special role. Another goal of Russia is to reduce the risks of global destabilization and to strengthen national financial systems. Also, Russia is interested in enhancing economic ties between the participating countries by stimulating mutual trade in goods and services.

Russia focuses on the development of relationships in the field of innovation as well. The Concept of Russia's participation in the BRICS specifies the spheres of industry. It seems necessary to develop high-tech industries such as energy, aviation, metallurgy, machine-tool building, electronics, and transport.

China, which has the world's second-largest economy, is currently facing the most significant external pressure in 70 years. Relations between the PRC and the United States under President D. Trump have turned from cooperative to confrontational. The reason for such a US policy should be considered the excessive "penetration" of the PRC into

the world economy. For the United States, whose opposition has led to trade wars, China's economic might is a peril.

The leading Chinese goal of participation in the BRICS is to reform the world monetary and financial system, founded by Western countries after World War II. The 2008 global financial crisis forced many countries to reconsider their approaches to economic development. Since then, China, which became the world's second-largest economy in the second decade of the 21st century, has sought to shape a new international economic order and reform the quota system at the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

In addition to reforming international financial institutions, China under Xi Jinping began to pursue a more active foreign economic policy, exemplified by the Belt and Road Initiative. Despite the vague formulation of the initiative and the absence of precise plans, it can be considered as China's foreign economic policy. One of the main mechanisms created under this initiative is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). As part of the diversification of international financial institutions in BRICS was to create a New Development Bank. Besides, China is also actively promoting the idea of creating the SCO Bank.

It appears that such a policy is aimed at developing foreign markets and international transport infrastructure necessary for the growth of China's export-oriented economy. Moreover, it is necessary to develop relations with countries that possess rare earth and energy resources the Chinese industry and economic spheres related to Industry 4.0 depend upon. This is the basis of the technological and innovative development of the PRC as a global power.

According to A. Gabuev, the BRICS format allows China to neutralize its internal uncertainty about how the structure of the international financial system should look like in the future. (Gabuev

et al., 2015) In discussions with the member countries, the PRC is gradually formulating the system model that is suitable for its tactical and specific strategic goals. At the same time, speaking on behalf of the BRICS erodes China's initiative in some issues on the international agenda, the reaction to which could be more serious if it came from one country.

From a political point of view, the strife for the possession of the status of a global power determines the foreign policy of the PRC. The coming to power of Xi Jinping marked a change in the country's foreign policy. According to Deng Xiaoping, the period of development came to an end, and China strengthened its voice in the international arena, stepping up its foreign policy in all regions of the world and levels of political interaction. International institutions are the platforms where China promotes its vision of solutions to specific global or regional problems and develops its relations with other countries. An essential component of Chinese foreign policy is the development of South-South cooperation, which allows it to project its influence outside. Another goal of China is to develop cooperation with developing countries to remove them from the United States' influence, which is its only global opponent. Moreover, China uses its joint membership with India in multilateral organizations such as BRICS and SCO to balance India-Japan relations because of the perceived threat they pose to China's interests in the region.

India is a South Asian regional power competing with China at the Asian regional level. Given the combined economic, military, and demographic potential, India is striving to enter the category of global powers. This strife is based on India's perception as a distinct civilization as well. India's foreign policy can be characterized as pro-Western with certain balancing elements that allow the country to pursue a more independent foreign policy.

BRICS is one of the elements of balancing that allows India to advance its global agenda with minimal losses. While the BRICS is often seen as a challenge for the West, India sees it as a forum for reforming global governance and mediation between the West and developing countries. According to S. Jaishankar, while stepping up in the international order, India should be regarded as a southern and western country, simultaneously taking into account its democratic development and bonding to the developing world. (*The Economic Times*, 3rd October 2019) Given this, India seems to be mediating between the two identities through BRICS.

India also views BRICS as an additional platform for interaction with China to discuss specific issues and problems without being tied to bilateral relations. For example, the conflict in Ladakh did not lead to problems in interaction between the countries at the BRICS summit in November 2020.

While analyzing India's policy towards BRICS, it can be noted that the country uses its membership to project its influence on the international financial system. Like Russia and China, India is unhappy with its global position in this area and is trying to reshape the global financial architecture. India was one of the initiators of establishing the New Development Bank, the idea of which was first voiced at the 2012 BRICS Summit.

Another significant issue important for India is the discussion of such issues as terrorism, climate change, and other global issues to which every country approaches differently. Discussions and negotiations over such topics aid India in formulating its international policy.

Another significant political issue is the reform of the UN Security Council. India has long been waiting for the reforms to acquire a permanent membership in the UNSC. According to the Indian political

establishment, India represents one-sixth of the world population. It is the third-largest economy that needs to be represented in the main body of world politics and make it more democratic.

4. Possible Tracks for Cooperation

Recently a few Russian academicians started to write about BRICS's policy in the Arctic. (Lagutina and Leksyutina, 2017) Basically, they state that few, mainly scholarly, events held independently or on the sidelines of other official meetings show the importance of the Arctic region for the decision-makers within the BRICS. One of the starting points of pulling together the Arctic and BRICS is mentioning a conference "The approaches of the BRICS countries to governing common spaces: trends and potential cooperation." Unfortunately, the authors of this article could not find any information on this event. Besides, the Arctic region and ocean cannot be considered as a "global commons" due to the international law norms that define this category. (Gudev, 2016)

This article has so far covered member-states' interests and objectives in the organization and their motives of involvement in the Arctic region. In this part of the article, we are trying to find tracks of BRICS's activity that may lead to the development of its pro-active policy relating to the Arctic region. There are several areas within the frames of which BRICS can enter the Arctic domain viz. New Development Bank (NDB) projects maritime, fisheries, science, and environmental matters.

Environmental issues lay at the heart of almost every discussion on polar issues, be it energy development, maritime policies, or governance issues. BRICS is no exception since climate change issues are of great importance for every member-state; however, their priority changes

from state to state. The environmentalist narrative is present in all summit statements. (BRICS Information Centre, no date) In general, climate change is mentioned concurrently with food security, development of renewable and nuclear energy, and promotion of natural gas as the eco-friendliest fossil fuel. Stress on nuclear energy coincides with the Russian rise of nuclear power plant construction in South Africa. At the 5th BRICS Ministers of Environment Meeting, held in August 2019 in Brazil, BRICS countries exchanged experiences in the field of environmental protection, search, share, and their implementation, the development of joint projects. (BRICS Brasil 2019, 15th August 2019)

At the level of multilateral cooperation, the BRICS countries actively participate in UNEP (UN Environment Programme) projects aimed at the transition to a green economy and renewable energy, as well as the promotion of green technologies.

Currently, in times of tense relations between Russia and the West, environmental policy acquires a new aspect. Russia considers this area as one of the dimensions where Russia strengthens its image as a trustworthy partner. Russia pursues environmental agenda in other international forums and organizations. (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016) Concurrently with the re-development of the Soviet military bases, Russian media draws attention to the Defence Ministry's activity on removing the solid waste from the military bases on the Arctic islands left since the soviet era. (*Lenta.ru*, 13th January 2015)

The maritime security issue steps forth since BRICS brings together powers from different regions connected mainly via sea routes. This problem is not external but equally internal. Chinese activity in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean evokes Indian officials and experts to raise concerns about Chinese infringer upon Indian national

interests. (Коростиков [Korostikov], 2016) India, Brazil, and South Africa (IBSA) are engaged in trilateral maritime cooperation. According to Vijay Sakhujia, it is possible to extend such cooperation to all five BRICS members. (Sakhujia, 2014) However, given the current cases of distrust between the states, this statement does not seem likely. As far as the Northern Sea Route is considered, although China respects national laws of the Arctic littoral states, there are doubts among some Russian experts whether Beijing will stick to its current policy when the passage becomes more lucrative due to the ice melting. Thus, to establish a comprehensive national regime of NSR, Russia has recently conducted several reforms, the aim of which is to define the state entities responsible for the development and operation of the NSR.

Maritime security is mentioned two times in BRICS summit declarations. For the first time, in the 2015 Ufa Declaration, the leaders of the member states articulated the problem of maritime piracy and called other states for operational decisions to fight this problem. In the 2018 Johannesburg summit declaration, the importance of Ocean Economy was stressed: “[W]e recognize the vast potential in cooperation and collaboration in advancing the Oceans Economy amongst BRICS countries, which encompasses multiple sectors, including the strategic areas of maritime transport, shipbuilding, offshore oil and exploration, aquaculture, port development, research and technology, conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, marine and coastal tourism, financial and insurance services, as well as coastal industrial zone development.” (BRICS Information Centre, 26th July 2018)

As for scientific research, the Arctic region is one of the most promising areas for all BRICS participants. One of such joint initiatives of scientists from Russia, Brazil, India, and China was the organization of a panel session on the topic “The BRIC(S) in the Arctic: emerging

opportunities for joint initiatives” at the annual Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik (Iceland) on 07 October 2016. This initiative is one of the first attempts to coordinate the general directions of developing scientific research in the Arctic within the BRIC(S) format on a multilateral basis.

In 2015 respective ministers of the member-states signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Science, Technology, and Innovation. (BRICS Information Centre, 2015) Ocean and polar sciences were among the main areas of cooperation mentioned in the Memorandum. Working Group on Oceanic, Polar Science and Technology was established and after it convenes once in two years.

New Development Bank was established at the Fortaleza Summit in 2014 in order “[t]o mobilize resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging market economies and developing countries to complement the existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development.” (BRICS Information Centre, 15th July 2014) So far, 53 projects equalling 15 bn US dollars were approved by the Board of Directors. The only project which can remotely be related to the Arctic region is 100 m US dollars loans approved for the Nord-Hydro project to increase energy supply in the Karelia region through renewable energy resource. (New Development Bank, 2016) Currently, NDB does not show any interest in the Arctic region. It is possible that in the future, the Bank will engage in the development of the NSR infrastructure and social projects; still, it is not a priority for the Board of Directors.

5. Conclusion

BRICS represents countries with different Arctic identities. While Russia is a littoral state and a member of the Arctic Council, China and

India became observers to the AC in 2013. Russian interests in the region cover several issues: traditional security, maritime, transport, energy, governance, and environment. China and India, basically, pursue scientific, energy, and transport interests. Brazil and South Africa are located in the Southern hemisphere; hence they lack any definite Arctic policy. Brazil has articulated its scientific interest in Arctic matters on a few occasions, but no official activity has taken place.

Recent discussions on BRICS involvement in the Arctic seem to exaggerate few facts. Although issues on the BRICS agenda may overlap with those in the Arctic Council and other regional forums, we cannot state that it creates enough evidence, which is more critical for political will to drive this process.

The notion of discussions within BRICS about the governance of “global commons” do not relate to the topic, since according to the international law, such as UNCLOS 1982, Convention on the Continental Shelf, and other documents, Arctic domain does not fall into “global common” category until all the disputes over the boundaries of the continental shelf are settled between the littoral states.

Environmental issues are of high priority both among BRICS states and in the Arctic matters. Still, we cannot state that the BRICS agenda deals with Arctic matters considering its peculiar conditions. The only area where BRICS countries are engaged in the region is scientific cooperation. This track started in 2015 by signing the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Science, Technology, and Innovation and establishing the Working Group on Oceanic and Polar Science and Technology. However, there are doubts that BRICS countries except for China have enough know-how about Arctic technologies that can stimulate the development of the Russian High North.

NDP is a unique entity that can help the development of the Arctic. So far, no project relating to the Arctic was approved. Still, there are

prospects of the Bank's participation in developing the NSR infrastructure and improving the social conditions in High North.

Abbreviations

btm - billion metric tons
tcm – trillion cubic meters
mcm – million cubic meters
mb – million barrels
mt – million tons

Notes

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