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BRICS and Security Challenges in Eurasian Region

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Background

BRICS was formed in 2001 as an emerging investment market and global power bloc.¹ It brings together five of the largest developing countries of the world, i.e. Brazil, Russia, India, China & South Africa, representing nearly 41 per cent of the world's populace, 24 per cent of the global GDP and 16 per cent of the world trade.² BRICS comprises of the fastest developing nations with their respective global ambitions, a fact mainly concerning China. This peculiar character of BRICS has the possibility of creating certain security challenges among the member countries, amidst varying regional aspirations.

Major Security Challenges in Eurasian Region

In brief, the major Security challenges in Eurasian region include:

- (a) **Internal Conflicts:** The conflicts, such as those in the Caucasus and Central Asia, have created refugee problems and may eventually threaten the security of other European states located around and outside the immediate geographic region.
- (b) **Corruption and Organised Crime:** These issues are peculiar to the developing nations and have been major obstacles to economic development in post-Soviet Eurasia. The Eurasian states after disintegrating from the erstwhile USSR had been grappling with economic problems post *glasnost* and despite *perestroika* or the restructuring brought in by Gorbachev.³
- (c) **Protracted and Armed Conflicts:** The major conflicts in Eurasia included strifes between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in April 2021 with the latest being between Russia and Ukraine since February 2022.⁴ These conflicts continue to harm peace and security in the region, while new armed conflicts have appeared, undermining regional stability.
- (d) **Militarisation and Defence Spending:** The rise in militarisation and defence spending in the region has contributed to the security challenges. China has been the major spender on militarisation amongst the BRICS members. As per the estimates of the U.S. government, during 2023, the Chinese annual defence budget was around \$700 billion almost at par with the United States' 2023 defence budget of just over \$800 billion.⁵ India was also found to be allocating defence budget to the tune of Rs 5,93,537.64 crore, which is

13.18 per cent of the total budget of Rs 45,03,097 crore during 2023-24 for the modernisation of its armed forces.⁶ This speaks about the focus that these two major powers in the BRICS are directing towards their armed forces.

(e) Regional and International Security Organisations: The effectiveness of these organisations in addressing security challenges in Eurasia has been questioned, as they have struggled to adapt to the new security landscape. Regional security groupings especially the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) have been doing well in promoting coordination among the Eurasian nations despite rising Chinese sway therein.⁷

(f) Russia's Influence: The Eurasian states trace their origins to the erstwhile USSR, and as such, Russia has had an influence on these states. However, with Eurasian states gaining prominence, mainly as reservoirs of precious minerals, energy resources and defence hardware in the global affairs, the Russian influence appeared to be gradually diminishing.⁸ However, Russia has re-emerged as a central actor in Eurasia, with an agenda of amalgamation and an idea of establishing Eurasia as a distinctive politico-economic entity.⁹

How can BRICS address the security challenges in the Eurasian Nations?

The vast and geopolitically complex region of Eurasia faces innumerable security issues ranging from regional conflicts to terrorism and economic instability. BRICS nations especially India and Russia, collectively possess the potential to play a pivotal role in addressing security challenges in Eurasia:

(a) BRICS can enhance cooperation through diplomatic channels to facilitate conflict resolution in Eurasia. It is felt that by utilising their collective diplomatic influence, the BRICS member countries can encourage dialogue and negotiations between conflicting parties, promoting peaceful solutions to the ongoing disputes. Diplomatic efforts can focus upon nurturing mutual understanding, building trust and establishing frameworks for conflict resolution amongst the nations within Eurasia.

(b) BRICS can play a significant role in promoting economic stability as a foundation for regional security in Eurasia. By strengthening economic ties and trade relations among member nations, BRICS can contribute to the development of the Eurasian region. This economic integration can create a more interconnected and interdependent network, reducing the likelihood of conflicts due resource competition and economic disparities.

(c) BRICS can provide financial support for infrastructure development, promoting economic growth and stability in Eurasia. A crucial aspect of security challenges in Eurasia involves addressing the threat of terrorism. Towards this, BRICS nations may collaborate on intelligence sharing, joint counter-terrorism training and operations and the development of comprehensive strategies to combat radicalisation and extremism. By pooling their resources and expertise, these countries can effectively tackle transnational threats and prevent the spread of terrorism within the region.

(d) BRICS may also attempt to address these challenges through soft power drivers like promoting education and social programs that counter extremist ideologies and foster long-term stability.

(e) BRICS can contribute to addressing the security challenges in Eurasia through multilateral military cooperation while respecting the sovereignty of the individual nations. Towards this, collaborative military exercises and joint peacekeeping missions can be organised to respond to crises and maintain stability in the region. This military cooperation should be conducted within the framework of international law and with a focus on promoting regional security rather than advancing the individual aspirations of the nations concerned

(f) BRICS can also engage in promoting a culture of good governance and the rule of law in Eurasian nations. By supporting the efforts of the concerned Eurasian nations to strengthen institutions, fight corruption and uphold democratic values, BRICS can facilitate the establishment of stable and accountable governance structures through mutual consultations. This, in turn, is expected to help in mitigating internal conflicts and fostering an environment conducive to regional security.

(g) Energy security is a critical aspect of stability in Eurasia, and BRICS can play a vital role in ensuring an unhindered and sustainable diversified energy supply for the region. Collaborative initiatives in the development of renewable energy sources, infrastructure for energy transportation, and joint investment in the energy sector can contribute to reducing dependency on a single energy source, thereby enhancing the resilience of Eurasian nations to external pressures and conflicts related to energy resources.

(h) BRICS can also work towards enhancing cultural and people-to-people exchanges in Eurasia. By promoting a better understanding of diverse cultures and fostering people-to-people connections, BRICS can contribute to building bridges of trust and

cooperation among Eurasian societies. Cultural diplomacy can play a crucial role in softening geopolitical tensions and creating an atmosphere conducive to resolving conflicts peacefully.

To conclude, we can state that BRICS has the potential to be a significant force in addressing the security challenges in Eurasia. BRICS nations can collectively contribute to fostering stability in the Eurasian region through diplomatic efforts, economic cooperation, counter-terrorism initiatives, military collaboration, governance support, energy security management and cultural exchanges, to say the least. However, it is essential for these efforts to be made in a cooperative and all-inclusive manner, duly respecting the sovereignty of individual nations and considering the diverse interests within the Eurasian region.

Notes:

¹ "What is BRICS," *The Economic Times*, January 24, 2024, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/definition/brics>. Accessed on January 24, 2024.

² BRICS India 2021, "Evolution of BRICS," <https://brics2021.gov.in/about-brics>. Accessed on January 23, 2024.

³ US Department of State Archive, "Dissolution of the USSR and the Establishment of Independent Republics, 1991," January 20, 2001 to January 20, 2009, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/pcw/108229.htm>. Accessed on January 24, 2024.

⁴ International Institute for Strategic Studies, "The Armed Conflict Survey 2022: Europe and Eurasia Regional Analysis," November 18, 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/en/online-analysis/online-analysis/2022/11/acs-2022-europe-and-eurasia/>. Accessed on January 24, 2024.

⁵ Peter Robertson and Wilson Beaver, "China's Defence Budget Is Much Bigger Than It Looks", *Foreign Policy*, September 19, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/19/china-defence-budget-military-weapons-purchasing-power/>. Accessed on January 24, 2024.

⁶ "Defence gets Rs 5.94 lakh crore in Budget 2023-24, a jump of 13% over previous year," *Press Information Bureau*, February 01, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaselframePage.aspx?PRID=1895472>. Accessed on January 24, 2024.

⁷ Rajneesh Kumar, "Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and India's Strategic Options in Central Asia," *Center for Air Power Studies*, May 22, 2023, <https://capsindia.org/shanghai-cooperation-organisation-and-indias-strategic-options-in-central-asia/>. Accessed on January 24, 2024.

⁸ C Raja Mohan, "With Russia's declining influence, India needs a new strategy in Eurasia," *The Indian Express*, September 21, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/with-russias-declining-influence-india-needs-a-new-strategy-in-eurasia-8160821/>. Accessed on January 24, 2024.

⁹ "Russia and Eurasia," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, <https://www.sipri.org/research/conflict-peace-and-security/russia-and-eurasia>. Accessed on January 24, 2024.