



BRICS + 'T': Turkey Moving towards Diversification of its Foreign Policy

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The 10th BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) Summit was held on 25–27 July 2018 in Johannesburg, South Africa themed 'BRICS in Africa: Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the 4th Industrial Revolution'. The summit focused on multilateralism, global economic expansion and outlook, infrastructure, counter-terrorism coalition, sustainable development goals 2030, reforming global governance, climate change, energy security, people to people contact, global stability and security, and support to the central role of the United Nations.¹ As part of "BRICS Plus" mechanism, host nation- South African President Cyril Ramphosa invited African countries and Turkey as guest members to the summit. In order to increase considerable weight within BRICS and inclusive pan-African investment, President Ramphosa elected to invite the leaders of the following African countries to attend the Summit.

- Senegal -Chair of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSGIC)
- Rwanda - Chair of the African Union (AU)
- Gabon - Chair of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)
- Uganda - Chair of the East African Community (EAC)
- Ethiopia - Chair of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)
- Togo - Chair of the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS)
- Zambia - incoming Chair of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
- Namibia - incoming Chair of the Southern African Development Community (SADC)
- Angola - Chair of the SADC Organ and
- Chair of the African Union Commission, Mr Moussa Faki Mahamat.

President Ramphosa's inclusion of African countries is also timely as South Africa formally signed the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement along with 44 African states on 21

March 2018. Turkey was singled out due to its Presidency of the Organisation of the Islamic Countries (OIC) and for possibly due to its increasing profile in South Africa's foreign policy interests and also in the African region.

Turkey's participation in BRICS summit has signaled four important aspects:

- a) Strengthening engagement with African countries
- b) Expansion of role beyond West Asian region
- c) Reinforcing the establishment of a multi-polar world system
- d) Diversification of foreign policy interests

Strengthening Engagement with African Countries

Post his presidential election victory in June 2018, Recep Tayyip Erdogan's participation in BRICS summit is a confidence boost to his African foreign policy interests. Engagement between Turkey and African countries has gained in momentum during Erdogan's tenure. Turkey had participated in the Second Ministerial Review Conference of the African Union, which was held in February 2018. Turkey's bilateral trade with African countries in 2017 amounted to \$18.8 billion. Its investment in Africa is estimated to have surpassed \$6 billion. Turkey has also extended economic and humanitarian aid in the region. Hospitals have been built by Turkey in different parts of Africa. The Somalia-Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan Training and Research Hospital in Mogadishu opened in 2015. Nyala Turkish-Sudanese Research and Training Hospital is also one of the large humanitarian projects Turkey has in Africa.² In this backdrop, the invitation to Turkey to the summit has added further impetus to Turkey's Africa engagement.

Expansion of Role beyond West Asian Region

Turkey's foreign policy aspirations are focused to move beyond West Asia's regional geopolitics and gain a larger profile. Turkey's Presidency of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), its engagement in Astana Talks alongside Russia, Iran and Syria in resolving the Syrian crisis and counter-terrorism measures in containing the Islamic State and the Kurdish crisis fits well within the obligations of BRICS members in curbing the rise of terrorism.

BRICS since its inception has become a symbol for a number of countries such as Turkey. It offers a different geo-political narrative and has often been an active critic of United States led Western international system. BRICS' condemnation of the US sanctions imposed on Russia post Crimean referendum (2014) is one case in point. Engagement with BRICS expands a host of geopolitical and economic rationales that Turkey will see fit to expand its role beyond the West Asian region.

Reinforcing the Establishment of a Multi-Polar World System

Multilateralism and the establishment of a multi-polar world order has been one of the focuses of the organisation- an alternative that its members have proposed to challenge the existing international system. In this context, it is important to bring long term allies of the West such as Turkey into the fold.

The participation of Turkey– a long term western ally and NATO member in a non-Western organisation’s event such as BRICS summit has therefore reinforced the perception of multipolarity as advocated by its members.

Diversification of Foreign Policy Interests

Until recently Turkey as a NATO member had pursued a pro-Euro-Atlantic foreign policy. But the erosion in Turkey- US relations and the deferment of its European Union membership has strengthened Turkey's moves towards diversification of its foreign policy interests. US' imposition of sanctions against two top Turkish government officials over the detention of an American pastor held on espionage charges, its strong condemnation of the killings of Palestinian civilians after the inauguration of the US Embassy at Jerusalem amidst protests in Gaza strip, US' support to Kurdish People’s Protection Unit (YPG) which is an affiliation with PKK and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Manjib and its stand during the Kurdish crisis against Turkey, call for imposition of Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAASTA) sanctions after Turkey signed the S-400 missile deal with Russia and imposition of steel tariffs to highlight a few has led to a deterioration in relations. Turkey’s growing proximity for Russia and its efforts along with Iran and Syria to resolve the Syrian crisis are also factors at play.

Domestic considerations have also induced Turkey to diversify its foreign policy given its current economic crisis. ‘In 2017, the value of Turkey’s exports to the five BRICS countries totalled \$7.3 billion, whereas its imports from the BRICS countries amounted to \$53.4 billion’. BRICS offers a significant market potential for Turkish products.

In conclusion, Turkey will explore the opportunities that BRICS throws up. Inevitably, Turkey will seek to balance its relations with the US and Western allies as its engagement with these long term partners are too important to be ignored. In brief, with reference to the current geopolitical calculus, it stands to reason that the participation of Turkey in BRICS summit has enhanced the country’s role and influence further as a global entity beyond its regional footprint.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.*

Endnotes

¹“**BRICS in Africa: Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the 4th Industrial Revolution, 10TH BRICS SUMMIT JOHANNESBURG DECLARATION**”, SANDTON CONVENTION CENTRE JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA 25 TO 27 JULY 2018 <http://www.brics2018.org.za/sites/default/files/Documents/JOHANNESBURG%20DECLARATION%20-%2026%20JULY%202018%20as%20at%2007h11.pdf>

²“**Turkey in intense cooperation with Africa**”, Anadolu Agency, 10 February 2018. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkey-in-intense-cooperation-with-africa-/1059565>