

Geopolitics

China urges Brics to become geopolitical rival to G7

Leaders from bloc of developing economies will gather this week to debate expansion



Tensions are mounting between India and China over whether the Brics should become a political force that openly challenges the west © Eraldo Peres/AP

Joseph Cotterill in Johannesburg, **James Kynge** and **Arjun Neil Alim** in London and **Michael Pooler** in São Paulo YESTERDAY

China will push the Brics bloc of emerging markets to become a full-scale rival to the G7 this week, as leaders from across the developing world gather to debate the forum's biggest expansion in more than a decade.

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa has invited more than 60 heads of state and government to a summit in Johannesburg from Wednesday when several countries could be invited to join the bloc of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, said several officials familiar with talks.

But in the run-up to the summit New Delhi has clashed with Beijing over the expansion. Tensions are mounting over whether the Brics should be a non-aligned club for the economic interests of developing countries, or a political force that openly challenges the west, said people briefed on India and China's positions. South African officials said 23 countries are interested in joining.

"If we expand Brics to account for a similar portion of world GDP as the G7, then our collective voice in the world will grow stronger," said one Chinese official, who declined to be identified.

Naledi Pandor, South Africa's foreign minister, said this month it was "extremely

wrong” to see a potential Brics expansion as an anti-western move. However, western capitals are likely to regard the possible additions of Iran, Belarus and Venezuela as a move to embrace allies of Russia and China.

Argentina, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia are vying to be the first new members since South Africa was invited into the original group of Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2010.

President Vladimir Putin will not join other Brics leaders in Johannesburg. This will spare Pretoria from having to carry out its legal obligation to arrest the Russian leader after the International Criminal Court indicted him over war in Ukraine.

Putin is likely to attend by video link and he spoke to Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi on August 17 about Tehran’s application to join the Brics, according to the Kremlin.

Xi Jinping will travel to Johannesburg on Monday for the summit and other discussions with African leaders, China’s foreign ministry said, marking a rare trip abroad for the Chinese president this year. Xi’s only other international travel so far in 2023 was to Russia in March.

Brazil’s President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has recently spoken in favour of opening Brics membership to neighbours Argentina and Venezuela, as well as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

A senior diplomat in Brasília said it wanted clear conditions established as the basis for any expansion. One could be a requirement for entrants to join the [New Development Bank](#), the Shanghai-based lender founded by the Brics. Saudi Arabia is in talks to become the multilateral bank’s ninth member.

“It’s important that criteria are defined for the entrance of these new members,” the diplomat said. It was unlikely that all 23 countries would join at the same time but “they need to know why the decision was taken [and] so that, if future expansions happen, the candidates know the priority issues”.

Officials shepherding pre-summit talks have said criteria for admitting new members will have to be agreed by Brics leaders.

They added that a [common currency](#) is not on the agenda, despite growing resentment of the US dollar’s dominance among members.

Instead of a broader push towards de-dollarisation, the summit could focus on seeking an agreement that Brics members should increasingly settle trade between

each other in their local currencies, officials familiar with discussions said.

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