

Why NATO member Turkey wants to join BRICS



By Selcan Hacaoglu
Journalist

OPINION

Starting in the 1940s, Turkey, wary of Moscow, positioned itself as an ally of the US and soon after joined NATO, the military alliance founded to protect Europe against Soviet attack during the Cold War. Since coming to power in 2003, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has gradually reinvented Turkey as a power in its own right that's free to make new friends even if it upsets the old ones. In the past decade, it's been courting a number of US adversaries — China, Russia, and Iran — as distrust of Western powers propelled its search for new partnerships. Now, it's seeking to join those three countries in the BRICS group of emerging-market nations.

Why is Turkey seeking to join BRICS?

Citing frustration over a lack of progress in its decades-old bid to join the European Union, Turkey has formally asked to join BRICS. The aim, according to people familiar with the matter, is to bolster Turkey's global influence and forge new ties beyond the country's traditional Western allies. Officials in Erdogan's administration say that the geopolitical center of gravity is shifting away from developed economies and that joining BRICS could improve Turkey's economic ties with Russia and China.

The BRICS grouping — named for the earliest members: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa — includes some of the biggest emerging economies and touts itself as an alternative to what its participants see as Western-dominated institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. New members can potentially broaden their political and trade relationships and get access to financing through the group's development bank. Four new members — Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, and Egypt — joined at the start of 2024. Erdogan is scheduled to attend the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, starting October 22.

What's Turkey's beef with West?

During much of the Cold War, Russia was the hostile neighbor that motivated Turkey to seek powerful allies to help defend its territory. But Turkey's ties with its Western allies began to deteriorate a decade ago. Erdogan accused Western governments

of backing anti-government protests in Turkey in 2013 in the wake of the Arab Spring revolts. When the US in 2014 began to supply weapons to Kurdish militants in Syria who were helping in the effort to combat Islamic State, Turkey — which is fighting its own conflict with affiliated Kurdish separatists — saw the move as a betrayal.

tempt by followers of a US-based cleric to topple his government in 2016. The same year, negotiations about Turkey joining the EU stalled. A year later, Turkey purchased an advanced Russian missile defense system, the S-400. It took delivery of it in 2019 after dropping talks to acquire a comparable US system, the Patriot, because of Washing-

supplies to the Jewish entity amid its punishing military campaign in the Gaza Strip against the Palestinian Resistance group Hamas. Erdogan has embraced Hamas, which the US and EU consider a terrorist organization.

What new ties is Turkey nurturing?

Turkey has opened dozens of

company Rosatom is building a \$24-billion nuclear power station on Turkey's Mediterranean coast, and Turkey's government has asked it to construct another. Turkey is in talks with China to build a third nuclear power plant. It seeks to secure more Chinese investment in plants making electric vehicles as well as a partnership with China to process a deposit of rare earth elements.

What's at stake?

Erdogan's balancing act challenges Western efforts to forge a unified front to persuade Moscow to stop its war against Ukraine. In July, Erdogan cautioned fellow NATO members against taking steps that could drag the alliance into the war. US officials have repeatedly warned that Turkish entities run the risk of running afoul of American sanctions against Russian entities and Hamas. But if the US pushes Erdogan too hard, it could jeopardize relations with an important partner in the volatile Middle East. Turkey hosts US nuclear warheads at an air base close to Syria and an early-warning radar that's part of NATO's ballistic missile defense capabilities. It's also absorbed millions of refugees from the Middle East and Asia and acted as a buffer for that flow to Europe.

Turkey, too is keen to avoid any move that could endanger its most important military alliance and scupper a deal to buy US-made F-16 warplanes and upgrade other military equipment.

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan makes a video address to a summit in Kyiv, Ukraine, on September 11, 2024, with Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy (c) looking on.

POOL

Turkey's sense that it must take its defense into its own hands was deepened in October 2015 when the US and then Germany withdrew air defenses from Turkey following Ankara's crackdown after a surge of Kurdish militant violence. A month later, under pressure from the US, Turkey canceled its plan to buy a missile defense system from a state-run Chinese company that had been sanctioned by the US for alleged missile sales to Iran. Erdogan's anti-Western rhetoric escalated following a failed at-

ton's refusal to share technology. Following the S-400 deal, the US barred Turkey from buying F-35 fighter jets out of concern the Russian system could be used to collect intelligence on their stealth capabilities. The US later imposed sanctions that effectively cut off Turkey's top defense procurement agency from US financial institutions, military hardware, and technology. Further complicating Turkey's relations with Western partners are Erdogan's growing anti-Israeli rhetoric and criticism of US arms

diplomatic missions in Africa and Latin America as Erdogan seeks a major role in world affairs. He's even vowed to make Turkey the first NATO member to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a China-led international security group that originally focused on Central Asia but is now expanding toward the Middle East. Russia has become a major economic partner, supplying 42% of Turkey's natural gas imports and 6.3 million tourists to the country last year. Russian state

Significance of country X joining BRICS

By Iqbal Surve and Banthati Sekwala
Senior BRICS representatives

OPINION

As the world shifts towards a multipolar reality, BRICS has emerged as a crucial platform for nations seeking to shape their own futures and redefine the global order.

Composed of some of the most powerful and dynamic emerging economies, BRICS stands as a beacon of inclusivity, cooperation, and fairness in an increasingly fractured world. The addition of new members to this prestigious group is not merely a formality — it represents a transformative moment in the evolution of global governance.

BRICS is more than a group of nations; it is a vision for a future where the voices of the Global South are heard and respected. With 47% of the global population and 36% of the world's GDP, BRICS is a force that cannot be ignored. Its growing influence, both politically and economically, draws countries eager to participate in the bloc's mission to reshape the rules of international engagement.

Appeal of BRICS

The BRICS vision is centred on promoting dialogue, fostering equitable cooperation, and creating a new world order — one that moves beyond the skewed policies of the past. Traditional institutions, like the IMF and World Bank, have often imposed rigid structures that prioritise the interests of a few at the expense of many. BRICS, by contrast, seeks to build a system where all nations have the opportunity to thrive.

At the heart of this mission is the New Development Bank (NDB), a BRICS initiative designed to offer fair financing to nations that have historically been underserved by Western financial systems. For many countries, joining BRICS represents not just an opportunity for economic growth, but a chance to break free from the financial constraints imposed by institutions that have long favoured the Global North.

Political, security cooperation: Shared commitment

One of the core pillars of BRICS is political and security cooperation. For countries that join BRICS, this pillar represents an opportunity to engage in global dialogues that prioritise peace, stability, and mutual respect. Unlike other global bodies, where power dynam-



The photo shows an empty convention room, days before it hosts the 2024 BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, from August 22-24, 2024.

SPUTNIK

ics often stifle smaller voices, BRICS offers equal footing to all members. This equality in decision-making allows BRICS nations to present a united front on the global stage, promoting principles of non-interference and sovereignty. In an increasingly polarised world, BRICS' commitment to multilateralism and peaceful coexistence sets it apart. The bloc's support for non-alignment ensures that no nation is forced into choosing sides in global conflicts. Instead, BRICS encourages dialogue and diplomatic solutions, offering a model for how global governance can function in a more just and balanced way.

Economic cooperation: A path to prosperity

For many countries, the pri-

mary appeal of BRICS lies in the economic opportunities it offers. As a member of BRICS, nations gain access to vast markets, enhanced trade relationships, and investment opportunities that can drive sustainable economic growth. The intra-BRICS trade network provides a platform for countries to diversify their economies, reducing reliance on traditional trading partners and external markets.

Infrastructure development is another key focus of BRICS, with the NDB providing alternative financing solutions for nations looking to invest in critical sectors. For countries struggling under the weight of high-interest loans from Western institutions, BRICS offers a lifeline — one that allows for economic development with-

out the strings attached. This is particularly crucial for nations looking to build resilient economies that can weather the storms of global instability.

Cultural exchange: Building bridges between nations

The third pillar of BRICS cooperation focuses on culture and people-to-people exchange. In a world where differences are often exploited for political gain, BRICS stands as a model for how diverse nations can come together in the spirit of mutual respect. Through cultural initiatives, such as the BRICS Film Festival and educational exchange programs, BRICS fosters deeper connections between its citizens, promoting tolerance, understanding,

and collaboration. Cultural exchange is not just a matter of diplomacy — it is a way to build lasting relationships between nations. By sharing their stories, histories, and experiences, BRICS nations create a foundation of trust and solidarity that strengthens the bloc as a whole.

A future of opportunity

The decision to join BRICS is not merely symbolic — it is a commitment to a future where all nations have a say in how the world is governed. For countries like Country X, membership in BRICS represents an opportunity to shape the global narrative, to participate in a system that focuses on fairness, and to contribute to a bloc that is leading the charge toward a more just world order.

As BRICS continues to expand, it is poised to play an increasingly important role in global governance, offering a platform for nations to thrive and ensuring that the voices of the Global South are heard and respected. Together, BRICS nations can build a future where all perspectives are valued, and where global development benefits everyone, not just a privileged few.

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