

## **The BRICS: An alliance for peace?**

A study of discourses in Brazil, India, China and South Africa around the Russian War in Ukraine (2014-2023)

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## Abstract

The 'BRICS' has become a widespread concept suggesting some form of coherence in the way Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa interact in the global order and their impact on global governance. Still, even with all this attention, the cohesiveness of the BRICS as a 'collective actor' in foreign affairs is not fully understood. This thesis explores the involvement of the BRICS in the conflict – and later full-scale war – between Russia and Ukraine from 2014 until the beginning of 2023. It seeks to grasp how the other BRICS members have reacted to the conflict and war, how their discourse has evolved, and the reasons behind their stances. It finds that the BRICS are generally anti-NATO, anti-sanctions (*vis-à-vis* Russia), and advocate for diplomacy as the path to peace. However, there is a divergence between the member states regarding Russia's war in Ukraine. Here, Brazil seems to be the outlier as it is much more critical of Russia than the other BRICS countries. It also finds that none of the BRICS are willing to condemn the Ukrainian regime but instead maintain close ties with it. The findings conclude that the BRICS cannot be considered a traditional alliance and must instead be seen as a form of network of states. This holds implications for how future studies should approach the BRICS grouping and how 'the West' should approach the political bloc in future conflicts since its members can have vastly different perspectives.

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## List of abbreviations

ANC – African National Congress  
BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.  
CRA – Contingent Reserve Arrangement  
DA – Democratic Alliance  
DI – Discursive Institutionalism  
DPR – Donetsk People’s Republic  
EAEU – Eurasian Economic Union  
EFF – Economic Freedom Fighters  
EU – European Union  
GDP – Gross Domestic Product  
HI – Historical Institutionalism  
IBSA – India Brazil South Africa dialogue forum  
ICC – International Criminal Court  
IMF – International Monetary Fund  
LPR – the Luhansk People’s Republic  
NDB – New Development Bank  
OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe  
SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organization  
PPP – Purchasing Power Parity  
RIC – Russia India and China  
RCI – Rational Choice Institutionalism  
SI – Sociological Institutionalism  
UN – United Nations  
UNGA – United Nations General Assembly  
UNSC – United Nations Security Council  
US – United States of America  
WTO – World Trade Organization

## 1 Introduction

Within the span of only two decades, the BRICS<sup>1</sup>, short for Brazil, Russia, India, China and (later) South Africa, have developed into an important political grouping of states in international politics. The term was coined by Goldman Sachs economist Jim O’Neill at the beginning of the 2000s in an attempt to categorize the increasingly powerful economies of several developing countries with large populations (O’Neill 2001). Since 2009 this grouping of states has steadily acquired institutional structure; eventually, South Africa was included in 2010, and the term went from “the BRIC” to “the BRICS” (Stuenkel 2020, p. 1). Why and how did these states eventually ‘take charge’ of the underlying idea and turn themselves into more than just an odd concept in the international political economy? When the BRIC heads of state held the first official BRICS summit in 2009 (then still without South Africa), clearly, this sparked the gradual institutionalization of intragovernmental cooperation over a broad range of policy issues important to the BRICS (Stuenkel 2020, p. 1).

The BRICS have launched new multilateral organizations like the New Development Bank (NDB) in 2014 or the Contingent Reserve Agreement (CRA) in 2015, which seek to balance if not challenge the traditional dominance of organizations such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Stuenkel 2020, p. 77). With China hosting the 14<sup>th</sup> BRICS summit in July of 2022, it has now lasted for over a decade despite many analysts believing it had little potential to turn into a meaningful political entity when it was first created (Stuenkel 2020, p. 2).

With the growing importance of the BRICS, scholarly attention has also increased and resulted in a number of studies on the subjects focusing on the role or influence of the BRICS on global order and governance (Hopewell 2017; Hooijmaaijers 2021; Stuenkel 2020) and on multilateral organizations as well as the new multilateral organizations established by the BRICS (Duggan, Ladines Azalia & Rewizorski 2022; Hooijmaaijers 2022; Suchodolski & Demeulemeester 2018).

However, there are still areas that have not been thoroughly studied. While a lot of research has gone into studying their capacity to reform global governance structures and align their positions, a lot less has been said about internal institutionalization or intra-BRICS cooperation. Although there are many high-level meetings and yearly summits between them,

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘BRIC’ is used to refer to the grouping prior to the accession of South Africa; BRICS is being used to refer to Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. BRICS is being used in singular and plural (without -s).

the BRICS is not nearly as densely institutionalized an international organization as the EU or NATO. Nonetheless, this could be seen as an important part of the grouping's efforts to cooperate. Understanding this breadth of cooperation leads us to broader theoretical questions such as: To what degree should we consider the BRICS grouping a cohesive 'unit' or 'actor' in international affairs? What kind of unified actor(s) 'are' or even 'is' the BRICS?

These are the key questions addressed in this thesis. This is even more important when we consider that the BRICS present themselves in opposition to the Western-based Bretton Woods world order established after World War II.

## 1.1 Research question

To study, understand and operationalize these questions, I investigate the BRICS cooperation in relation to the ongoing conflict that turned into a full-fledged war between BRICS member Russia and its Western neighbor Ukraine—from the Crimean annexation in 2014 to Russia's invasion in early 2022. The purpose is here to examine the cohesiveness of the BRICS by studying whether they are converging or diverging on this foreign policy issue and see how the BRICS as an institution affects their members beyond what can be considered economic cooperation. Additionally, this conflict is one of the central issues in international politics today, and it is therefore relevant to understand how the BRICS impact it. In particular, I shall focus on the discourse around the Russian war in Ukraine, seeking to illuminate how BRICS' communication converges or diverge by using the conflict as a test. Do we see the other BRICS members condemning or encouraging Russia? Do they use the same language and highlight the same issues regarding the conflict? Can we observe change or specific trends over time? If the BRICS *is* or perhaps better, *are* cohesive that stand united and supports each other as allies, then we could expect to see a more cooperative effort that aids Russia. However, if no such support or even condemnation exists then it would rather seem like the BRICS remain incohesive institutionally – that is a rather loose grouping of states. Towards this background, the key research questions of this thesis are:

- *How did the BRICS states communicate about the conflict between Ukraine and Russia?*
- *Has there been convergence or divergence over time in terms of how the conflict (and later war) has been perceived amongst the BRICS?*

- *What could this tell us about the BRICS as an international actor?*

With the upcoming BRICS summit in August 2023 the BRICS relationship and impact on the conflict is perhaps more relevant now than ever before. Events such as the International Criminal Court sending out an arrest order on Putin for war crimes forces the BRICS to make tough choices while the West condemns Russia (Sidley 2023). How events like this and the conflict itself has affected the BRICS and their relationship is what this study will examine.

This study will not go deeply into detail about the conflict as the focus is still the BRICS rather than the conflict itself. The reason to use the conflict is to limit the study to a single field and a more manageable size. It could have been possible to study BRICS cooperation over many different fields, but such a thesis would be shallow as a result of the overwhelming number of points of study and the limiting size of an MA thesis. Instead, this thesis aims to explore the BRICS in depth by examining a single case in the foreign policy field.

## 1.2 The early history of the BRIC(S)

In the 1990s the dominant view was that the US was not only the center of a unipolar system but that it would also continue to define the global order's composition, and that nations like India or China would not play such a significant role in the near future (Krauthammer 1990; Wohlforth 1999). Even if the emerging economies were growing rapidly, the gap was still large, and analysts thought it would take a long time before any of them caught up to the US. Since the previous decades had been so marked by the Cold War, the idea that a new power would shift this power balance did not seem imminent. Even if some thought that there eventually would be a shift away from unipolarity, it seemed like it could take many decades. As Curti Wohlforth put it in 1999:

The current unipolarity is not only peaceful but durable. It is already a decade old, and (. . .) it may last as long as bipolarity. For many decades, no state is likely to be in a position to take on the United States in any of the underlying elements of power. (Wohlforth, 1999, p. 8)

The “underlying elements of power” were here the dominant economic, military, technological, and geopolitical power of the US which made it seem unchallengeable.



Wohlforth even went a step further and mentioned that the time period could be called “Pax Americana” because of how dominant the US was (Wohlforth, 1999, p. 38).

Even the inventor or creator of the BRIC acronym O’Neill did not believe it would have such an impact on world politics. When interviewed about it in 2013, he answered:

No, of course not! Try to imagine the situation in which I came up with that idea. This was shortly after 9/11. The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington strengthened my belief that the dominance of the western countries needed to be superseded, or at least complemented, by something else. If globalization were to continue to be successful, it should not sail under the US flag. It seemed to me that because of their sheer size and their populations, China, India, Russia and Brazil had the economic potential. What emerging markets have in common -- in addition to their distrust of the West -- is their bright future. But apart from that, they could hardly be more different in terms of their politics and, also, their economic systems (Follah, 2013).

The acronym was initially limited to the financial world for this very reason. Even if they had some traits in common, the BRICS still seemed too different to become a collective “challenger” to the dominant powers at the time. However, it was the 2003 Goldman Sachs paper “Dreaming with BRICs: The Path to 2050” that advanced the use of the term and concept. This paper went on to make bold predictions, such as that the BRIC economies would outperform the G6 (US, Germany, Italy, UK, France, Canada and Japan) by 2050 (Wilson & Purushothaman, 2003, p. 1). Not only did this paper greatly influence the investment and banking world, but it even went beyond it to influence other fields. As it was termed at the time before the addition of South Africa, the BRIC was now becoming a buzzword in international politics, too (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 12). In 2005, the predictions for the growth of the BRIC were becoming even more positive and seen as an integral part of the international economy for the coming decades (O’Neill et al., 2005 p. 3).

However, although the BRIC states’ economies were growing, this fact did not lead to much greater inclusion in the international order at the time. While the creation of the G20 was one of the more powerful symbols of a more multipolar world, it remained underrepresented in multilateral institutions like the IMF and World Bank (Stuenkel 2020, p. 14-15). The voting

power of the BRICs (still before the inclusion of South Africa) within multilateral institutions like the IMF or World Bank was much lower when compared to European states despite the large populations of the BRICS and their growing economies. In 2006 Brazil, China and India had, for example, 20 percent less voting power in the IMF than the Netherlands, Belgium, and Italy despite their economies being four times the size of the Europeans (ibid, p. 15). Even as their economies skyrocketed over the next two decades, the BRICS would remain underrepresented in these institutions. Their voting power would eventually be the inverse of their GDP PPP compared to the EU28 (Suchodolski & Demeulemeester, 2018, p. 581). This is described in more detail when looking at some of the BRICS reform attempts later in this text.

The G8 also had smaller member states like Canada but not large ones like Brazil, China or India. Its membership had remained mostly the same with only Russia being invited to make it the G8. But even when Brazil, India, China, and South Africa were invited it was only as observers. This led to increasing discontent among their policymakers, who wanted a larger say in world affairs (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 15). Perhaps due to this discontent, some of the BRICS would begin cooperating more closely. India's Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula), and South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki established the so-called "India Brazil South Africa Dialogue Forum" (IBSA) in 2003 (ibid, p. 15) after the G8 summit in France. Since the BRICS had been invited only as observers, they felt it was merely a symbolic gesture. As a result, three days later, their ministers of foreign affairs met in Brasilia and signed the "Brasilia declaration" (not to be confused with the BRICS Brasilia declaration of 2019), formally establishing the forum (Kurtz-Phelan, 2013, p. 2).

This was a symbol of how the emerging powers had a growing willingness to participate directly and take charge themselves. They did not wish to sit on the sidelines looking in; indeed, the BRICS nations wanted to participate in critical decisions and be better represented. As Lula put it:

What is the use of being invited for dessert at the banquet of the powerful? We do not want to participate only to eat the dessert; we want to eat the main course, dessert and then coffee (quoted in Kurtz-Phelan, 2013, p. 2).

A similar forum existed between Russia, India, and China, popularly coined the "RIC". Since 2001 this grouping would hold annual meetings between the foreign ministers of the three

states, although they primarily focused on security issues related to Asia (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 22). The conditions that led to the rise of alternative institutions like the BRICS can be seen as twofold. First the decline of the US as the leader of a unipolar global order was a major factor in giving the emerging powers room to become more central players on the international scene. This decline had occurred largely due to the cost of the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and the “war on terror” reducing US legitimacy (Acharya, 2018, p. 22). However, the catalyst for the rise of the BRICS was the financial crisis in 2008. While the developed nations were in crisis, these “emerging powers” were not. This now meant that the international financial institutions also saw their legitimacy undermined (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 21). This led to a twofold legitimacy crisis for the US and the West.

The lead-up to this saw the “RICs” organize an additional informal grouping that included Brazil, thus the acronym finally took the form of “BRIC” in 2006 with the informal meeting of their foreign ministers (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 23). During the meeting, they reiterated their commitments to jointly reform the global financial structures (BRICS Foreign Ministers 2006). The second BRIC meeting in 2007 was held alongside a meeting in the UNGA, and during the BRIC meeting, Brazil proposed the group should hold more standalone meetings (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 23). This resulted in Russia organizing a standalone session for foreign ministers in 2008. By the time the meeting was held, the global financial crisis was already full-blown. Consequently, the BRIC states (without South Africa) met frequently. With both a rapidly increasing share of the world economy and now more formal meetings together, the BRICs saw itself transform from simply an investment category into a political entity (ibid, p. 25). With the release of a communique in 2008, they both called for reform of the international structures and announced further meetings to discuss the global financial situation. All of this signaled a long-term commitment to work together.

After holding several such meetings, often alongside other important events, they eventually aligned their positions to create a common agenda within several fields, especially international finance. Eventually, they agreed to hold a full-scale summit in 2009. Of particular note is that their ministers met during the *first* G20 summit in November 2008 and have been meetings every G20 summit since (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 25).

The institutionalization of the “Big Four” (without South Africa) started with the first BRIC leaders’ summit on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June in 2009. The summit was hosted by Russia in Yekaterinburg and was attended by Russia’s president, Dimitry Medvedev; Brazil’s president, Lula; India’s prime minister, Manmohan Singh; and China’s president, Hu Jintao (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 39). However, the day before, they had also hosted the ninth summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Many observers were invited to the SCO summit, and aside from Brazil, most appeared to be there mainly for this gathering. The international media at the time paid more attention to the SCO summit rather than the BRICs summit (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 39).

The official summit declaration from 2009 institutionalized the BRICs group. Stuenkel claims that despite the skepticism of western analysts and commentators the declaration “sought to make the transition of power from Europe and the United States toward emerging powers seem inevitable” (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 40). The declaration was focused on the issues surrounding the financial crisis at the time. It underscored the will of the BRICs to work with the G20, and follow the decisions it had come to: “2. We call upon all states and relevant international bodies to act vigorously to implement the decisions adopted at the G20 Summit” (BRICS Heads of State 2009).

The declaration, therefore, made no efforts to abolish the existing international structures but instead work within them. At the same time, the declaration made no statement about any direct forms of cooperation between them. Instead, it only discussed the common interests of the BRIC members. In that sense, it could be said that the BRICs (without South Africa) did not succeed. While they cooperated on weighty specific projects, the grouping was legitimized through a narrative that symbolized a shift away from Europe and the US towards the emerging powers, thereby making the world less Western-centric (Schweller, 2011, p. 285). This was a narrative that was, in part, made possible through the efforts of Goldman Sachs. It could be said that Goldman Sachs was crucial in legitimizing the authority of the BRICs members as emerging powers and the grouping as a representative of emerging powers. This is because of just how central and vital the bank is as one of the financial nerve centers of the world, and its connections to the political elite (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 43).

The inclusion of South Africa into the grouping came in late 2010 and is perhaps one of the country's most significant foreign policy achievements. It also saw the group gain an African representative. The reasons behind the decision to include South Africa seem to mainly come from the trust it had already built with many BRIC members. The IBSA forum had seen South Africa already build close ties with India and Brazil, which to them confirmed South Africa as a safe choice (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 62). In addition, the BASIC agreement – made up of Brazil, South Africa, India, and China – watched as South Africa worked closely with their officials on environmental issues. The BASIC agreement even managed to marginalize and isolate the EU during the 2009 Copenhagen climate conference and could be seen as a victory for its members (Keukeleire & Bruyn, 2017, p. 436). While some critics might have argued that it was more sensible to include a larger or more powerful fifth member, it shows how common ideas and policy positions were more important to the group when they transitioned from “BRIC” into the “BRICS” (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 63). With the transition, they took complete control over the term, too.

### 1.3 The role of the BRICS

As mentioned in the previous section, since its very inception, one of the uniting factors for BRICS representatives was to discuss ways to reform international financial institutions like the IMF, WTO, and the World Bank. This has also been a common theme in their declarations, even since the very first declaration in Yekaterinburg:

3. We are committed to advance the reform of international financial institutions, so as to reflect changes in the world economy. The emerging and developing economies must have greater voice and representation in international financial institutions, and their heads and senior leadership should be appointed through an open, transparent, and merit-based selection process (BRICS Heads of State 2009).

The BRICS successfully managed to push through quota reforms for the IMF in 2010 and these were implemented in 2016. The reforms shifted a total of six percent towards developing countries and saw the power of China rise to the third largest, with Brazil, Russia and India all joining the top ten quota holders (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 21). Still, this is far from the representation the BRICS envisioned and they still saw themselves as underrepresented. It makes more sense to compare their voting shares with their share of the world's GDP

Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). In 2017, just one year after the reforms were implemented, the BRICS had 14.2 percent of the voting power in the IMF, while the EU 28 collectively held 29.6 percent (Suchodolski & Demeulemeester, 2018, p. 581). Meanwhile, their share of the world GDP PPP was almost the exact opposite. Here the BRICS had a collective 31.4 percent while the EU 28 had 16.7. The numbers from the world bank are similar with the BRICS having 12.9 percent of the votes against the EU 28's 26.9 percent. Despite their efforts, little change had actually occurred: "Still, after a decade and a half of BRICS meetings, the leading global political fora, including the Bretton Woods Institutions and the UN, remain mostly unchanged" (Duggan et al., 2022, p. 475).

This disparity in representation was a leading cause in making the BRICS seek an alternative. That alternative was the creation of their own separate multilateral institutions. During the 2014 summit in Fortaleza, the BRICS signed into being the BRICS CRA and the NDB. The creation of these institutions prompted the BRICS to take a significant step towards institutionalizing their relationship further (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 77). As Suchodolski & Demeulemeester (2018) put it in their study on the NDB:

Their attempts to reform the system have produced few practical results, so they had little choice but to create their own institutions. In this regard, the BRICS are aware that the most pressing demand is not for another Multilateral Development Bank, but for a transformation in the practices of development finance. This seems to be their ambition for the NDB (Suchodolski & Demeulemeester, 2018, p. 584).

While the idea that the BRICS would attempt to weaken the existing institutions had little evidence previously. However, with the creation of the NDB and CRA, the BRICS were now more directly challenging old institutions. On the other hand, they also continued to strengthen their role within the old Bretton Woods institutions, which could be seen as "hedging their bets" (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 93). Others have similarly claimed that the BRICS, despite its perception as a "challenger" to the traditional systems of cooperation, still acts cooperatively with traditional systems and seeks to make them more representative of emerging economies (Larionova & Shelepov (2022). Stuenkel also concludes that the greatest threat to the Western-led world order comes not from the BRICS, but from within:

The greatest threat to international order has emerged from within the west. Populist anti-globalization movements, both in the United States and Europe, have led many to doubt

whether developed countries can continue to uphold the rules and norms that construct today's system. However, it would be naïve to jump to the conclusion that the election of President Trump is the sole reason for the end of Western leadership in the global order. Rather, structural forces have led to such an outcome irrespective of who won election in the United States in 2016" (Stuenkel 2020, p. 180).

Likewise, Mark Beeson and Jinghan Zeng (2018) wrote about how the BRICS has not stepped up to fill in the gap in the global order. They claim that even as the US turns inward looking due to populism, the dynamics of the BRICS can prevent them from truly playing a constructive role in global governance. Of particular importance is how China and their geo-economic power could put them at odds with the other BRICS members. This idea that the dynamic of the BRICS has been a limiting factor in their potential is echoed by other scholars, too (Hooijmaaijers, 2021, p. 48). A case study of the NDB also concluded:

These emerging powers seek to change the system of global governance but act to prevent one party from the group from becoming the dominant actor within that system. Personal preferences and leadership change play a role in the BRICS political grouping. The dynamics of the BRICS limit their potential to reshape global governance (Duggan et al., 2022, p. 475).

Internal dynamics and structures seem to be limiting factors among the West and the BRICS grouping. Since the term originates in finance, it is unsurprising that economic and trade cooperation is seemingly their most important field. However, when Stuenkel gathered data on the number of meetings between BRICS representatives until July 2018, only 147 out of the 497 meetings were about trade, finance or development (Stuenkel 2020, p. 186). Altogether there were 13 different fields of cooperation, ranging from foreign policy to culture, education, and even some security-related meetings.

## 1.4 Literature review

Scholarly literature about the BRICS has mostly focused on their role in global governance, how they impact the global order, as well as their projects with alternative multilateral institutions like the NDB, AIIB, or CRA. Hopewell (2017) wrote about how the BRICS grouping cannot be discounted because they have growing power in organizations like the WTO and have a "profound effect" on global governance. On the other hand, Beeson &

Zheng (2018) wrote about how even with a more inward-looking US, the BRICS have not stepped up to fill in the gap in the global order. Their research looked at how their dynamics can prevent them from playing a more constructive role in global governance, and how China's growing power could put it at odds with other members. Similarly, Duggan (2021), Hooijmaaijers (2021) and Duggan, Hooijmaaijers, Rewizorski, & Arapova (2022) analyzed why the BRICS has not played a more central role in global governance, with a focus on the trust and practical issues between them. Dowie and Williams (2018) looked at what role the BRICS could play in environmental governance. While Keukeleire & Bruyn (2017) and Keukeleire & Delreux (2022) analyzed the EU-BRICS relations and the global order balance between them. Their 2022 text went more in-depth and looked at how the EU members were unable to coordinate when the BRICS AIIB and the Chinese 'One Belt, One Road' initiative expanded their influence overseas. Luo & Yang (2021) wrote about the distribution of voting power in BRICS institutions with Larionova & Shelepov (2022) expanding more on their efforts to reform the Bretton-Woods institutions from within. On a related note, Suchodolski & Demeulemeester (2018) explored how the limited effects of their reforming efforts have led the BRICS to create the NDB. Moreover, much of the literature has revolved around the NDB in particular. Hooijmaaijers (2022) and Duggan, Ladines Azalia & Rewizorski (2022) examined how the BRICS have been in the process of institutionalizing through the NDB—and the structural power that can have. The Duggan et.al. text argued it did not have the power to change the rules and norms within the international arena.

More extensive works include Salzman's (2019) book "Russia, BRICS, and the Disruption of Global Order" and "BRICS and Global Governance" by Larionova & Kirton (2018).

Salzman's book focused on the Russian perspective and how it has used the BRICS to frame a competing world order to the old "Liberal World Order" of the West. Salzman feared the BRICS was losing prominence in political science. She concluded with three possibilities for the state grouping's future: The first possibility was that it could continue like before by being active with critical discourse but with few concrete results. The second possibility was that it could "implode" due to the tensions between China and India. While the third possibility was rifts appearing between the group as a result of Russia not caring about preserving the existing global governance system, while the other members have more cautious approaches to global governance. She predicted the first possibility to be the most likely. She predicted the first possibility to be the most likely. Kirton and Larionova used rational choice institutionalism to evaluate the BRICS and the reasons the grouping came together and the



benefits it brings them. They also concluded the group would most likely remain as a series of summits and not institutionalize further. However, they were a lot more positive about the grouping's achievements than Salzman. They saw the grouping as building a multipolar world order, well placed to push for global governance reform, and thought it would stand for values like multilateralism, peace and universally recognized norms of international law (Kirton & Larionova 2018, p. 198).

One of the most important scholarly accounts relevant for this thesis is Ferdinand's (2014) analysis of the BRICS general voting patterns in the UNGA between 1974 and 2008. This article concluded, among other things, that there was in general a divergence between how the IBSA states cohesiveness in their voting while China and Russia's lack thereof. Although there was still a lot of overlap between India and China in how they often opposed human rights issues. While Brazil in contrast was consistently in favor of human rights issues, a perspective that South Africa shared during the Mandela regime. The article, however, only examined their votes and did not explore in-depth their discourse or potential reasons for specific voting behavior behind it.

Another central source for this thesis is Oliver Stuenkel's 2020 book *The BRICS and the future of Global Order* upon which this thesis draws a lot. It is one of the most comprehensive academic accounts on the BRICS and delves into its development from inception until recently. It also has a chapter that outlines how the BRICS reacted to the crisis in Crimea and why they reacted the way they did. Therefore, this book and its numerous sources have been used to build some of the foundations for this study. On top of that, the book's contents lead its author to ask the very question this thesis seeks to illuminate, namely: "To what extent should we consider the BRICS grouping a cohesive unit in international affairs?" (Stuenkel, 2020, p. 185). However, this was then reviewed through a much broader but more shallow study (in terms of theories and methods being applied) than what this thesis aims to achieve. While the book looked at the number of meetings and what they were about quantitatively, a qualitative study of a single field should contribute to a deeper understanding of this question.

Another essential writing is *Rising Powers & Foreign Policy Revisionism: Understanding BRICS Identity and Behavior Through Time* by Cameron G. Thies and Mark David Nieman (2017). This book provides a comprehensive literature review of the foreign policies of all the BRICS states individually over time, from the second world war until the early 2010s. The book provides an excellent overview of how scholars have viewed the foreign policy of these

states over the previous decades and offers a compelling addition to the constructivist approach of this thesis with its focus on identity and role conceptions. Moreover, it provides insights into historical developments that could have impacted *why* a state holds certain ideals or perceive itself a certain way.

This thesis examines the BRICS as an institution by analyzing its discourse about a specific conflict. To examine the institution Fairbrass (2011) and Schmidt (2010) have been used to get a better overview of the different ‘institutionalisms,’ which are theories about how to best analyze institutions. Fairbrass (2011) examines in some detail the strengths and weaknesses of the four different institutionalisms and explains how and why they should be used. This article provides great insight into when one should use these different theories. This was also done to some degree by Schmidt’s 2010 article but it was more focused on Discursive Institutionalism in relation to the others. Discursive Institutionalism is the theoretical approach this thesis uses, and Schmidt is the creator of this approach, on that basis another article about Discursive Institutionalism from 2008 by Schmidt was also used, as this article exhaustively explains what Discursive Institutionalism is. A series of articles by Bell (2011;2012) and Schmidt (2012) was also reviewed in the theoretical section to better understand the various critiques of Discursive Institutionalism. Additionally, as both Schmidt (2008; 2010) and Fairbrass (2011) explain; Discursive Institutionalism is supposed to be used together with another institutionalism serving as a background. Therefore Cappocia & Kelemen’s (2007) article on Historical Institutionalism and critical junctures was also used. The next section examines these theories in more detail.

## 2 The theoretical approach: Discursive Institutionalism

An important part of the theoretical approach for this thesis lies in constructivism. In international relations and comparative politics, constructivist theory is the belief that ideas and concepts shape a large portion of international relations (Finnemore & Sikkink 2001). These ideational factors must be understood in order to analyze international relations. The most important are those beliefs that are held collectively, as these construct the ideals, identities, and interests of actors (ibid, p. 392-393). For example, things that have no material value and exist only because people believe they exist – like money, sovereignty, and rights – are “constructed” and fundamental to constructivism. These have been called “social facts” and studying how they change and influence politics is the main focus of this approach to

international relations (ibid, p. 393). Other methods look at individualistic or materialistic approaches, such as variations of rational choice, liberalism, or realism. Constructivism by itself is not designed to make predictions or testable hypotheses but is about *how* we think about the nature of interactions between people.

To best illuminate these factors, this thesis will evaluate the institution known as the BRICS by analyzing the discourse within and around it. Therefore, we must have a theoretical foundation for such analysis. The theory this thesis will use is an approach called “discursive institutionalism” (DI) coined by Vivien A. Schmidt<sup>2</sup>. DI can be seen as the fourth part in a wave of new institutional thinking, with other theoretical approaches like Rational Choice Institutionalism (RCI), Historical Institutionalism (RI), and Sociological Institutionalism (SI) preceding it (Schmidt, 2010). However, compared to these other approaches, DI has certain strengths that are ideal for our study of the discourse around the BRICS. While, for example, Historical Institutionalism explains “critical junctures,” some criticize it for not sufficiently explaining the underlying reasons behind the changes that take place during them and the incremental changes over time (Fairbrass, 2011, p. 956). Meanwhile, DI can explain the dynamics of institutional change and continuity. While this thesis will look at the war in Ukraine as a critical juncture, it will also seek to understand the underlying structure and agency that led to the potential changes (or lack thereof) we can observe.

Discursive Institutionalism is a theoretical framework for analyzing change in political institutions. Discourse refers here to the entire process of conveying ideas. Ideas are both what is said and the context it is being communicated in. The context can be further divided into two main sections: *structure* and *agency* (Schmidt, 2008, p. 305). Structure refers to *what* is being said, *where* they are saying it, and *how* they say it. Agency refers to *who* said what to *whom*.

DI is institutional in the sense that institutions are seen as simultaneously both structure and construct (Schmidt, 2010, p. 4). While structure limits what is expressed around certain topics, construct limits where it is being communicated and how it is conveyed to different norms and rules. Construct is about the agency aspect of an institution. The agents of ideas are responsible for creating, maintaining, changing, or potentially even dismantling institutions

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<sup>2</sup> Also sometimes called “Constructivist Institutionalism” see Bell (2011; 2012).

through their interactions. They are the ones who interact both within an institution and outside of it.

Even before Schmidt coined DI and created more structured guidelines, some still used similar methods. Schmidt identifies four themes that those who used a form of DI all had in common (Schmidt, 2008, p. 304):

1. Even if their conceptualization about discourse and ideas are varied, they still take them seriously.
2. The ideas and discourse occur in an institutional setting, that is they take place within an organization. Other variations of institutionalist thinking, such as HI, SI or RCI may serve as complementary theoretical backbone of the analysis.
3. Despite differences in communication and structure they still perceive of discourse as following a “logic of communication” instead of the logic of calculation (RCI), the logic of historical regularities (HI), or the logic of appropriateness (SI) used by the other institutionalisms. Through the lenses of DI, institutions are seen as both the context where agents take actions and the contingent results of actions taken by the agents to create and maintain them (ibid, p. 314). The “logic of communication” refers to how agents create and maintain institutions through their ‘ideational abilities’ and communication within their institutions and outside of them.
4. It is also of utmost importance how they take a dynamic view of change. While the other approaches can be sometimes be “static” and ignore incremental changes Schmidt believes ideas and discourse can even explain changes and overcome obstacles that the other three institutionalisms assert as “insurmountable”.

Actors engage in a process of generating ideas about political action or policy in an institutional setting before legitimizing or discussing those ideas. However, it is important to note that in DI, it is more than simply interpreting “text” without context and seeing reality as nothing but words. The structure and agency are key here. Actors act according to the logic of their communication. Therefore, the context and the interactive process are just as important as the substance of the ideas.

By observing structure and agency more closely, we can better understand what normative or cognitive ideas lie behind what an institution has been doing and why. The ideas themselves can be about various issues: policies, programs, and philosophies (Schmidt, 2008, p. 306).

Here, policy ideas are the most detailed and specific; they are the policies or policy solutions that policymakers propose and vote upon.

The programmatic ideas are the ones that underpin policy ideas and show us the intended purpose of the policies and what they hope to accomplish. For instance, the ideas here could be the following: possible solutions to a problem and the issues that need to be considered; all the different norms, methods, laws, and codes that are to be applied; or which department(s) will handle its implementation.

Lastly, the philosophical ideas are deeper and more elemental than the others. These are core ideas that are part of how the ‘agents’ view reality and what makes up their worldviews. It is the foundation that ideas are built upon. Things like the values, principles and knowledge of society are all part of this foundation. Due to how integral these ideas are, they might be contested only in times of crisis.

Within the school of DI there “cognitive” and “normative” ideas are being discerned. Cognitive ideas tell us what is good or bad or what one should or should not do (Schmidt, 2008, p. 306). They provide us with the methods or procedures for political action and justify them through interest-based logic and necessity. This can mean different things at different levels of the ideas (Schmidt, 2008, p. 307). At the policy level, this can be how policies offer solutions to the problem at hand. While at the programmatic level, cognitive ideas refer to how the programs indicate potential solutions or define problems that need solving. Finally, they might also show how ideas from the policy and programmatic levels can be interwoven with those at the philosophical level.

Conversely, normative ideas are concerned with the values of political actions, which serve to validate and legitimize policies (Schmidt, 2008, p. 307). Rather than interests, they instead focus on what the *appropriate* thing is, and what one *ought to do*. For instance, at the policy level, this could touch on how the policies meet certain ideals or aspirations. Normative ideas also provide the principles and beliefs, which can link all three levels of ideas together.

Discourse is the process by which actors interact in terms of generating, deliberating, and legitimating ideas (Schmidt, 2010, p. 15). These interactive processes are either *coordinative* or *communicative*. Coordinative discourse takes place among the direct participants of the policy process. These are often the political elites, such as officials, representatives, civil servants, administrators, or interest groups. In comparison, the communicative discourse links the policy process to the general public. Here, ideas are brought to the public for deliberation and legitimization. This process can encompass a much wider range of political actors, including political leaders, policy forums, and informed publics.

According to Schmidt, discourse usually appears to flow from the top down (Schmidt, 2008, p. 311). This is because the political elites will generate ideas that they then communicate to the public with already established and preconceived terms before mediating the debate. Through this process, they both establish the terms of the discourse and frame it through the media. However, it can also be seen from the “bottom-up” by having social movements or grass-roots organizations, opinion polls, and votes put pressure on the top (Schmidt, 2010, p. 3). The complexities of the political system in question will determine the relative importance of coordinative and communicative discourse.

One of the great advantages of DI is its ability to explain the dynamics of institutional change and continuity. It does so by focusing on discourse by highlighting the role of sets of ideas and the interactive process to help show *how*, *when*, *where*, and *why* ideas succeed or fail (Fairbrass, 2011, p. 956-957). By showing which ideas or policies gain traction or which ones are marginalized or outright fail, it can assist in recognizing the asymmetries of power and the potentially conflicting nature of some ideas that might be part of the interactive process.

As stated by Schmidt, DI can complement the other three new institutionalisms. They frame the discourse through structural constraints like rational interests, historical paths, or cultural norms. While the other three can provide the background for what one might expect, DI can “explain the unexpected” because it can account for unique events by referencing the ideas and discourse of individuals (Schmidt, 2008, p. 314). Additionally, by following this logic of communication, the results might even be expected, even if it is unexpected by a logic of calculation (RCI), the logic of historical regularities (HI), or the logic of appropriateness (SI).

However, Fairbrass points out how DI “risks appearing highly voluntaristic unless the structural constraints derived from the other three new institutionalisms are included” (Fairbrass 2011, p. 956). In other words, the fear is that without this background information to explain the “expected” from the other forms of logic, it might appear as if everything is merely the result of a few individuals wishing it to be so. She also goes on to say that it may sometimes overstate the significance of social construction or be overly deterministic concerning ideas. Additionally, establishing causality regarding ideas and discourse can be problematic. On the other hand, its ability to explain incremental changes is a major advantage over the other three (Fairbrass, 2011, p. 957). While they might only see the results and what might lie behind a decision, DI can better analyze the build-up, the key actors, and the process itself. However, some critics like Stephen Bell have claimed that Schmidt and other constructivists “exaggerate” the problems with the other approaches or that they focus too much on the agents and not enough on the structural variables (Bell 2011). Bell suggests these “can be dealt with by using a suitably tailored historical institutionalism” (Bell 2011, p. 883). Bell and Schmidt have also further debated these issues in the past with Schmidt responding that she preceded most of her discursive analysis “with a historical institutionalist account of crisis-driven and/or incremental changes in rules and regularities” (Schmidt 2012, p. 707-708). While Bell (2012, p. 715) argued such accounts should not precede but instead be “fully integrated” into a HI approach with a “constructivist analysis of how agents use ideas in institutional settings and how institutions shape agency”. Bell in essence argues that HI by itself is sufficient so long one includes constructivist analysis while Schmidt believes HI (or other institutionalisms) should instead just play a supporting role to DI during constructivist analysis. It is also important to note how both Bell and Schmidt consider DI to be constructivist with Bell calling it “Constructivist Institutionalism” instead, although Schmidt (2012, p. 712) also calls Bell’s approach constructivist, which might be a point of disagreement.

In order to not appear voluntaristic, this thesis will borrow the concept of “critical junctures” from historical institutionalism (HI) to structure the discussion. This concept is based on how institutional development is characterized by relatively long periods of path-dependency, while there are brief periods of institutional flux called “critical junctures” (Cappocia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 341). During path-dependency periods, the institution is in theory

relatively stable, while during critical junctures more dramatic changes are possible. Choices during critical junctures have a long-lasting impact and usually close off alternative options.

The reason for choosing DI is how it is designed to analyze discourse, which is highly relevant to a constructivist approach. Since identities, roles, and ideals are “social facts,” they are integral to constructivism. By using DI to analyze them, the intention is for it to aid the thesis in answering the research question, “How did the BRICS communicate about the conflict in Ukraine?”. The statements made by representatives and high-ranking officials will in essence, be the answer to that question. The second research question about convergence and divergence is also answered through a DI analysis by seeing where the points of convergence and divergence lie. Critical junctures can help provide some historical perspective and structure to the analysis, and scholarly works and research articles provide further interpretation of the possible reasons behind these convergences and divergences.

To discuss the last research question of “what kind of actor the BRICS is,” concepts like *alliance* or *network* could be useful tools to give more insight. The concept of ‘alliance’ is not new. However, what the definitions have in common is how they relate to security and military cooperation. Most of these definitions focus on the “mutual enhancement of the military security of its member” or “security cooperation” between states (Fedder 1968, p. 68; Niou & Ordeshook 1994, p. 168). Some, like Snyder (1990, p. 105) see alliances as a subset of *alignments* instead, which relates to the “mutual expectations between two or more states that they will have each other’s support in disputes or wars with particular other states.” However, such support can be a lot more limited and informal, to the point where informal alignments are merely “special relationships” or “good relations” between states (ibid, p. 106). *Networks*, as a term, is more recent and dates back to Rhodes’ (1996) studies on governance. Networks have usually been defined as being non-hierarchical and not having market bargaining relationships. More recent network analyses see them as “sets of relations that form structures, which in turn may constrain and enable agents” (Hafner-Burton et.al. 2009, p. 560). This thesis will, however, operate with it defined as a “mode of organization that facilitates collective action and cooperation, exercises influence, or serves as a means of international governance” (ibid, p. 560). But it is important to note how networks can have such effects on their members. By undertaking these definitions, it is possible to evaluate the BRICS and articulate something more concrete. If the BRICS is an alliance, we could expect a great deal of direct or indirect support for Russia in its conflict with Ukraine. Otherwise, broader or different definitions like an *alignment* or a *network* might be more applicable.



### 3 Method and research design

This section discusses the research method and research strategy for this thesis. Here, the methodological approach will be a qualitative one. This section will first give a few arguments for why this is an appropriate approach for this thesis. Then it will give a few more specifics about the method before describing the data collection and selection process used in this study.

The method of this thesis is qualitative because the work is based on a *how* type of question. A qualitative method is best suited for studies based on *how* questions and those that try to investigate and describe processes (Pratt, 2009, p. 856). The process looks at the convergence or divergence between the BRICS grouping. To justify this choice, we could look at what defines a qualitative method and how it differs from a quantitative method.

The qualitative method has a low number of investigated units, and we use it to have variation and diversity of interpretations or experiences (Jacobsen, 2015, p. 141). On the other hand, the quantitative method is characterized by investigating a large number of units in order to increase generalizability. This is accomplished by discovering covariation between phenomena and their extent. Because this study emphasizes the discourse around the BRICS in relation to the conflict and war between Russia and Ukraine, discourse analysis will be applied as methodology. Sigmund Grønmo (2016, p. 434) defines discourse analysis as:

[...] a special form of qualitative content analysis which is used to enable a comprehensive understanding of expressions of opinion and processes of communication. Its purpose is to understand the discourses that are expressed in the texts. Discourse is here understood as a system of ideas, perceptions, and concepts about conditions in society.

This method is very similar to the DI approach. Discourse lies at the center of both, and developing our understanding through analyzing the ideas or perceptions behind communication are central themes here. *Qualitative content analysis* is based on analyzing documents, whether in the form of texts, numbers, sounds, or pictures (Grønmo, 2016, p. 175). However, it is common to use this method for documents with verbal contents, either in text or sound files that are transcribed before analysis.

In this study, I am investigating what kind of actor the BRICS is by asking questions such as: *how* cohesive they are and *how* they diverge or converge to understand the dynamics of the BRICS better and explain it more deeply. If it were a matter of testing the extent of their cooperation, then a quantitative method would be more appropriate in that case. However, there are *how* questions – like *how many* or *how often* – that are quantitative. Such questions, though, investigate a phenomenon more or less independently from its context to draw inherently quantitative conclusions (Jacobsen, 2015, p. 133-137). On the other hand, a qualitative method is better suited to studies that generate a large amount of information about a few units and seek a deeper explanation of the studied phenomenon. Since such a deep and comprehensive study is the purpose of this thesis, a qualitative method will be used.

While studying the BRICS' convergence or divergence is the purpose of this thesis, a full, comprehensive study in all fields of cooperation would be too lengthy and extensive for an MA thesis. Therefore, it is necessary to limit the scope of the study to something more manageable. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, starting from the Euromaidan protests in 2013, the subsequent Crimea crisis after the overthrow of the Yanukovich regime in 2014, and up until the current and ongoing war post-Russia's 2022 invasion.

First, this thesis will highlight the conflict's consequential "milestones" before analyzing it through the lens of Discursive Institutionalism. The hope here is to build an understanding not just of the stances BRICS states have taken over time, but also how these attitudes may have changed and why, as well as which ideas lie at the heart of this discourse. The conflict itself is *not* the focus of this thesis. The aim is not to understand the conflict in depth but to use the conflict as a form of "test" for the cooperation of the BRICS states. To see just how profound their support for their fellow BRICS member Russia is. If the BRICS is truly an alliance, one could expect some form of support when they quarrel with another nation. While qualitative studies do not always do extensive testing of hypotheses or theories, this study will use two propositions to create a better empirical foundation:

Proposition 1: "If the BRICS are an alliance, then we can expect to see a lot of support and military cooperation for Russia from all the BRICS member states."

Proposition 2: “If the BRICS are a network, then we can expect to see it facilitating collective action and cooperation between its members and exercising influence or serving as a means of Global Governance.”

By ‘testing’ these propositions, we should be able to say more definitely whether the BRICS closely cooperate in foreign affairs, thereby seeing if the cooperation of the BRICS extends beyond just what can be considered economic cooperation and into foreign affairs like this conflict.

### 3.1 Data collection and data selection

In qualitative content analysis, the data collection occurs, to a certain degree, together with the data selection and text analysis (Grønmo, 2016, p. 175). This is because as more texts are studied, analyzed, and interpreted, the research question is better illuminated, while the researcher develops an increasingly greater understanding of which texts would be fruitful for the analysis.

The first step – and perhaps most important step – in the collection phase in this project was therefore to clarify the focus of the thesis. Since there is so much flexibility with this approach it was necessary to have a clear goal in mind when collecting the data so that it was relevant to the study and narrow enough for an MA thesis.

For this reason, narrowing down the central theme of the thesis is critical before one moves on to find which sources are available for such a study. Here, this started by focusing the study on the institution of the BRICS and attaining a deeper understanding of how they cooperated on the international stage. The reason for this choice is that there is extensive literature on the BRICS in global governance and their role in the global order. However, there is a lot less research on the institution itself. During the process of data collection, the next choice was to focus on primary texts that are widely available. With a view to space constraints, I chose to focus on the case of the Ukraine conflict.

The early stages of data collection consisted of using databases and search engines to gather texts and information. In particular, I employed *Oria.no*, which is the database and search engine used by most Norwegian university libraries. Additionally, Google Scholar was drawn

on, as well as with a few recommendations from my supervisor. The “snowballing” method was then used by taking the reference lists of these texts in order to find more (often highly specific) sources. Finally, and most importantly, the database made by the University of Toronto containing all the joint BRICS declarations and statements called the “BRICS Information Centre,”<sup>3</sup> was used to get a better overview of all these primary sources and a few research articles. India’s Ministry of External Affairs also has a website dedicated to information about the BRICS<sup>4</sup>. This official site has all the declarations in addition to event calendars, documents, bulletins, and a plethora of other relevant information and media. Another site that was instrumental to this research was the UN’s digital library<sup>5</sup>. This site collects all of the voting records and full meeting records from most of the meetings between the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the UNSC. When meeting records were not available UN press releases were used instead, which were found through standard searches with Google.

In this thesis, the primary sources for analysis will be the large number of declarations, statements, communiques, and other official forms of communication from the BRICS as a group. By combining these with individual statements on the same issues from the member states we can spot discrepancies, see if there are changes from the states after a BRICS meeting, and see if there is convergence after these meetings or not. By themselves, however, these might paint an incomplete picture. Therefore, other sources such as statements made by representatives, diplomats, or officials could shed more light on the underlying discourse behind the statements and the ideas that shape them.

Additionally, since an international conflict is being used as a point of study, the UN is also very relevant. UNGA often holds votes on issues like this and then makes public statements regarding how they voted. These can also be highly pertinent for this study because they show us how the BRICS acted regarding the Ukraine conflict in an international forum. If they voted differently from each other or condemned certain actions by Russia, this could show us that they do not align on specific issues. Moreover, their statements in the UNGA and UNSC can show us different things. For example, if their reasoning, statements, and the ideas behind them are similar, then we can see this as a form of convergence. On the other hand, if they do

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<sup>3</sup> Available at <https://www.brics.utoronto.ca>.

<sup>4</sup> Available at <https://www.brics2021.gov.in>.

<sup>5</sup> Available at <https://www.digitallibrary.un.org>.

not align, this could be an example of divergence. The UNGA meeting records were widely available and contained longer statements from each state on the resolutions and situations discussed during the meetings allowing for a more in-depth analysis of their stances. News sources were sometimes necessary to collect statements or singular facts. These have not been used for any of its analyses but only for comments made by high-ranking officials and to provide a source on a singular fact.

## 4 The Russian war in Ukraine as a critical juncture

To understand the conflict's<sup>6</sup> historical context, it is necessary to briefly look at the build-up to the conflict, its causes, and motivations. Critical junctures are the points in time characterized by some form of instability where dramatic changes are possible. Choices made during a critical juncture have long-lasting impacts and close off alternative options (Cappocia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 341). We can also evaluate if these characteristics can be found in the conflict.

Already in the 1990s Russia had made it clear that the states participating in the “Eastern Partnership” (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) held a special interest for Russian security concerns due to being geographically located between Russia and the EU (Seibel, 2017, p. 273). This “shared neighborhood” was therefore something of particular concern for Russia. However, the idea of having such spheres of influence or even hegemony of the area was incompatible with the EU's position. Both were, on the other hand, aware of the problem this created and Seibel (2017, p. 273) claims this could explain the mild reaction of the EU towards Russia's actions in Georgia in 2008. At this point in time, conditions were stable, and the EU and Russia did not interfere too much with each other directly. This is true even when the EU and Ukraine started negotiations about the possibility to more closely link the two or have Ukraine join the EU.

However, Russia started imposing economic, financial, and trade reprisals on Ukraine from 2007 until 2009, when they were lifted after Russia and Ukraine struck an oil transit deal

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<sup>6</sup> The use of ‘conflict’ and ‘war’ in this section is used to differentiate in how the scale changed with Russia's invasion in 2022. It helps underscore the change in 2022, even if perhaps both words could be used to describe the series of events as a whole.

(Cosgrove, 2020, p. 6). The austerity measures by Yushchenko's government to deal with the economic problems were widely unpopular and most likely contributed to the electoral victory of Yanukovich in 2010. When Yanukovich took power, policy shifted more in favour of Russia than before. Cultural measures favoring the Ukrainian language over Russian ceased, Ukraine's NATO application was withdrawn, and the Russian lease on the port of Sevastopol in Crimea was extended to 2042 (Cosgrove, 2020, p. 6). However, negotiations with the EU continued.

#### 4.1 The Euromaidan protests

The first milestone in the conflict comes at the beginning of 2013 after the Ukrainian parliament had approved the finalization of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. The then proposed agreement would have seen Ukraine forging closer ties with the EU. However, the agreement would also have been an issue for Russia which was in the midst of creating its own free trade initiative called the "Eurasian Economic Union" (EAEU) superseding the Eurasian Economic Community of 2000. As a result, the Russian government put severe pressure on Ukraine to suspend their negotiations with the EU (Seibel, 2017, p. 274). This pressure was diplomatic and consisted of restrictions on Ukrainian imports. Furthermore, when the EU supported a 15-billion-dollar loan from the IMF, conditions were attached. However, Russia matched the loan but without the same conditions. The loan would have instead come from a "Ukrainian-Russian Action plan" that Putin and Yanukovich finalized in December 2013. The Ukrainian President Yanukovich then decided not to sign the agreement despite the parliament's decision.

This sparked a large wave of pro-EU protests in Ukraine, further exacerbated when the government attempted to shut down the protest forcefully. Interviews with the protesters at the time suggest that as the protests continued, they became more about protesting the corruption of the government and their violent actions against the protestors rather than just the Association Agreement itself (Hansen, 2015). The corruption was seen as coming from the government and influential oligarchs, while President Yanukovich became the figurehead for the accusations (Marples & Mills, 2014, p. 9-14).

The protests continued for months—and steadily escalated. The violent clashes that took place during January and February 2014 between protestors in Kyiv and Berkut special riot

police caused the deaths of 108 protestors and 13 police officers, while wounding many others (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2016, p. 21-25). The clashes first took place in the streets of Kyiv in late January and then expanded as protestors occupied governmental buildings in many different parts of Ukraine. Between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of February, severe violent clashes occurred when protestors advanced on parliament with shields and helmets while under fire by police snipers.

During the protests, officials and national leaders from both the EU and the US expressed support for the protestors and discouraged the use of military force against them (Cosgrove, 2020, p. 9). US President Barack Obama also condemned the use of force against the protestors and imposed visa bans on several Ukrainian officials. On the other hand, Russia attempted to stabilize the rule of the Yanukovych regime and incentivize it to continue its pro-Russian policies (Cosgrove, 2020, p. 10). Instead of discouraging the state from using force, they called for the “leaders of the Maidan” to stop the violence, by renewing the dialogue with legal authorities “without threats and ultimatums”. Additionally, Russian Prime Minister Medvedev stated that they could only cooperate fully if Ukraine’s government was “in good shape” and that they could not give out the previously promised loans if the government folded to the protestors.

After the severe clashes in late February, negotiations between the Yanukovych regime and representatives of the protestors resulted in a settlement on February 21. These negotiations were overseen by the foreign ministers of Germany, France, and Poland and a Russian diplomat (Seibel, 2017, p. 275). They resulted in an agreement to hold new elections in 2014, restoring parts of the constitution that the Yanukovych regime had removed and investigating the violence during the protests. The Ukrainian parliament also voted to impeach Yanukovych the day after, but he had already disappeared on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February only to resurface in Russia a few days later.

## 4.2 The invasion of Crimea

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, both Ukrainian and Russian military forces around the Black Sea were on high alert due to the clashes in Kyiv. In the following days, Russian forces invaded the Crimean Peninsula (Kofman et.al., 2017, p. 7). Already in 2008 Putin had warned that if Ukraine joined NATO, it risked losing Crimea, and in December 2013 the head of the

Supreme Council of Crimea said that, “Crimea was prepared to join Russia if Yanukovich should fall” (Zygar, 2016, p. 275-276). Still, there were clear divisions among the population of Crimea, and the Muslim Tartars, in particular, were extremely opposed to the activities of Russian NGOs and the Supreme Council of Crimea’s advocacy for revising the legal status of Crimea (Cosgrove, 2017, p. 10).

However, this was a clear breach of the 1994 Security Assurances from Budapest, where Russia, the UK, and the US had pledged to “respect the independence, sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine” in exchange for Ukraine disarming their nuclear weapons and signing a treaty on non-proliferation (Seibel, 2017, p. 275). One of the reasons for Russia’s invasion of Crimea was the importance it had held for Russia as a military base at several points in history. It had held a vital role not just in old wars but also in the 2008 conflict with Georgia (Cosgrove, 2017, p. 2-5).

In late February, Russia began occupying military bases, airports, and governmental buildings on the Crimean Peninsula while advocating for the Ukrainian forces stationed there to defect to Russia with considerable success. The invasion saw as few as six deaths among the Russian troops, and out of the 18,000 Ukrainian forces stationed there, only 6500 left for mainland Ukraine, while the rest mostly stayed in Crimea (Kofman et.al., 2017, p. 11).

The Supreme Council of Crimea declared independence from Ukraine on March 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, while Russia held a referendum on Crimea’s independence from Ukraine, which was overwhelmingly in favor of seceding from Ukraine, despite violent clashes between demonstrators in Crimea leading up to the referendum (Cosgrove, 2017, p. 14). The referendum received international criticism; Russia had occupied the peninsula by force and seemingly broken the UN Charter. While a draft resolution in the UN Security Council aimed to declare the vote invalid, Russia vetoed it. The US House of Representatives voted to condemn it, and the European Council decided it would begin sanctioning Russia if a diplomatic solution could not be reached (Seibel, 2017, p. 275). Despite this backlash afterwards, Russia recognized Crimea as an independent republic, and then began the process of integrating the peninsula into Russia, and (only a month after the occupation started) on March 21<sup>st</sup> the annexation was signed into law (Cosgrove, 2017, p. 16).



### 4.3 The conflict in Donbas and Eastern Ukraine

The protests that took place in February also extended to Eastern Ukraine. They were mainly an expression of discontent towards the Ukrainian government, but some were also held by pro-Russian groups (Kofman et al., 2017, p. 33-34). However, Russia exploited the situation. Putin claimed that Donbas was part of “Novorossiya,” i.e. “New Russia,” under which he subsumed parts of southeast Ukraine (Freedman 2014, p. 13).

In late March, just as Crimea was coming under Russian control, Russia gathered 30,000 to 40,000 troops on the border near eastern Ukraine (Kofman et al., 2017, p. 55-69). This was a move in part to divert attention away from Crimea; however, it also signaled Russia’s willingness to potentially invade other regions of Ukraine. In April, armed conflict started in eastern Ukraine when separatist forces began fighting the Ukrainian army. These forces were backed directly and indirectly by oligarchs (both from Russia and Ukraine) and the Russian state. Irregular fighters, regular Russian troops, military support, and disinformation campaigns were all employed during this process. In spite of these efforts, the separatists were eventually pushed back by Ukrainian military forces, and Russia failed to inspire the local population to take up arms on a larger scale. The collapsing situation caused Russia to begin a conventional invasion with its army on August 25. The day after the Russian defense ministry claimed the troops had simply crossed the border “by accident” (Freedman 2014, p. 35). The conflict proceeded with an even more involved Russia from that point onward. The separatist organizations were later recognized as the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and the Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR) by Russia.

### 4.4 The Minsk agreements and stalemate thereafter

Peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine started in June but failed to come to any agreement until September. The first Minsk agreement was signed on September 5 by Ukraine’s former president Kuchma, a Russian diplomat, a diplomat from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and representatives for DPR and LPR (Wittke, 2019, p. 267-268). However, the parties that signed the agreement met heavy backlash. First, Kuchma’s authority to negotiate and sign on Ukraine’s behalf was called into question. Second, the DPR and LPR representatives were seen as illegitimate and illegal by critics, especially in Ukraine. The first Minsk agreements failed to have much impact on the

conflict, perhaps because of these problems, and by February 2015, the situation had only worsened (Wittke, 2019, p. 269).

On the other hand, the second Minsk agreement did have an impact. This time, the negotiations happened between President Putin, Poroshenko, and Hollande, in addition to Chancellor Merkel (Wittke, 2019, p. 269). While representatives from both the LPR and DPR were present here, too, these agreements did in fact reduce the level of fighting. However, the agreed-upon measures were never fully implemented, and only some were partially carried out (Åtland, 2020, p. 123). After the second agreement, the fighting fell into a stalemate and the ceasefire was broken almost daily (Åtland, 2020, p. 136). This would last for several years, during which Ukraine would modernize its military with help from the West. Ironically despite Western efforts to put the agreements into practice and forge lasting peace, the modernization of the Ukrainian military may have played a part in why it did not happen. This is due to how the views and goals of Ukraine and its opponents were fundamentally incompatible. One of the fundamental ways they differ is the status of the LPR and DPR. Russia states that the conflict is internal to Ukraine, with the LPR and DPR being against the “post-Maidan government,” while Ukraine sees it as an invasion of its territory (Åtland, 2020, p. 127). However, as the Ukrainian military modernized, they gained the ability to resist Russian military efforts and thus became less willing to follow the terms of agreements that greatly favored Russia (Åtland, 2020, p. 137).

## 4.5 The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022

In 2021, Russia began bolstering its military on the border with Ukraine. Towards the latter half of 2021, this development escalated further, however, Russia kept denying any intention to attack Ukraine (Taylor, 2022). In November 2021, NATO warned Russia that even if they would not intervene directly, they would make any attack on Ukraine costly for Russia (Marson, & Mauldin, 2021). When Russia continued to deny these accusations, the US began releasing intelligence containing troop movements and supposed attack plans (Harrison & Sonne, 2021). Indeed, Russia had made demands of NATO in December to effectively withdraw troops and weapons to NATO’s 1997 position before the inclusion of Poland, the Baltics, and the Balkans, in addition to a guarantee that NATO would not expand further (Roth, 2021).

From February 17, 2022 onwards, fighting in the Donbas region began heavily escalating (Brown, 2022). And on the 21<sup>st</sup>, Putin announced in a presidential address that due to these escalations, Russia would move to diplomatically recognize the LPR and DPR as independent republics (Janowski, 2022). Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine a few days later, on February 24. The invasion was called a “special military operation” by Russia to “de-nazify” Ukraine (Stanley, 2022).

Not long after the initial invasion in 2022, American political scientist Lucan Way (2022) looked at how the war was not only uniting the West against Russia but could potentially create division within the BRICS grouping. This goes to the core of why the conflict in Ukraine is so consequential for the BRICS. It has the potential to be a critical juncture for the bloc as an institution and the relationship between its members due to the widespread impact it has on the world and international relations. Therefore, when studying how the conflict has affected them, it is important to understand how it has developed and how ‘2022’ differs from ‘2014’. It will help paint a more complete picture of their situation as this study now moves on to examine the conflict’s impact on the BRICS. This thesis will not detail the invasion itself, especially as the war is still ongoing. The latter sections will look more closely at the Russian justifications and the discourse around them because this case can be used to compare Russia and the other BRICS states. Through this comparison, it is possible to better identify convergence or divergence between the BRICS, their beliefs and worldviews.

## 5 BRICS – a collective voice?

While the BRICS declarations cover numerous topics, it is important to analyze those sections that relate directly to the war in Ukraine and the UN due to its use as a platform and forum for international discussions related to conflicts. The BRICS have repeatedly expressed their support for both the UN as a multilateral forum and the UN Charter as a cornerstone of international law. Even back in 2008, in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian war, the BRICS collectively expressed their support for the UN: “...today’s world order should be based on the rule of international law and the strengthening of multilateralism with the United Nations playing the central role” (BRICS Foreign Ministers 2008).

Later this support for the UN was also extended to have the UN Charter as central to international law. The ‘eThekweni declaration’ from 2013 reads as follows:

21. We underscore our commitment to work together in the UN to continue our cooperation and strengthen multilateral approaches in international relations based on the rule of law and anchored in the Charter of the United Nations (BRICS Heads of State, 2013).

Since this declaration, every single declaration has featured a similar point about the BRICS commitment to the UN Charter (BRICS Heads of State, 2013-2022). The UN Charter codifies many aspects of international relations, including the sovereignty of states and the use of force. One example of the BRICS speaking out about the UN Charter could be seen in how they emphasized the instability in Northern Africa and the Middle East. They wrote: “It was also stressed that military interventions that have not been authorized by the Security Council are incompatible with the UN Charter and unacceptable” (BRICS Foreign Ministers 2015a). This is perhaps because the US and NATO have undertaken interventions in the past. Russia has also expressed concerns about how the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was used to justify the NATO intervention through the BRICS collective voice (BRICS Foreign Ministers 2011A).

As explained in an earlier section, the desire to cooperate on reforming the Bretton Woods institutions is one of the central reasons accounting for the establishment of the BRICS. Despite their strong support for the UN as a forum for international relations, they have also repeatedly expressed their collective wish to reform the institutions of the UN. This was something the BRICS expressed as far back as 2008 and has been present in every single BRICS declaration (BRICS Foreign Ministers 2008) (BRICS Heads of State 2009-2022). In the 2019 Brasilia declaration, the BRICS listed all these organizations together while stressing that emerging and developing nations are underrepresented:

We reiterate the urgent need to strengthen and reform the multilateral system, including the UN, the WTO, the IMF and other international organizations, which we will continue working to make more inclusive, democratic and representative, including through greater participation of emerging markets and developing countries in international decision-making (BRICS Heads of State, 2019).

The UN did begin some reforms of its institutions in 2020. This happened when the UN Secretary-General received support for such reforms from the UNGA with resolution A/RES/75/1 (UNGA 2020a)—the resolution called for the UN’s principal organs to be reformed, including the UNGA and UNSC. In the following two years, the BRICS would then refer back to that resolution to support their continued calls for UN reforms (BRICS Heads of State, 2021-2022). Another aspect of their cooperation regarding the UN is how the permanent members of the UNSC, Russia and China, repeatedly expressed their support for increasing the influence of the non-permanent members India, Brazil, and later also South Africa when they joined (BRICS Heads of State, 2009-2022). Presumably, the fact that they use language like “support their aspirations to play a greater role in the United Nations” could be a reference to wanting them as members of the UNSC, ideally as permanent ones (ibid 2009). When India and Brazil gained seats on the UNSC for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, the BRICS had four of its five members on the UNSC in 2022. They expressed their appreciation of this in the Beijing declaration and stated it would “further enhance the weight of our dialogue” (BRICS Heads of State, 2022).

When Russia annexed Crimea, several sanctions and punishments were imposed, including the country’s exclusion from the G8 and its potential exclusion from the G20. However, Russia received support from the other BRICS members on this issue, and they released a collective statement voicing their support for Russia while expressing that shunning Russia was the will of just one member (of the G8/G20) rather than a group decision:

The Ministers noted with concern, the recent statement on the possible exclusion of Russia from participating in the forthcoming G20 Summit to be held in Brisbane in November 2014. The custodianship of the G20 belongs to all Member States equally and no one Member State can unilaterally determine the exclusion of another Member State from the Summit. (BRICS Foreign Ministers 2014a).

President Putin would later attend the summit in Brisbane but would leave early after being berated by other G20 representatives about Ukraine (Heritage 2014). At this early point in the conflict, the BRICS could potentially be seen as collectively supporting Russia to some extent, not for their annexation of Crimea but in how they have shielded Russia from the consequences of it.

The Fortaleza summit in July would only have the BRICS call for dialogue and “restraint from all the actors involved” while again referencing the UN Charter (BRICS Heads of State, 2014). However, they would more directly voice their support for the Minsk agreements. The foreign ministers would express their support for the first Minsk agreement in September 2014 and again with the second Minsk agreement a year later (BRICS Foreign Ministers, 2014B-2015). The BRICS would go on to include this support in the Ufa declaration in 2015, where they would also emphasize how Germany, France, and Ukraine supported the agreements, as well as the UNSC (BRICS heads of state 2015). After this, the BRICS would not say anything else about the Ukraine conflict until the war broke out in 2022.

When the conflict escalated with Russia’s invasion in 2022, the BRICS would not make any collective expressions of support or condemnation of the conflict but instead referred to their national positions in the UNGA and UNSC, which they called the “appropriate fora” for such discussion (BRICS heads of state 2022) (BRICS Foreign Ministers, 2022). This may have meant they no longer held a collective position they could agree on and release jointly. However, they would support “talks between Russia and Ukraine” and the humanitarian efforts of the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The following sections will more closely examine these national positions in the UN, their reasoning, and some of the historical, geopolitical, and other factors that could explain their rationale.

## 5.1 BRICS voting record in the UNGA

Figure 1 (on page 39) shows the voting record of all the BRICS members regarding UNGA votes about the conflict in Ukraine from 2014 to the start of 2023. What we can observe from BRICS UNGA voting concerning the conflict in Ukraine are several changes over time between 2014 and 2022. We can observe that none of the BRICS were willing to vote against Russia when the conflict initially broke out in 2014, with most of the other BRICS abstaining from the resolution related to the annexation of Crimea. Although, even early on, most of them voted against resolutions associated with the human rights situation caused by the conflict such as how Russia treated the people in these occupied territories. These resolutions were on the “Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine.” They had multiple BRICS members voting against them in the first few years after the annexation in 2014. The only exception here was Brazil, who abstained instead. However, a shift is discernible later as the conflict approaches the 2022 invasion.

India and South Africa both stop voting against these resolutions and instead, abstain from them.

**Figure 1: United Nations General Assembly votes about Ukraine**

Year/Topic	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa
2014/Crimea	Abstained	No	Abstained	Abstained	Abstained
2016/Human rights	Abstained	No	No	No	No
2017/Human rights	Abstained	No	No	No	No
2018/Human rights	Abstained	No	No	No	No
2018/Militarization	Abstained	No	Abstained	Abstained	No
2019/Human rights	Abstained	No	No	No	Abstained
2019/Militarization	Abstained	No	Abstained	Abstained	Abstained
2020/Human rights	Abstained	No	No	No	Abstained
2020/Militarization	Abstained	No	Abstained	No	Abstained
2021/Human rights	Abstained	No	No	No	Abstained
2021/Militarization	Abstained	No	Abstained	No	Abstained
2022/Condemning Russia - it should withdraw troops	Yes	No	Abstained	Abstained	Abstained
2022/Humanitarian situation	Yes	No	Abstained	Abstained	Abstained
2022/Suspend Russia from Human Rights Council	Abstained	No	Abstained	No	Abstained
2022/Annexation - Russia has broken the UN Charter	Yes	No	Abstained	Abstained	Abstained
2022/Tracking Russian wrongdoings for Reparations	Abstained	No	Abstained	No	Abstained
2022/Human Rights	Yes	No	Abstained	Abstained	Abstained
2023/UN Charter	Yes	No	Abstained	Abstained	Abstained

Source: UN Library 2014-2023 voting data.

The resolutions titled the “Problem of the militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov” also saw both South Africa and China voting against it alongside Russia. However, South Africa only did so in 2018 before abstaining from all resolutions, which has continued into 2023. China only started voting against these in 2020 and had instead been abstaining when they were first debated.

A shift comes from Brazil's voting in favor of different resolutions condemning Russia's actions after the conflict's escalation in 2022. Brazil had been the only one of the BRICS member nations abstaining on all resolutions until 2022 and became the only one to vote in favour of such resolutions against Russia. The country did this not only once but multiple times after this. On the other hand, even Brazil did not vote in favor of the resolution seeking to remove Russia from the UN Human Rights Council, or the resolution that sought to track Russian wrongdoings in the war (with the ultimate aim of having Russia pay reparations for these actions after the war). China, on the other hand, would here outright vote against these resolutions while the other BRICS members would abstain. This is, of course, except for Russia, who voted against all these UNGA resolutions related to Ukraine. The only deviation from this pattern can be found in how Russia voted for the UNSC resolution supporting the Minsk agreements. The agreements were of course seen as support for Russia by some as discussed in section 4.4.

Both the UNGA and the UNSC are points of interest for this study. Although, more focus has been put on the UNGA due to how all the BRICS members participate in it throughout the entire conflict; indeed, only China and Russia are permanent members. Admittedly, Brazil and India were members in 2022, however upon examination of their statements in both the UNGA and UNSC, there was found a large degree of overlap. Additionally, the UNGA votes were usually held several days or weeks after votes on similar issues in the UNSC and were often somewhat longer and most likely better prepared. The Brazilian representative even commented that he did not have time to confer with his home nation on the resolution before the meetings due to how hastily it was held (UNSC 2022c). As such, this thesis focuses on the UNGA. The statements and reasoning of the BRICS members, starting with the outlier Brazil, will be examined in the following sections of this chapter.

## 5.2 Brazil – caught between ‘two worlds’

Brazil's foreign policy has historically focused on maintaining its autonomy and independence while developing its economy (Thies & Nieman 2017, p. 62-63). During the Cold War, Brazil ended up allying itself with the US and was responsible for maintaining some level of control of South America. After the 1964 military coup, Brazil saw itself as a “privileged partner of the United States.” This relationship developed over time and turned from Brazil being a regional collaborator for the US into being a regional leader. In 1971, a



meeting between both President Medici and Nixon confirmed that Brazil would take care of South America and were viewed as having a strong anti-communist role in their foreign policy (Landry 1974, p. 30).

In the 1970s, Brazil would become less restricted by the Cold War because it occupied a more middle-power role and viewed itself as a “superpower in waiting” (Thies & Nieman 2017, p. 64). In the 1980s, some scholars even saw Brazil emerging as “the superpower of the South” (Brooke 1981, p. 167-168). At the same time, Brazil was increasingly seeking its own national interest over those of the US, which saw the relationship becoming more strained. However, they were still viewed as a pivotal state for US foreign policy in the region (Thies & Nieman 2017, p. 65-66). In the 1990s, Brazil played an essential role as a developer for South America and the leader of its economic sphere. This was further reinforced with the formation of the “Southern Common Market,” also known as Mercosur.

However, Brazil started becoming increasingly assertive and independent from the US under the Lula’s presidency, becoming more like a rival relationship at times (Brands 2011, p. 40). American scholar of International Relations Hal Brands describes Brazil’s grand strategy under Lula as one that hastens the end of unipolarity with a move toward multipolarity. This was highlighted by Brazil strengthening ties with other powers through the founding of IBSA in 2003 and later the BRIC grouping in 2008. Brazil has been increasingly accepted as a rising power globally and in scholarly circles in the 2000s, which continued under President Dilma (Thies & Nieman 2017, p. 67). However, it has sometimes struggled to be recognized as a regional leader among South American states. Still, Brazil has often pursued unwritten alliances or multilateral approaches to problems with the US, viewing itself as a partner in a mature relationship and as a contributor to a group of emerging powers that balance American hegemony through multilateralism (Thies & Nieman 2017, p. 66 & 78). Thies and Nieman (2017, p. 79) suggest that while Brazil may band together with the other BRICS for a joint project like the NDB, it seems unlikely to more actively challenge the US-led liberal world order.

On March 18, 2014, Russia declared its annexation of Crimea and on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the UNGA held a vote not to recognize the Crimean referendum and affirm their commitment to the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Brazil abstained from voting on the resolution (UN Digital Library, 2014). At the time, the Brazilian UN delegate, Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, called for the

international community to “reaffirm its strong resolve to urgently find a peaceful solution” while stressing the country’s close ties to Ukraine and Brazil’s large population of Ukrainian descendants (UNGA, 2014). He also “expressed deep regret over the deaths in Kyiv.” He also highlighted how the UN charter and international law must be respected. Before finalizing the statement, he commended the UN Secretary-General for efforts to de-escalate and promote dialogue.

The comments about their “close ties” to Ukraine could be referring to how Brazil’s population of Ukrainian descent numbered 500,000 in 2014 and how the two had funded a joint space and satellite program worth about a billion USD (Pomar et al. 2015, p. 3). Meanwhile, the comments about the violence in Kyiv do not condemn either the Ukrainian government or the protestors as perpetrators. As discussed in the earlier section, the West condemned the Yanukovich regime for the violence during the protests, while Russia criticized the leaders of Euromaidan. Brazil’s unwillingness to criticize either and abstain from voting on Crimea could be due to their reluctance to take a clear side in the conflict.

Brazil’s stance on these issues was part of a general “hedging strategy” to both preserve ties with the US and Russia (Stuenkel 2014, p. 2). This was due to how the global order was seen as moving towards multipolarity, making it necessary to maintain ties with multiple poles of power. Anti-Americanism at the time was rampant due to NSA spying scandals, especially in Brazil (Stuenkel 2020, p. 164). The US had tapped Brazilian President Rousseff’s phone and spied on Petrobras, a Brazilian state-owned petroleum company. Rousseff was also facing re-election, and the potential of cancelling Putin’s participation in the BRICS summit in Brazil in July would leave her open to criticism about her forging policy. Moreover, Brazilian ties to both the West and Russia would have been jeopardized.

Brazilian sentiments about the Western use of sanctions have also generally been negative. In the 1980s, the US Congress imposed sanctions on Brazil for pursuing nuclear enrichment and reprocessing technology (Stuenkel 2020, p. 163). What has been viewed as hypocritical stances on human rights abuses and lack of democracy by the US have also caused some commentators in Brazil to argue that such double standards are far more damaging to upholding fair and just international order than Russian policy over Crimea. However, based on interviews, Stuenkel (2020, p. 165) also claims that leading diplomats internally urged Brazil to take a more critical stance against Russia, even if some in the Brazilian media also partially blamed NATO’s eastward expansion.

In the yearly votes about the potential human rights violation and the ongoing situation in Crimea, Brazil abstained from voting (see Figure 1) but made no public statements about the conflict. The same was true for the yearly votes between 2018 and 2021 on the region's militarization. This clearly showed that Brazil did not wish to condemn Russia during this period. However, also of note is that in 2019 the US designated Brazil as a "non-NATO ally" in 2019 (U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Brazil 2019). President Bolsonaro said, "This participation as a non-NATO ally is welcome" when describing the deepening ties between the two nations and pointed out how it would aid Brazil in purchasing weapons and technology from the US (Campos & Verdelio 2019).

Brazil's neutrality and abstentions changed with Russia's 2022 invasion into Ukraine. Brazil was on the UNSC at the time and when it voted to convene an emergency special session in the UNGA on Ukraine in late February, Brazil voted in favor of convening it (UNSC 2022b). The Brazilian UN Ambassador Ronaldo Costa Filho however also warned that measures such as cyber-attacks or sanctions could "jeopardize the situation" or "enhance the risk of direct confrontation between the Russian Federation and NATO". Filho, in a previous session of the UNSC, had also stated that despite Russian concerns about the power balance in Europe, "that does not give Moscow the right to do what it is doing now" when Brazil voted to support a UNSC resolution that "have deplored, in the strongest terms, the Russian Federation's aggression as being in violation of Article 2, paragraph 4 of the Charter of the United Nations" on territorial integrity (UNSC 2022a).

On the other hand, Brazilian President Bolsonaro did not seem to believe that Brazil was against Russia, despite these efforts in the UNSC. In a press conference on the same day, he said: "We will not take sides, we will continue being neutral, and help with whatever is possible" (Stargardter 2022). He continued by declaring that "A big part of Ukraine's population speaks Russian," that the two were "practically brother nations," that "A chief of state like that of Russia does not want to undertake a massacre, anywhere" and that many in southern Ukraine wanted to "approximate themselves to Russia." Before again reinforcing Brazil's stance against sanctions by saying it "could bring negative repercussions for Brazil" since Russian fertilizers are important for Brazil's agriculture sector. Still, Bolsonaro also noted that he would wait before giving his opinion on whether to condemn Russia.

The first resolution of the UNGA emergency special session was titled ES11-1, and the vote was held on March 2. This resolution reaffirmed Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty while deploring Russian aggression and demanding the complete and unconditional withdrawal of Russian military forces from Ukraine (UNGA 2022a). Despite such strong wording against Russia, Brazil voted in favor of the resolution. Filho stated:

The resolution cannot be seen as something that allows the indiscriminate application of sanctions. These initiatives do not lead to the reconstruction of a diplomatic dialogue, and it brings consequences that go beyond the current situation (Brito et.al. 2022).

The second resolution centered around the humanitarian fallout caused by the war. The vote was held on March 24. There was initially some debate about the text of the resolution, where Filho "lamented that the adopted resolution did not take into account the humanitarian impact of economic sanctions" and that "indiscriminate economic sanctions will affect all countries, particularly developing nations" (UNGA 2022b, p. 18). Brazil still voted in favour of the resolution, stating it was "due to the urgent need to send a strong message on the humanitarian situation."

Working against sanctions by saying they run counter to dialogue is a common theme in Brazilian discourse. In early March 2022, the World Bank extended its sanctions from 2014 by immediately stopping all its programs in Russia and Belarus (World Bank 2022). Afraid that similar actions would be taken in organizations like the IMF or with the G20 summit, Russia's finance minister later wrote his colleague in Brazil to seek support (Viva et al., 2022). When asked to comment Erivaldo Gomes, the Brazilian Economy Ministry's secretary of international economic affairs said: "Our bridges are the international bodies, and our assessment is that these bridges have to be preserved" (ibid). A more concrete example of this is how Brazil did not support excluding Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. The UNGA can suspend countries from participating in the council and, in fact, voted to suspend Russia on April 7. Here Brazil abstained from the vote (UN digital library 2022c).

In late September 2022, Russia held what it referred to as referendums in several of its occupied territories to justify its continued occupation of them. Shortly thereafter, the UNSC

would discuss it in their meetings, and Filho would say the referendums were illegitimate. He stated:

It is unreasonable to assume that populations in areas of conflict are able to freely express their will. The results of such referendums, under the current circumstances, do not constitute a valid or genuine expression of the will of the local populations and cannot be perceived as legitimate (UNSC 2022c, p. 8).

Despite this criticism, Brazil abstained from voting on the resolution Russia would later veto. According to the Brazilians, the resolution's language did not aid in de-escalating the conflict, and they said they did not have time to deliberate on it with their home nation. However, when the UNGA voted on a resolution to condemn Russia for breaking the UN charter and declaring the referendums illegitimate, Brazil voted for the resolution (UNGA 2022d). Filho repeated much of what he said during the UNSC meeting on the topic but was also "disappointed" that their proposal to "include a clear message urging the parties to cease hostilities and engage in peace negotiations was not included in the draft" (ibid, p. 17).

This message was, however, finally included a few months later, in February 2023, when the UNGA again voted on a lasting peace based on Russia breaking the charter of the UN and demanding they withdraw their troops (UNGA 2023). On the other hand, they had abstained the previous November when the UNGA voted on whether the UN should create an official record of all Russian wrongdoings with the goal of having them pay war reparations (UN Digital Library 2022e).

In 2023, Lula returned to the presidential spotlight. At this point in time, however, it did not seem like it would drastically shift Brazil's position on the war. Thus far, Brazil condemned the invasion as a breach of the UN charter but was reluctant to support all Western efforts to hold Russia responsible. In an interview with Time magazine, Lula blamed Putin, the West, and Zelensky for the war:

But it's not just Putin who is guilty. The U.S. and the E.U. are also guilty. What was the reason for the Ukraine invasion? NATO? Then the U.S. and Europe should have said: 'Ukraine won't join NATO.' That would have solved the problem (Nugent, 2023).

When speaking about Zelensky, Lula said, "This guy is as responsible as Putin for the war" (Nugent, 2023). Similarly, when Lula was interviewed with the Spanish newspaper 'El País' he reiterated many of these talking points while saying "The Russians are wrong" and talking

about how he believed they either had the choice to “feed the war or try to end it”, before he explained his plans to end the war by engaging countries not involved in the war as well as beginning negotiations between the two parties (Bueno 2023). He told the newspaper that Brazil could not send military aid to Ukraine since it would hinder Brazilian efforts to be a neutral negotiator. This was because he claimed sending arms would be seen as “taking part in the war” by Russia (ibid). He also criticized the permanent UNSC members for “not seeking peace” and said the world should “adapt the UN to 2023” once again reaffirming Brazil’s stance on UN reforms (ibid). On the other hand, he was less decisive about what peace would look like and stated:

Don’t ask me how – first we have to sit down at the negotiating table. Both sides want to win, but war doesn’t always need a winner. Stop fighting, come to an agreement, and get everything back to normal (Bueno 2023).

He also talked about the wildly different views between the sides that would make negotiation difficult, however, he believes negotiation is the only way to achieve peace (Bueno 2023). Therefore, the Brazilian strategy under Lula seems to present the country as a neutral negotiator who can sit down the two sides of the war and negotiate an end to it. Although it remains unclear if this can be achieved in the near future. Brazil will face a tricky balancing act if it wishes to maintain ties with both the West and Russia in the future although it could potentially paint itself in a more positive light if it plays an important role in ending the war and securing peace.

### 5.3 India – The ambivalent pragmatic

India’s foreign policy has often been characterized by both the sometimes-conflicting wish to be seen as a regional or great power—and its policy of “non-alignment.” This stems back from its time under the leadership of Nehru between 1927 and 1960, when non-alignment and anti-imperialism dominated (Thies & Nieman 2017, p. 101). India has at times clashed with its neighbors, such as China or Pakistan, over border disputes or influence over the South-East Asia region, causing it to act increasingly like the great powers it had been critical of in the past (ibid, p. 102-105).

This shift has caused some to argue that the moral power India once held as a non-aligned state furthering peace has disappeared and that India has traded its moral power for military

power (Abraham 2007). Others have called India “ambivalent” and termed it a “bridging power” due to how it is a successful negotiator between different worlds and ideas that “promotes seemingly inconsistent normative values and practices” (Ollapally 2011, p. 202).

Despite the non-alignment, India has periodically sought allies. In the 1970s, they had close ties with the Soviets, and even when there was widespread condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, India still supported the USSR (Thies & Nieman 2017, p. 103). After the fall of the Soviet Union, India’s rivalry with China over South-East Asia grew in the 1990s, and India sought closer ties with the US. However, they never pursued a formal alliance. Even when the Bush administration supported India’s efforts to be recognized as a nuclear power in 2005, India still rejected their efforts to create a formal alliance (ibid, p. 107). However, US-Indian relations suffered a setback in 2013 when an Indian diplomat was arrested on visa fraud charges in the US (Panda 2013).

India is usually critical of arguments that seek to alter territorial borders based on kinship or ethnocultural affinities. It has multiple border disputes with China and Pakistan over such issues and has fought four wars over them in the past (Sahni 2014, p. 2). With its history of non-alignment and wariness of such arguments, one might expect that India would speak out against Russia seizing Ukrainian territory based on them. However, the reality was quite different. India made very few comments about the issue in 2014. India’s official statement was that they hoped for “a solution to Ukraine’s internal differences” and that, “It would be important, in this context, for a legitimate democratic process to find full expression through free and fair elections that provide for an inclusive society” (Sahni 2014, p. 2). However, such vague phrasing could be interpreted in multiple ways. The Indian newspaper, ‘The Times of India,’ (2014) used the phrase “the erstwhile Ukrainian province which President Vladimir Putin just annexed to Russia after it voted for such an association” to describe the Crimean annexation, which could indicate that some in India saw the Crimean referendum as a “legitimate democratic process” even if its government remained silent on the issue.

India’s national security advisor, Shivshankar Menon, also talked about the issue as “internal” during a news conference but mentioned how “there are after all legitimate Russian and other interests involved” which caused some to believe India sided with Russia at the

time (Sahni 2014, p. 1). Although some scholars believe that India did not back Russia and instead simply tried not to get involved (Sahni 2014; Stuenkel 2020, p. 166).

When the UNGA voted on Crimea, India also abstained without commenting on it (UNGA 2014). India's only other public statement on the conflict before 2022 was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interview on CNN, where he briefly mentioned the downed Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 that had been shot down over eastern Ukraine by Russian-controlled forces earlier that year. In the interview, he would only call it "a plane accident" before saying that "Ultimately, India's viewpoint is that efforts need to be made to sit together and talk, and to resolve problems in an ongoing process" (Ministry of External Affairs of India 2014).

Aside from statements made with the other BRICS nations, India would then remain silent on issues regarding the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. However, the yearly votes in the UNGA between 2016-2022 regarding human rights issues saw India vote against the resolutions until the outbreak of the war in 2022, when they would abstain instead (see Figure 1). India would also abstain from voting on resolutions regarding the militarization of these areas and the black sea between 2018 and 2021. But they would not make any public statement regarding them.

As Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine occurred, India was on the UNSC. The UNSC would proceed to call for an emergency special session of the UNGA a few days later. Here India would abstain from the vote, but the Indian representative called for an immediate cessation of violence and an end to hostilities (UNSC 2022b, p. 5). Filho stated: "There is no choice but to return to the path of diplomacy and dialogue." During the emergency special session, a total of six resolutions would be passed between February 2022 and 2023. India would abstain from voting on all of these resolutions (see Figure 1). The only decision related to Ukraine in the UNGA that India did not abstain was when they voted for letting Ukrainian President Zelensky address the UNGA remotely. However, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs later claimed this was not a vote against Russia (Haidar 2022). During the meetings, India appealed for a ceasefire or end to the hostilities, while expressing their belief that the only possible solution would be through dialogue (UNGA 2022a-2022d). It declared: "We continue to believe firmly that differences can be resolved only through dialogue and diplomacy" (UNGA 2022a, p. 18).



At the heart of India's arguments is the belief that dialogue is the only solution and could be part of their justification for not condemning anyone for their actions. They also voiced doubts that any process not involving both sides could lead to a "meaningful resolution" of conflict (UNGA 2023). Instead, India focused more on humanitarian aid and those indirectly affected by the war, in what it would later call a "people-centered approach to this situation." This could be seen in how, even though they abstained from voting on resolution ES11/2 regarding the humanitarian issues in Ukraine, they instead made moves to send aid themselves:

India has already sent more than 90 tons of humanitarian supplies to Ukraine and its neighbors as part of the nine separate tranches of humanitarian assistance delivered so far. The supplies have included medicines and other essential relief materials. (UNGA 2022b, p. 14).

Another aspect of this "people-focused approach" is their advocacy for those affected by the rising prices as a consequence of the war and the following sanctions. In particular, they spoke out against such sanctions when the UNGA was discussing and voting on the issue of the Russian annexation of occupied territories:

As developing countries face the brunt of the conflict's consequences on food, fuel and fertilizer supplies, it is critical that the voice of the global South be heard, and their legitimate concerns duly addressed. We must therefore not initiate measures that further complicate a struggling global economy (UNGA 2022d, p. 15).

Despite India advocating for international law, and the UN charter in the very same speech and saying that "those principles must be upheld without exception," they did not condemn Russia for breaking the UN charter and instead focused on sanctions. The reason to focus on the sanctions could be many.

One such reason could be found in the very same meeting. Earlier in the session, Pakistan had used the opportunity to talk about the disputed territories of Jammu and Kashmir, which they said were "illegally occupied by India in complete violation of international law and relevant resolutions of the Security Council" (UNGA 2022d, p. 14). India would then go on to call the remarks "frivolous and pointless" (ibid, p. 15). The fact that India also has these territorial disputes could be part of why they might not wish to set a precedent one way or the other regarding such issues. If the international community and India set a precedent with Ukraine,

it could impact India's own disputes and conflicts. Additionally, India has received long-standing support from Russia on the Kashmir issue dating back to Soviet days (Warren & Ganguly 2022, p. 814).

Another issue for India is its relationship with Russia is its purchasing of Russian arms for the Indian military. India's emulation of "great powers" has led it to increase its military power. This increase naturally needs a supply of arms, and Russia has been India's main source of arms imports. Between 2000 and 2021, 65 percent of Indian arms imports came from Russia, although this saw a downturn in 2021 when less than one-third of imports came from Russia (Warren & Ganguly 2022, p. 819). On the one hand, the portion of imports from Russia decreased significantly in 2021, and Western sanctions have complicated further imports from Russia by removing its firms from the international banking system and limiting the country's ability to import certain materials and technologies (ibid, p. 812). On the other hand, Russian energy exports to India have increased since the beginning of the war in 2022, with Russia decreasing prices to maintain exports even as European nations are reducing their imports from Russia (ibid, p. 827). Although Warren and Ganguly believed these efforts to increase bilateral energy trade would face challenges due to geography and Western sanctions, at the beginning of 2023, Russia overtook states like Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia as India's largest exporter of crude oil (Huang 2023).

The war could also have a massive long-term impact on relations between India and China if Russia ends up weakened as an independent global power. Markey and Larsen (2022, p. 783) see three pathways that could strain relations between India and China in such a potential future. First, if Russia is too weak to aid Indian defense efforts, it could push India to seek deeper relations with the US and Europe, thereby threatening China. Second, it could undermine Russia's position as the middleman between India and China and limit their diplomatic options. Finally, the war could create a more bipolar world, and may force India to increasingly oppose China due to security issues.

If Russia were to be pushed towards China due to Western efforts to isolate it, then India might see it as necessary to limit the isolation of Russia so that it does not lead to a deteriorating situation with China. One such fear for India is that an increasingly close relationship between China and Russia could lead Russia to support Chinese claims on the Kashmir region, thereby ending its long-standing support for India on the issue (Warren &

Ganguly 2022, p. 825). These issues could be part of why India has chosen not to condemn Russia over its conflict with Ukraine, even as this conflict has escalated into a full-scale war.

#### 5.4 China – Deepening ties with Russia

Sino-Russian relations have changed many times over the years. While China was originally more of a “lesser partner” in its alliance with the Soviets, this gradually changed after World War II as China attempted to increase its power (Thies & Nieman 2017, p. 118-119).

However, when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, China was very critical of it and often ended up curbing Soviet hegemony in the following years.

Due to this, China moved closer to the US in the 1970s and the US even ended up “altercasting” China as a great power to challenge Soviet dominance (Thies & Nieman 2017, p. 119-123). Nevertheless, US-Sino relations would take a downturn due to Reagan’s support of Taiwan. Consequently, the Taiwan issue would adversely affect US-Sino relations with the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis and remains a contentious issue between them. China views Taiwan as something that “holds it back” from fully taking a more powerful role and views Taiwan as a part of China and “unfinished business” necessary to “complete the revolution” from 1949 (ibid, p. 119-123).

The international view of China has also been affected by US-China relations. In the past, the US has attempted to frame China as a “troubled modernizer” that will eventually liberalize. However, this view was shattered by Tiananmen Square (Thies & Nieman 2017, p. 123). After this, the US instead framed it as a “failed modernizer” or a potential “rogue” in the international system; China, in turn, used this to fuel Chinese nationalism and anti-Americanism at home.

Still, the US wanted China to become a “responsible stakeholder” in the mid-2000s to facilitate cooperation between the two (Zoelick 2005). China has also promoted itself as such with its efforts in UN peacekeeping activities (Thies & Nieman 2017, p. 123-125). In the views of many scholars, China has indicated a willingness to follow the international order rather than challenge it (ibid, p. 123-125). However, China is still a great power in a political order designed by the US with institutions that benefit it and its allies. Thies & Nieman (2017, p. 123-125) viewed it as “a great power that has not yet acted in a revisionist way.” On the

other hand, the BRICS have been a way for its members, China included, to attempt to reform the existing international order, as discussed in previous sections of this thesis.

One explanation for why China did not condemn Russia's occupation of Crimea could be seen in how the crisis strained relations between Russia and the West. This happened without directly affecting ties between China and the West, thus drawing Russia closer to China (Stuenkel 2020, p. 168). The day before the Crimean referendum, the UNSC urged UN member states not to recognize it. While a Russian veto blocked the resolution China was the only member of the UNSC to abstain from the vote, all the other members aside from Russia voted for the resolution (UNSC 2014b). China explained this decision by stating that "the text only would have complicated the situation" (UNSC 2014b).

Similarly, when the Crimean referendum and annexation became an issue in the UNGA two weeks later, China again abstained from the vote while also declaring that the UNGA resolution would complicate the situation (UNGA 2014). The Chinese delegation claimed that its approach was "balanced and impartial" and that "China has always been opposed to intervention in the internal affairs of other countries." China's opposition to intervention here might not be an objection to Russia's intervention in Ukraine but rather to Western intervention. Chinese commentators universally criticized the US and the EU for "instigating regime change by manipulating Ukrainian populism and encouraging internal confrontation and fragmentation in the country." (Alden 2014, p. 2). They also highlighted how Ukraine's government had been weak and its democratic transition had failed, in addition to how deep cultural and ethnic divisions that had always been present in Ukraine were brought forward by the crisis.

China would support the Minsk agreements in the UNSC while discussing how "any long-term solution must be balanced and address the legitimate concerns of all parties and respect the long-standing realities of the region" (UNSC 2015). The fact that China focused on "the legitimate concerns of all parties" could here be a reference to how China saw or framed the Russian security or cultural concerns as legitimate, unlike how the West instead saw this as a clear breach of the UN Charter on states territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Between 2016 and 2022, China would vote against every UNGA resolution on human rights in Ukraine (see Figure 1). A member of the Chinese delegation to the UN would explain this opposition as “a principled position of China to oppose country-specific resolutions on human rights” (Yao 2017). China would on the other hand, abstain from voting on militarization in Crimea and the Black Sea in 2018 and 2019 but would switch to opposing similar resolutions when they were voted on in 2020 and 2021 (see Figure 1). However, it would make no statement on why this stance changed.

When the war broke out in 2022, China concentrated on urging diplomacy between Russia and Ukraine while abstaining from voting on UNSC resolutions regarding it (UNSC 2022a-2022b). At the beginning of the war, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi published a ‘five-point position’ on Ukraine that would shape Chinese discourse regarding the war (Wang 2022). This included a reiteration of China’s support for the UN Charter, territorial integrity, and sovereignty. However, he also criticized NATO’s eastward expansion and stated that “Russia’s legitimate security demands ought to be taken seriously,” which is far more direct support of Russia’s stated security concerns than seen earlier. He also said that the top priorities lay in preventing humanitarian crises and facilitating diplomacy while emphasizing that the UNSC should “cool the situation” before criticizing the use of sanctions that China believed ran counter to this goal. During the emergency session on Ukraine, China would similarly abstain from voting on most issues, except for the vote to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council and the vote to track Russia’s wrongdoings for future reparations (UNGA 2022a-2022e). This lines up again with China’s view that sanctions of any kind would not be conducive to “cooling the situation.”

Arguments around Russia’s security concerns were also expanded on during the meetings. During the forum, on the first resolution to condemn Russia’s aggression, the Chinese representative argued that “abandoning a Cold War mentality and the logic that one country’s security should come at others’ expense,” was necessary to create lasting peace in Ukraine (UNGA 2022a, p. 16). However, the country whose “security came at another’s expense” was not Ukraine but Russia. The “Cold War mentality” that China criticized was the expansion of NATO, and it said peace “requires abandoning an approach that guarantees regional security by expanding military blocs.” China’s representative would again bring up the Cold War mentality during a vote on resolutions to condemn Russia for breaking the UN Charter both in

the UNGA and the UNSC. They said that the UNGA meeting should instead focus on “avoiding bloc confrontations” (UNGA 2022d, p. 4) (UNSC 2022c, p. 6). Despite China championing the UN Charter repeatedly, it would make no move to condemn Russia for breaking it.

China also sponsored South Africa’s draft resolution on the humanitarian situation due to its much more neutral language and the fact that it did not mention Russia as an aggressor. Moreover, instead of “demanding Russia cease their aggression,” it would “demand all parties cease hostilities” (UNGA 2022b). China also emphasized preventing “spillover” effects due to sanctions. China’s representative argued that “Blindly exerting pressure, imposing sanctions and creating divisions and confrontation will only further complicate the situation and quickly lead to a spillover of the negative effects of the crisis, affecting even more countries” (UNGA 2022a, p. 16). While simultaneously critical of any sanctions, China was actually on board regarding efforts towards the Black Sea Grain Initiative to aid global food supply (UNGA 2022d, p. 5).

China’s praise for the Grain Initiative can be traced back to how Ukraine and China deepened their trade relations in 2018. Ukraine established the One Belt One Road Trade and Investment Promotion Centre in Kyiv in 2018. It signed several tax and trade treaties, and large contracts with China, eventually leading Ukraine to become one of China’s largest sources of corn imports (Belt and Road 2023). While only 4.2 percent of Ukraine’s exports went to China in 2018, this number had grown to 13.8 percent in 2020, making China Ukraine’s largest export destination (Observatory of Economic Complexity 2023). This would also come into play when China specifically stressed the importance of facilitating grain exports through the Black Sea in a 2023 press release on Ukraine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2023).

In that press release, Wang Yi’s five points were expanded into twelve. The additions were focused on avoiding nuclear threats and making the old points more specific. The nuclear issue is perhaps the closest China has been to directly ‘criticizing’ Russia during the war. Nuclear plants in Ukraine had also been subject to shelling. China was very critical of it within the UNGA, too, although they did not specifically criticize either side: “The safety and security of nuclear facilities cannot be compromised, not even by the smallest margin. We call on all parties concerned to exercise restraint...” (UNGA 2022d, p. 5). However, the US

Secretary of State Antony Blinken criticized the plan because “a ceasefire that does not include the removal of Russian forces from Ukrainian territory would effectively be supporting the ratification of Russian conquest” (Chatterjee 2023).

While China has a great deal of trade with Ukraine, it also has a lot of trade with Russia. On February 4, 2022, just three weeks before the invasion of Ukraine, Russia and China signed a joint statement where it said the “Friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no “forbidden” areas of cooperation...” (Kremlin 2022). This could potentially demonstrate— as NATO’s General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg has said – that NATO has seen signs that China is considering sending arms to Russia (Cotton et al., 2023). As mentioned earlier, some scholars believed that China’s strategy in 2014 was to draw Russia closer by using the country’s international isolation to its advantage. This is again a potential strategy some scholars believe China may be following during the war in Ukraine (Markey & Larsen 2022, p. 783; Warren & Ganguly 2022). A closer relationship between the two has the potential to strengthen China’s position should it decide to act on its threats to reclaim Taiwan as its own (Dibb 2019, p. 9). Therefore, China’s position on the Ukraine war should be considered with this possibility in mind.

### 5.5 South Africa – A broker of peace?

South Africa was often seen as an international pariah until the end of apartheid and the subsequent election of the ANC in 1994 (Thies & Nieman 2017, p. 136-142). Under Nelson Mandela, South Africa was restored to the international scene, diplomatic ties were established, and it could again participate in multilateral institutions. Before his election, Mandela claimed that “human rights will be the light that guides our foreign policy” and that South Africa would emerge as a diplomatic power by brokering regional peace deals (ibid, p. 141-146). However, South Africa enjoyed greater recognition internationally for these efforts than they did in their own region, as many other African nations were not as accepting of its leadership back then. Much of the moral authority held by Mandela has also disappeared with his successors (ibid, p. 135).

Despite having its regional leadership role contested, South Africa added an African voice to the BRICS grouping with its inclusion in 2011 and thereby giving it a “stronger capacity to speak on behalf of the emerging world” (Stuenkel 2020, p. 57). The BRICS grouping was also important for South Africa as it provided it with a sense of credibility as a regional leader and influence on the world stage. This could help explain why South Africa abstained from the 2014 UNGA vote regarding Russia’s annexation of Crimea and why it made no comment in the General Assembly at the time (UNGA 2014). South Africa would instead simply echo the BRICS statement and criticize the “escalation of hostile language,” the use of sanctions, and threats of violence which it said did not “contribute to the peaceful resolution of the situation” (Stuenkel 2020, p. 168).

South Africa would continue to refrain from comments about Ukraine in the UNGA in the following years until the war in 2022. South Africa would initially vote against the UNGA resolutions about the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, although in 2019, it began to abstain instead (see figure 1). South Africa similarly abstained or did not vote regarding the militarization of the Black Sea, Sea of Azov, and Crimea.

South Africa would also abstain from all six resolutions during the emergency special session (UNGA 2022-2023). During the meetings, South Africa’s representatives focused on the idea that the resolutions were divisive and did “not create an environment conducive to diplomacy, dialogue, and mediation” (UNGA 2022a, p. 20). Instead, they argued it “could drive a deeper wedge between the parties rather than contributing to resolving the conflict.” South Africa’s said that they believe the UN “[...] should be used as a platform to build bridges, address divergent views and provide recommendations and support for the parties to engage in a spirit of compromise while de-escalating tensions” (ibid, p. 20). In all the meetings on these resolutions, South Africa would base their arguments around these concepts (UNGA 2022a-2023).

It would argue that removing Russia from the Human Rights Council would “further divide and polarize States” (UNGA 2022c, p. 9). While resolutions centred around making Russia pay reparations, both declaring its annexations illegal and asserting that the country was in breach of the UN Charter did “not serve to bring the parties closer to peace.” (UNGA 2022c-



2022e & 2023). During the vote on whether Russia was in breach of the UN Charter, South Africa expanded on this by arguing that the resolution did not aid the prospect of peace because it was not “taking into account the concerns of all affected States” (UNGA 2022d, p. 13). On the other hand, South Africa would avoid mentioning whether Russia was actually in breach of the UN Charter despite this being the subject of the meeting. They would instead only mention that they had “noted” the UN Secretary-General’s argument for why Russia was in breach of it (ibid, p. 13).

Aside from this, South Africa would otherwise only focus on how the war was “heightening the food and fuel crisis” and how there was “an influx of arms to the region” (UNGA 2023). Although it would not zero in on these issues until the beginning of 2023, it would also criticize the international community for not coming up with concrete proposals to end the war. This could mean South Africa did not believe calls for Russia to withdraw its forces to end the war would have that effect. At the same time, its worry about arms being sent to the region most likely referenced how NATO had been supplying Ukraine with arms. Although South Africa has not outright criticized this supply, by all intents and purposes it seems not a choice it would have made.

As aforementioned, South Africa has a history as a peace broker in conflicts. This also came into play when it submitted an alternative draft resolution on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine on March 23, 2022. Internal voices in South Africa had been calling on it to act at this early point in the war; one example of this could be seen in a parliamentary debate a week earlier. There, Brett Herron, a member of the parliament, issued a call for South Africa to mediate:

There’s no country better positioned to broker peace in this conflict than South Africa. We have done so in Northern Ireland. Let’s utilize this currency and play a meaningful role in convincing these countries that the lasting solution to their conflict is negotiation and compromise (Mputting 2022).

Similarly, the Deputy Minister of the Department of International Relations Cooperation said the country has always maintained a “stance of upholding dialogue and diplomacy as mechanisms that can bring about peaceful settlements to conflicts.” (Mputting 2022).

In late March 2022, two draft resolutions were submitted to the UNGA regarding the humanitarian situation in Ukraine. The first of these was submitted by Ukraine and was called “Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine” (called L.2) while South Africa submitted an alternative text titled “Humanitarian situation emanating out of the conflict in Ukraine” (called L.3). Their differences stemmed from how L.2 would demand Russia to cease hostilities against Ukraine, while L.3 would not mention Russia’s invasion but instead called on “all parties” to cease hostilities (UNGA 2022g). However, both drafts mentioned the protection of civilians, medical personnel, medical transportation, and medical facilities. A remarkably similar text had been submitted by Russia to the UNSC some days prior but had been rejected.

South Africa would argue that “an impartial humanitarian resolution should focus purely on addressing humanitarian needs” and criticized L.2 by stating: “However, there are elements in draft resolution A/ES-11/L.2 that make attaining a consensus in the General Assembly difficult” (UNGA 2022b, p. 11). South Africa seemingly believed that it was necessary to keep the resolution as impartial as possible in order to facilitate unity in the UNGA and thereby send a more united message on humanitarian needs. The alternative draft generated much debate in the UNGA. Ukraine would go on to harshly criticize it. Not only would it call its submission an “attempt to confuse” the UNGA, but also strongly denounced it and urge the other member states to vote against it, even stating that: “It is fresh paint on the mouldy, rotten structure of the Assembly. But it is not paint, it is actually the blood of Ukrainian children, women and defenders.” (UNGA 2022b, p. 13). The draft would be rejected by the UNGA by a vote of 67 to 50. Among the BRICS, all would vote in favour of the draft, except India which would abstain instead (ibid, p. 14). Due to its rejection, only the Ukrainian L.2 remained as an option for actual adoption by the UNGA.

Further reviewing the South African National Assembly debate concerning Ukraine could also shed some light on the topic’s internal divisions. The discussion was started by opposition leader John Steenhuisen who said the war would negatively impact the South African economy and cautioned against siding with Russia: “Our government can’t be seen to be supporting Russia’s aggression and alienate its trading partners. Let’s put the country before party politics and think what this war will mean to us and what will be its impact on our economy.” (Mputting 2022). Steenhuisen is a member of the second-largest and centrist

political party, the Democratic Alliance (DA). While he was cautious about siding with Russia, a member of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Floyd Shivambu said South Africa has a “blood bond” with Russia, due to Russian support against apartheid. He also stated that, “We won’t support NATO’s expansionist and imperialist agenda” (ibid). EFF is a left-wing political party and the third largest in the South African National Assembly.

Among members of the African National Congress (ANC), Supra Mahumapelo spoke out against those who opposed the government’s position by saying they “are products of colonialism and should never be allowed to set an agenda for Africa. Their global imperial and its philosophy will be suffocated defeated,” (Mputting 2022). Only some of the smaller parties would advocate for the condemnation of Russia. It would therefore seem likely for South Africa to remain neutral or very loosely supportive of Russia in the future. It could perhaps shift towards a less supportive stance if the DA gained influence, although the ANC has been the incumbent government for so long that this is relatively unlikely in the near future.

The International criminal court (ICC) sent out an arrest order for President Putin and the Russian ‘Commissioner for Children’s Rights’ Maria Belova on March 17, 2023; for the alleged abduction of Ukrainian children during the war (International Criminal Court 2023). As a result, the upcoming BRICS summit in August sees ICC member South Africa met with the dilemma of whether or not to arrest Putin or disregard the ICC. The dilemma has reportedly caused South Africa to seek legal counsel and President Ramaphosa even announced that South Africa was withdrawing from the ICC at one point only to retract the statement the same day (Sidley 2023). One particular fear is that South Africa might lose favorable trade terms with the US as a result of not getting the US ‘African Growth and Opportunity Act’ renewed in 2025 or even being expelled beforehand. This would cause the fears discussed in the South African parliament a year before to become real. The former president of the International Bar Association Sternford Moyo appealed to South Africa based on its history: “It is our hope and expectation that South Africa will be reminded by its own history of the importance of international cooperation in fighting crimes against humanity” (Sidley 2023).

South Africa’s history has seen it go from an international pariah only to overcome apartheid and hold great moral power under Mandela, however the current South Africa no longer holds that power, and its efforts as international peacekeeper can seemingly be overshadowed by its

association with states like Russia if it is not willing to take a principled stance against wars like Russia's war in Ukraine.

## 5.6 Russia – A different worldview

It is helpful to analyze Russia's stance in discourse in order to compare it with the other B(R)ICS in section six. This is mainly to see how Russia justifies its war in Ukraine and then later compare these justifications with the other BRICS to analyze if they converge or diverge in their discourse and if all their arguments are supported by the other BRICS or opposed by them. Russian discourse suggesting the annexation of Crimea did not start in 2014. Already in 2008, during a NATO summit, Putin had warned that Ukraine risked losing Crimea and eastern Ukraine if it joined NATO (Zygar 2016, p. 275). He had formerly expressed that Russia needed to "deal with Ukraine or we'll lose it." Still, in the years following this warning Russia's internal position on the issue seemed to become "if Ukraine joins NATO, we'll take Crimea" (ibid, p. 275). When the Maidan protest began in Kyiv in 2013, the chatter among the Kremlin and many influential businessmen revolved around how "Crimea is ours" (ibid, p. 276). The decision to annex Crimea was most likely due to a combination of historical, geopolitical and security issues (Zygar 2016, p. 276).

Russia voting against all the UNGA resolutions and effectively vetoing every resolution vote in the UNSC except anything relating to the Minsk agreements (which they co-authored) is relatively obvious. For this reason, their argumentation around the Ukraine conflict is a better point of comparison. When the Crimean annexation was debated in the UNGA, Russia's discourse was based mainly on four arguments (UNGA 2014, p. 3-4), the first being is that the Crimean referendum was legitimate and represents the voices of the people living in Crimea. The Russian representative would argue that "Russia could not refuse the Crimeans' wish to support their right to self-determination" (ibid, p. 3-4). Second, Crimea was historically Russian territory and the Soviet Union's decision to make it part of the Ukrainian Republic was "arbitrary." The representative would also call the annexation "historical justice" (ibid, p. 3-4). Third, the Yanukovich government was overthrown militarily and illegitimately in what Russia called "a coup", despite the Yanukovich government coming to an agreement "which provided for disarming the militants". According to Russia, this coup was supported by the

US and the EU, whose representatives took part in the demonstrations and “openly marched alongside them and called on them to openly carry out anti-Government actions” (ibid, p. 3-4). The sniper fire, which killed several people, supposedly also came from the headquarters of the Maidan where US representatives were stationed. This seemingly implied that the US had a hand in the shooting. Fourthly, Russia claimed that the new government was made up of “national radicals” who “did not conceal that they considered the Ukrainian allies of nazis as their ideological ancestors” (ibid, p. 3-4). These “national radicals” supposedly “preached racist, antisemitic and xenophobic views” (ibid, p. 3-4).

When the UNSC unanimously adopted a resolution to support the Minsk agreements, some would also raise questions about Crimea, and Russia would respond by using the referendums in Crimea to defend its annexation (UNSC 2015B). Russia would dismiss the UNGA resolutions about Ukraine or Crimea after the Minsk agreements. Their statements called the resolution “politicized.” They said: “the Assembly was being distracted by a text put forth by Ukraine, even though the people of Crimea have already decided its future through a referendum” (UNGA 2020b).

The arguments would again be similar in 2022 with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. When the UNGA adopted the first referendum condemning Russia and demanding its withdrawal of troops, Russia based its arguments on how the Ukrainian government was illegitimate. It stated that the resolution “could embolden Kyiv’s radicals and nationalists” while saying the government in Kyiv was using the population as hostages, which they meant in the literal sense (UNGA 2022a, p. 11-12). Russia also still referred to the Ukrainian government as “the Maidan regime” in 2022 (UNSC 2022a, p. 7).

In addition, much of the argumentation attacked the US, NATO, and the West. In particular, Russia focused a lot on Kosovo and criticized the NATO intervention. It argued that the regions occupied by Russia in eastern Ukraine had voted in referendums to become part of Russia, so its use of military force was legitimate. According to Russia, this was unlike Kosovo where NATO was “prepared to protect the Kosovo Albanians from threats that did not even exist at the time” (UNGA 2022d, p. 8). Additionally, in the same meeting, Russia argued that the resolution had “nothing to do” with the UN Charter despite being about it. Also of

interest is how Russia appealed to China by stating: “Recently, Washington declared its readiness to use force to protect Taiwan, which is an integral part of the People’s Republic of China” (ibid, p. 8). They also lambasted the use of economic sanctions and how the US “threatened” smaller states into voting against Russia in a move that was supposedly “driven by neocolonial instincts” (ibid, p. 9). The Russian discourse shows multiple reasons for its actions in the conflict over the past decade. By comparing these reasons with the discourse of the other BRICS members, we can see which areas Russia can find support among them or potentially even opposition.

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Where do the BRICS converge or diverge?

When it comes to what unites the BRICS, their shared commitment towards reforming and changing the Bretton-Woods institutions and ending Western hegemony within them is not only what first caused the grouping to unite but still seems to keep them together. Not only have they continually worked towards reforming multilateral institutions, but their discourse also reflects constant anti-NATO attitudes as well. Russia is, of course, the most obvious case. It blamed the US and EU for not only the initial Maidan protests and the Crimean crisis but also NATO expansion or how it uses other conflicts with NATO involvement to deflect attention away from Ukraine. However, they are not alone in doing so. Multiple statements from China have supported Russia by calling these concerns legitimate and criticizing the expansion of NATO. The same legitimization could be found in Brazilian President Lula and members of South Africa’s parliament. One of the reasons Brazil did not condemn Russia in 2014 was also seemingly due to how US and NATO interventions were viewed so negatively at the time. Furthermore, South African delegates to the UN have indirectly criticized NATO for sending Ukraine arms. Even an Indian official called Russia’s concerns legitimate in 2014. However, India may have shown the least direct involvement and instead relied on non-alignment or its “people-centred approach” to the war in 2022 to focus its discourse elsewhere.

In a similar vein, the BRICS are also all against the use of sanctions of seemingly any kind. Here, there also is little to no difference in the degree among the BRICS. Not only do they collectively go against sanctions with the BRICS grouping, but each member finds fault with

the use of sanctions on their own without making any exception during the Ukraine conflict as a whole. Even India, with its unwillingness to criticize anyone for the conflict, has spoken out about the negative impacts of the sanctions. And despite condemning Russia at some points throughout the conflict, Brazil has not wanted to see it sanctioned in any way for it.

Instead, the BRICS universally advocate for the use of dialogue and diplomacy. Sometimes, they even go so far as to say it is the *only* way to resolve the conflict. As this conflict has developed over the years, they have always turned towards calls for dialogue as one of the main tools for resolution. They would all support the Minsk agreements due to this as well. This opposition towards sanctions – and their attendant reliance on dialogue – could conceivably undermine Western efforts to sanction and isolate Russia. While they do not necessarily support Russia's involvement in Ukraine and, in Brazil's case sometimes even condemn it, the BRICS nonetheless do not align themselves with the Western efforts to punish Russia either. Instead, their discourse indicates that the path forward would have been to use diplomacy to somehow find mutual ground between the parties in the conflict. This was the case with Lula's efforts to bring together neutral states and push for dialogue and, as previously stated, South Africa has constructed itself as a peacemaker in the past. This caused the country to involve itself by promoting a more neutral approach to the humanitarian situation. South Africa did this by not placing any blame on Russia or mentioning Russia's aggression, despite this being seen as the cause of the precarious humanitarian situation in the first place. Ukraine's representatives criticized this involvement, and due to its similarity to Russia's UNSC proposal, it could be seen as a form of support for Russia—still, the proposal aligned with the BRICS' support for dialogue and diplomacy. The BRICS seem to believe that such efforts to promote dialogue are best achieved by not blaming any side for their actions in the conflict, which can be seen in their discourse and how all the BRICS nations supported the draft resolution.

On the other hand, when it comes to divergence, this can be seen the most clearly in whether or not they are willing to condemn Russia over the war in Ukraine. In particular, the divergence seems to lie between the democratic IBSA states (India, Brazil and South Africa) and the more autocratic state of China. While India and South Africa had at times voted against UNGA proposals regarding Ukraine, this changed with the outbreak of the war in 2022, and both have abstained throughout the war so far. However, China has still voted

against any proposals that could bring direct negative consequences for Russia—such as suspending it from the human rights council or tracking its wrongdoings for reparations. This seems consistent with previous studies (Ferdinand 2014) suggesting that the IBSA grouping is a better predictor for their voting behavior in the UNGA than the BRICS grouping. While China is seemingly using the conflict and the isolation of Russia to its benefit by strengthening its ties to the country and is willing to defend it to a certain extent with its discourse and UNGA votes.

However, the IBSA states do not go as far in their discourse. While there is some criticism of NATO, this is not the main concern for Brazil, India and South Africa and in India's case these legitimizations of Russia are vague and very few. Indian discourse is instead focused on de-escalation and humanitarian aid. This position most likely stems back to how non-alignment has been a central point in Indian foreign policy historically and its future concerns about foreign policy and security related to Russia and China. This lies at the heart of why India may seek to maintain ties with Russia without loosening its relations with the West. South Africa as a democracy also has diverging opinions on how it should approach the war, although some of its views support Russia. While there are large political parties in the South African parliament that would rather see it disassociate itself from Russia and the war in Ukraine, others would directly support Russia. This has resulted in South Africa trying to frame itself as a peacemaker without either condemning Russia or outright supporting it. Still, by far, the greatest outlier is Brazil. While it had maintained a distance from the conflict and abstained from any votes related to it in the UNGA, this all changed with the war in 2022. At that point, Brazil condemned Russia in the UNGA for its invasion by supporting several resolutions against it. It admonished Russia for the invasion and stated that the referendums held in occupied eastern Ukraine could not be considered legitimate when military forces were present.

What, then is the reason for Brazil taking such a different stance from the other BRICS? Three potential factors can be identified from empirical data. The first factor is Brazil's close relations with the US. Brazil not only had a rather intimate relationship to the US during the Cold War but also strengthened this relationship quite recently. The breakdown in relations with the US around 2014, due to the spying scandals and its bad reputation at the time, was also a factor in Brazil maintaining distance from the Ukraine conflict and not condemning Russia over the Crimean annexation. Indeed, the other BRICS nations do not have such close relations with the US. India has rejected formal alliances, while both it and South Africa



seemingly have closer relations with Russia than the US. Even if neither India or South Africa wishes to worsen their US relations they still are not as close as Brazil and therefore do not have the same concerns. South African concerns over the ICC arrest order or India wishing to maintain ties in case of conflict with China is more the case of cordial relations and trade treaties rather than formal alliances like in the case of Brazil. Meanwhile, China has its ongoing conflicts with the US over Taiwan. The Brazilian worldview here is also important. Brazil seems to believe that the world is becoming multipolar and that it is necessary to maintain good relations with *all* the poles of power. This would then entail that if poles of power clash, Brazil would need to find a path that preserved its ties to both parties. This could mean keeping their alliance with the US by criticizing the war without completely alienating Russia.

The second factor is precisely the scale of the conflict, which has greatly escalated since 2014. While it may be possible to ignore the Crimean annexation or the conflict in the Donbas, the war after Russia's invasion in 2022 not only has a much larger scale, but the impact is greater and it affects both the world economy and food supply. Since the war has escalated to even indirectly affect Brazil, it would seem natural for it to take a more active interest in the war than it did in 2014. Brazil potentially held negative views of Russia's actions in Ukraine already in 2014, as can be seen in how its diplomats apparently urged condemnation of Russia internally or in how they never voted against any UNGA resolution condemning Russia. Meanwhile all the other BRICS would vote against at least some of these resolutions.

The third factor here points to Brazil's diplomats. Stuenkel's interviews find that many Brazilian diplomats urged the country to condemn Russia over the Crimean annexation but were ignored due to other circumstances. However, there is a discrepancy between Bolsonaro declaring Brazil neutral and the UN representative Filho condemning Russia for the invasion of the UN. Similarly, Lula was willing to harshly criticize NATO for its eastward expansion and believed it should have reassured Russia that Ukraine would not become a NATO member. Filho, however, railed against this very argument in the UNSC in February of 2022. This discrepancy between Filho and the Brazilian presidents suggests there might be differences of opinion here as Stuenkel suggested. However, due to the limitations of this study, it is not possible to examine the causes of these differences in more depth, so it is suggested to conduct a separate survey of them instead.

Following DI theory Filho and Lula are among Brazil's 'agents of ideas' in institutions like the UN or the BRICS. This construct part of DI sees them as responsible for creating, maintaining, changing, or dismantling institutions by interacting both inside and outside institutions simultaneously. While it is difficult to estimate to what degree Filho's interactions in the UNSC and UNGA could propel Brazil away from Russia or create rifts among the BRICS, they nonetheless could push Brazil and Russia closer to changing the BRICS institutionally in the future. However, the fact that other central agents like its presidents Lula and Bolsonaro take slightly different stances that reflect better on Russia could help maintain the BRICS. Even other Brazilian agents like a secretary from the Brazilian Economy Ministry stated that Brazil wished to maintain the international bodies as bridges for communication with Russia. This shows how even when Brazil diverges from the other BRICS it still seeks to maintain its institutional relationships with them in most instances.

A *second* point of divergence can be identified between Russia and the other BRICS. This comes from Russia's criticisms of the Ukrainian regime after its so-called Revolution of Dignity, unlike the other BRICS. Russia has called the Ukrainian government "national radicals" associating them with Nazis since then. On the contrary, none of the other BRICS voice any discourse that suggests similar views. Instead, they have expressed their ties to Ukraine and, as in the case of China in particular, maintained close trade relations with it. While there has been some criticism among the BRICS against the US and EU for being supportive of the Maidan protests, none of these go as far as to suggest outright they are directly causing it by sending their own to march in the streets or shooting people, as Russia suggests. At most, a few Chinese commentators implied manipulation of Ukrainian populism; however, this is not to the same extent as Russia's accusations, nor was it officially done by the Chinese government. Therefore, the benefits of maintaining ties with Ukraine seem to have outweighed the BRICS' willingness to condemn the Ukrainian regime and fully stand behind Russia's various justifications during the conflict or its invasion in 2022.

The BRICS have gradually extended their cooperation over time. While initially only a few meetings between foreign ministers, it transitioned into a more official and institutionalized venture. It expanded to include South Africa among its members, attempted to push for reforms of the Bretton-Woods institutions collectively, and even founded its own multilateral institutions when these efforts had minimal success. Indeed, DI theory sees these interactions as the creation part of agency interactions for institutions. Through a constructivist view, one might expect that these efforts of working together toward a goal and building some form of

shared identity as “the BRICS” or as “emerging powers” would continue to bring them closer together in many different fields. One might have expected to see them uniting in further fields outside of economic governance and observe the BRICS cooperate closely on security matters to combat Western dominance there, just like they had cooperated to reduce Western dominance in multilateral economic governance. Or one could have watched as the BRICS gradually became more and more similar regarding their ideals and aspirations. These are after all perhaps some of the most important aspects for those with a constructivist approach to international relations.

However, the case of the conflict in Ukraine paints a different picture of the BRICS. Instead of their stances converging more between 2014 and 2022, they have diverged more than ever before. Instead, what prevented many of the BRICS from condemning Russia in 2014 (as some scholars at the time predicted they would) had to do with both circumstances and the severity of the situation. Most prioritized maintaining good relations with Russia over condemning it for something of a “smaller” scale like the annexation of Crimea. When the conflict accelerated with the invasion in 2022, some were forced to consider more principled stances. Brazil chose to condemn the invasion, and South Africa debated its stance in parliament due to the global economic impact and the potential impact on its relations with the West.

This divergence was brought forth by how differing ideals and interests divide the BRICS in several ways. For example, India has avoided too much involvement in security matters outside its sphere of influence due to its long-standing tradition of non-alignment. While South Africa, conversely, would rather interfere due to its traditions as a peacemaker, which date back to the Mandela regime and the moral power it wielded at the time. On the other hand, China and Brazil tend to have opposing views on human rights issues and US relations. Brazil had consistently supported human rights issues. This was seen not only in previous studies on the subject (like Ferdinand 2014) but also in how Brazil was unwilling to vote against any of the resolutions even when it may have reluctantly avoided condemning Russia in 2014. Although the invasion brought forth these tendencies to support human rights issues and criticize the use of military force in violation of the UN charter due perhaps to the scale of the events being so much bigger and their relations to the US being much better. By contrast, China has been consistently against human rights issues, even stating that it has a “principled stance” against it, regarding a single country or region. This could potentially put the two at odds with each other on such issues. Additionally, its worldviews differ in how they approach

their relations with Russia and the US. China is potentially attempting to build close relations with Russia by using the Ukraine conflict and has rival tendencies with the US over issues such as Taiwan. This is at odds with, for example, how Brazil continues to rebuild its close relations with the US, viewing both the US and the other BRICS as essential elements of a more multipolar world. This shows why China might be more willing to side with Russia despite the consequences.

## 6.2 The BRICS as a 'collective actor' is a network.

In many ways, the BRICS have constructed complementary identities in how they overlap in the following areas: working to reform the international multilateral institutions and their cooperation against Western dominance within them, or in how they work together against sanctions and advocate for diplomacy. Nevertheless: just what type of actor is the BRICS? The BRICS do not fit with the traditional definitions of alliances. The grouping is not a form of military cooperation. Regarding the case of the Ukraine conflict, the BRICS only minimally supports Russia; in fact, the support that does exist is mainly on a state-by-state basis. While India has close trade relations with Russia that might lessen the effects of Western sanctions, they nonetheless do not go much beyond trade relations and maintaining diplomatic ties. Its support for Russia regarding Ukraine in the UN is limited to not voting against Russia and only on rare occasions voting with them. While seemingly releasing some united statements regarding the Ukraine conflict these also grew vaguer after Russia's invasion in 2022, instead referring to their statements in the UN. This, as DI refers to as the structure part of the context, shows that the BRICS no longer held a united enough stance after the invasion in 2022 for their Heads of State and Foreign Ministers to unite their voice into one. Their discourse is here no longer a coordinative effort between the BRICS states but instead simply individually communicative in the UN. The legitimization of Russia's ideas then do not get the same support as before after this point. And while NATO might eye China over potentially sending Russia supplies, this would still only be the actions of a single BRICS member instead of the group as a whole. Additionally, two BRICS members in the form of China and India have to carefully consider the ongoing disputes between each other when choosing their positions over the Ukraine conflict. And Brazil is even calling the US an ally despite BRICS members like Russia and China constructing identities with the US as a rival. On the other hand, Snyder's broader definition of "alignment" could be more applicable simply because it is so broad and somewhat vague. However, even then, it does not seem like Brazil truly supports Russia's war in Ukraine. Brazil has been critical of the war and has even

condemned it. Although, if used very loosely, the BRICS maintain “good relations” which could indicate a more informal version of “alignment,” the BRICS is institutionalized and, therefore, a formal agreement. Even if we used such a broad definition, it is perhaps still difficult to fully justify calling the BRICS an alignment.

A more fitting definition then is calling it a “network.” The BRICS institutionalization could potentially justify calling it an organization. It certainly does “facilitate collective action and cooperation” in areas like reforming the international multilateral institutions and facilitating cooperation between its members. Through these efforts, it could also be said that the BRICS “exercises influence” on global governance. One could also argue that the BRICS has a constraining effect on the relationship between India and China, preventing relations between the two from deteriorating too much. This structure part of the BRICS also limits what is expressed about Russia’s invasion for the BRICS members due to the norms and expectations Russia holds for them to not fully support Ukraine in Russia’s war. As was also seen in how Lula stated Brazil could not supply Russia with arms if it wished to maintain neutrality in the eyes of the Kremlin. This definition, therefore, seems the most accurate when describing what type of “collective actor” the BRICS are. It is a network for cooperation on global governance and to construct an image for the BRICS states as important poles of power in the international arena. The BRICS are also more inclined to cooperate on economic matters rather than aid each other in wars and international disputes. These are more likely to be decided on a case-by-case basis. However, the closer relations facilitated by the BRICS network can certainly impact what stance their governments will take regarding these cases.

Predicting the stances and actions of governments are also very important to scholars and analysts worldwide. Many of these thought the BRICS would condemn Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014. This was due to their territorial disputes potentially being negatively impacted if they legitimized Russia’s justifications, their usual stances on military interventions, and their views on maintaining internationally recognized borders based on the UN Charter. Still, these analysts were wrong for a few different reasons. Breaking down these reasons and seeing what changed to make Brazil condemn Russia in the UN could help us see which factors should be studied before producing such predictions.

One such factor could be *scale*. In 2014 the scale of events was “only” the Crimean Peninsula, and it was occupied and annexed without enormous casualties or widespread fighting and destruction. For countries like Brazil or South Africa, such “small” scale events would have

seemed far more distant and unimportant than the war in 2022. The sheer scale of this event has already had far larger global impacts than the Crimean annexation did. Even internally in South Africa, there was debate amongst its parliament if these events and their impact on the global economy could have become so big now that South Africa would have to get more actively involved or take a side and even potentially condemn Russia. Later, the ICC sending out an arrest order for Putin further impacted South Africa due to hosting the BRICS summit in August 2023. In many ways, the invasion in 2022 represents a critical juncture in the Ukraine conflict that was large enough in scale to spill over into the relations between the BRICS and reveal the underlying differences between them.

Other factors to explore are the relations between the states involved and the context of these states and their relations. The relationships between states are critical to their very future. Therefore, when “large” or “powerful” states are involved in a conflict, either directly or indirectly, then these relations can shape which stances they adopt toward a conflict by making them pay attention not only to how they would normally approach such a situation when there is no self-interest. Similarly, the context of these relationships can change if a particular relationship is at a low point or its international reputation is damaged. This is one of the possible factors why Brazil did not condemn the Russian annexation in 2014. The situation at home can also be a very important part of the context. Examples here include how the Brazilian President Rousseff needed to signal to the Brazilian electorate that the country still had international allies under her leadership, while both India and China wish to keep close ties in order to have allies against their rivals in potential conflicts and disputes, or how the war could affect the global economy and food supply.

Still, it is not surprising that analysts predicted that at least some of the other BRICS might condemn Russia over the Crimean annexation. The BRICS are usually against such affairs; indeed, both their stances against military interventions and their championing of the UN Charter mean that they speak in favor of upholding international borders without outside interference on multiple occasions. Of particular importance is the UN Charter. The BRICS have talked about the importance of it not only individually but have made it a central part of the BRICS declarations and many of their collective foreign minister statements. For example, they said a state must have the approval of the UNSC to intervene in another after NATO’s Libya intervention in 2011. Still, despite this rhetoric, Russia’s actions in Ukraine are in breach of the Charter by the UNGA and have been voted on as such. However, while the UNGA has called Russia in violation of the UN Charter, only Brazil seems willing to agree

with them. India, South Africa, and China are all reticent to do the same. Instead, they opt to abstain from such votes.

When we can actually expect the BRICS to uphold these ideals, then? If they ignore the Charter when one of their own is in breach of it, it would seem they do not hold each other to this standard—even if Brazil was willing to condemn Russia in 2022 it did not do so in 2014. Based on what this thesis has looked at, it seems that for the BRICS to diverge on such issues not only would one of them need to be in breach of the UN Charter, but their own domestic context and international relations must also incentivize doing so. For example, they would have to fear that not condemning actions in breach of the Charter could cost them in domestic elections or fear they could face international backlash themselves. If strengthening ties with the West was seen as more important to the Rousseff regime than its ties to the BRICS in 2014, then Brazil could potentially have taken a stance against the Crimean annexation back then. Similarly, anxieties around Western reactions were one of the main points of the argument *in favor* of condemning Russia in the South African parliament. However, the BRICS was founded partly to cooperate against a form of Western dominance, and therefore, anti-NATO discourse is present among all member nations. This could lead the BRICS to react more strongly if the subject of debate is NATO. If NATO were accused of breaching the Charter in the future, the BRICS could be more easily convinced to condemn them than another BRICS member. However, such condemnation would be far more likely from China or Russia as they see the US as a rival and could more easily go against NATO. At the same time, the Indian traditions surrounding non-alignment could perhaps see it abstain from any such issues no matter who is the subject of debate.

## 7 Conclusion

As we have seen, the use of term “BRICS” has grown and changed considerably over the last decades. It has moved away from simply an investment term for economists into an important term for scholars in other fields. The acronym has come a long way since the economist Jim O’Neill created the original “BRIC” designation. The way the BRICS states took charge of the acronym and created their own semi-institutional political outfit transformed it into an important political entity. With the first summit in 2009, its importance rose considerably and with South Africa’s inclusion in 2010 it expanded to another continent and became the BRICS. What originally brought the BRICS together was a shared interest in challenging the dominance of the West in multilateral governance. In particular organizations like the IMF,

World Bank, and even the UN have been targets of BRICS reformation efforts. The BRICS created alternative organizations in the field of multilateral economic governance with the NDB in 2014 and the CRA in 2015. As a result of these efforts and new organizations, much scholarly attention has been focused on them and their role in global governance and in the world order. However, despite this attention, there was still a limited understanding of how cohesive the BRICS were as a “unit” or what kind of “actor” we could consider it. So, a study of this aspect of the BRICS was valuable to better understand it and the dynamic of cooperation within it.

It has been shown that the BRICS communication and discourse around the Ukraine conflict has three main categories of convergence and two categories of divergence. The BRICS have convergence on anti-NATO rhetoric, being “anti-sanctions” and advocating for diplomacy as the path to peace. The anti-NATO tendencies of this discourse are most likely rooted in how the BRICS have been working to reform the Western Bretton-Woods organizations and reduce Western dominance within them and global governance—as well the national histories and rivalries of states like Russia and China. Russia holds the most anti-NATO sentiments and has frequently blamed it for the events in the Ukraine conflict. Yet it must be understood that it is not alone in such blame among the BRICS. While Russia takes it much further, strong tendencies to do the same have been found among Chinese representatives—and it is the member closest to Russia. Many scholars believe this is driven by China using the Ukraine conflict, the sanctions, and the isolation of Russia as a means to strengthen the cooperation between the two and potentially have Russian support for its own conflicts over Taiwan in the future. Even the three IBSA states have a lot of anti-NATO rhetoric too, with the Brazilian president and South African parliamentary members criticizing NATO over the conflict. India has perhaps the least amount of such reproval, with most of its negative sentiments focused on the use of sanctions by the West.

The second topic of convergence seen in this thesis was sanctions, with every BRICS member criticizing it both individually and collectively. This criticism is also deeply connected to BRICS advocacy for the use of diplomacy and dialogue as the paths to peace, which is the third point of convergence. They have repeatedly criticized Western use of sanctions since 2014 and throughout the conflict. Some of them, like India, even stated that diplomacy was the “only” path to a peaceful solution. This in turn puts the BRICS very much in opposition to the West on these issues, with India and China continuing large-scale trading with Russia even after the Western sanctions.



On the other hand, a divergence exists between China and the IBSA states regarding how culpable Russia is for its 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Brazil stands out in its criticism of Russia's actions, while China gives the most credence to some of Russia's justifications. South Africa has not recognized Russia's justifications as legitimate but has attempted to shield Russia from some of the criticism. It presented an alternative to a Ukrainian draft resolution in the UNGA that did not include any censure of Russia's actions during its invasion or even to mention that Russia caused the humanitarian concerns addressed.

The last divergence discussed is how the BRICS generally do not reiterate Russia's criticisms of the Ukrainian government and do not seek to condemn or distance themselves from it. In some instances, they show sympathy for Ukraine or maintain strong trade relations with it. China particularly expresses a lack of support for Russia on this topic despite doing so on many others related to the conflict. Instead, China heavily increased trade with Ukraine and bolstered efforts to protect its grain exports even after the invasion.

The BRICS have in essence looked at Russia's unfolding war in Ukraine with concern over NATO's involvement, the use of sanctions and the lacking use of diplomacy to settle it. However, as the war has developed, some of its members has also become increasingly skeptical and even critical of Russia's escalations and uses of military force.

In conclusion, the findings point toward the BRICS not fitting the traditional view of an alliance. Therefore, the most fitting description is of the BRICS as a *network*. While it is a network that has institutionalized and strengthened ties in multilateral economic governance, this does not mean it will always be united on foreign policy and security issues—especially if these issues are as contentious as the Russian war in Ukraine. The BRICS is therefore best defined as a network created to aid its members in their collective efforts to reform the international multilateral governance system. This is because the BRICS do not necessarily support each other in conflicts with other states and cannot be said to be a completely cohesive unit in international relations. In reality, the BRICS hold multiple points of divergence with some going much further in supporting Russia's conflict with Ukraine. The findings tell us that the BRICS' willingness to support each other in conflicts, like the one in Ukraine, will depend on factors such as their own relations with the involved states, their domestic context, and the scale of the conflict. They are unlikely to condemn another member of their network; however, if the results of support or condemnation are found to be too detrimental for a state's regime, then it will naturally be more inclined to have this reflect

their stance. The effects the Ukraine conflict can have on the electorate (in the IBSA states) or how it can affect their relations with other states, particularly the West, seem to be the factors that could most easily influence these decisions and cause a BRICS member to act against another. This is also because a network like the BRICS lacks the cohesion of a more traditional alliance.

The BRICS network has however been an aid for the BRICS in reforming multilateral institutions like the IMF or the World Bank and increase their voting power within these institutions. These reforms perhaps justify the creation of the BRICS network, although such reforms are not sufficient grounds for having the BRICS network encompass military cooperation on the scale of a traditional alliance. The constraining effects of the network on India and China have also seemingly aided them in having their border disputes and regional conflicts not escalate into wars. The way the network has also aided member states like South Africa and Brazil in increasing their international recognition as “regional powers” or “emerging powers” could help explain why they find themselves together with more autocratic states like China and Russia.

Still, more research could be dedicated on a case-by-case basis to examine what internal divisions and dynamics are at play over the conflict in Ukraine, in each of the BRICS. It could be possible to explore if there is a possibility for the electorates of democratic states like Brazil, India, or South Africa to sway their governments on the issue of the Ukraine conflict or as a more general study on how conflicts impact their electorates and elections. Another possible study could investigate to what extent there are divisions between Brazilian diplomats and their government. As discussed in the section on Brazil, such differences were reported by the Brazilian author Stuenkel over the 2014 Crimea annexation; indeed, this thesis has also observed some discrepancies between UN representative Filho and Brazilian presidents. To fully explore these potential differences, interviews with Brazilian diplomats or government insiders would certainly be necessary. Furthermore, the issue of Taiwan could also be explored along with lessons from Ukraine to provide new perspectives and hopefully more accurate predictions for the responses and behavior of the BRICS.

What then could these findings mean for the future of not just of the BRICS but the West? The escalation of this conflict into a full-scale war has forced the BRICS to pick sides. It compelled Brazil to take a harsher stance of condemnation against Russia and South Africa to make difficult choices. The West will have to make difficult decisions too, as being more

critical of positions that do not condemn Russia's invasion could force some of the BRICS to outright condemn Russia. It goes without saying that the US and Europe are very important to these countries too. However, the narrative of a multipolar world order holds significant potential for friction in the global governance of tomorrow. The BRICS are against Western dominance in multilateral institutions and the use of sanctions. However, the possibility of their reformist approach changing to something more "combative" is still an issue because the fear that the BRICS would try to undermine the liberal world order or go beyond just reforming the Bretton-Woods institutions is one that has been present since the grouping's inception. And although it has not gone beyond just reforms yet, critical junctures like the war in Ukraine always hold the potential for profound change.

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