

BRICS IN 2022: Economic and Geopolitical Quandaries

Roundtable Report

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Roundtable Report By
People's Forum on BRICS

July 2022



Published by:

Centre for Financial Accountability

R21, South Extension Part 2, New Delhi-110049

Website: www.cenfa.org

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For People's Forum on BRICS

New Delhi, July 2022



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About the Organisers

People's Forum on BRICS

The People's Forum on BRICS is a collective platform of several people's movements, progressive networks, trade unions and civil society organisations from across India and around the world. It attempts to raise critical voices from below on social, ecological, political and economic concerns that are often ignored at inter-governmental processes such as BRICS. It not only monitors and analyses developments at the official and business arenas, but also builds solidarities across borders with like minded groups to advance an alternative model of development that puts people before profit.

The People's Forum on BRICS can be followed at www.peoplesbrics.wordpress.com

Centre for Financial Accountability

Centre for Financial Accountability engages and supports efforts to advance transparency and accountability in financial institutions. We use research, campaigns and training to help movements, organisations, activists, students and youth to engage in this fight, and we partake in campaigns that can shift policies and change public discourse on banking and the economy. We monitor the investments of national and international financial institutions, engage on policies that impact the banking sector and economy of the country, demystify the world of finance through workshops and short-term courses and help citizens make banks and governments more transparent and accountable.

Centre for Financial Accountability can be followed at www.cenfa.org

About the speakers at the roundtable

Trevor Ngwane

Trevor Ngwane is a scholar-activist who works in the academic and political spheres. He obtained his PhD at the University of Johannesburg in 2017 after two decades of political activism in various social movements and political organisations. In 2021, he was appointed as director of the Centre for Sociological Research and Practice at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Boris Kagarlitsky

Boris Kagarlitsky is a well-known international commentator on Russian politics and society. He is a Marxist theoretician and sociologist who coordinates the Transnational Institute Global Crisis project and is the Director of the Institute of Globalisation and Social Movements in Moscow. Boris was a deputy to the Moscow City Soviet between 1990-93, during which time he was a member of the executive of the Socialist Party of Russia, co-founder of the Party of Labour, and advisor to the Chairperson of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia. Previously, he was a student of art criticism and was imprisoned for two years for 'anti-Soviet' activities.

Lisa Thompson

Lisa Thompson is a political economist and full Professor in the School of Government at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. Since 1998 she has led participatory, community orientated research aimed at amplifying the development dynamics and contradictions between local and global in international development and participatory democratic development initiatives. While located within international global political economy and development debates and dynamics, the research focus developed over past decades includes a strong action based component including both mutual learning and advocacy work with grassroots community groups, civil society, non-governmental organisations, social movements and ad hoc forms of community activism and mobilisation from below. Since 2007 Lisa has been Director of the African Centre for Citizenship and Democracy.

Vijay Prasad

Vijay Prasad is an Indian historian, editor, and journalist. He is the chief editor of LeftWord Books and the director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. He is a senior non-resident fellow at Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Renmin University of China, the Chief Correspondent for Globetrotter, and Editor at LeftWord Books.

Au Loong Yu

Au Loong-Yu is a leading global justice campaigner. He is the author of *China's Rise: Strength and Fragility* and *Hong Kong in Revolt: The Protest Movement and the Future of China*. He is also an editor at Borderless Movement, and blogger at Stand News and InMedia.

Ana Garcia

Ana Garcia is the General Coordinator at the BRICS Policy Center and Associate Professor of International Relations at Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She is also a member of the editorial board of the Socialist Register (Canada) and vice-coordinator of the thematic area of International Political Economy of the Brazilian Association of International Relations (ABRI). She is also associated with the Interdisciplinary Laboratory of International Relations Studies (LIERI/UFRRJ) and Institute for Political Alternatives for the Southern Cone (PACS). Her work surrounds International Political Economy, Critical Theory, Gramsci, hegemony, imperialism, multinational companies, and South-South relations.

Adhemar Mineiro

Adhemar Mineiro is an Economist and member of the Coordination of the Brazilian Association of Economists for Democracy-RJ and advisor to the Brazilian Network for the Integration of Peoples, a network of Brazilian social movements and NGOs monitoring trade negotiations where Brazil is involved, and other international processes, such as BRICS, G20, etc. He has been an advisor to TUCA (Trade Union Confederation of Americas) and the International Secretariat of CUT (the biggest Brazilian trade union confederation).

Introduction

This year, the official BRICS Summit took place on 24th June, 2022 under the Chinese presidency. While the geopolitical turmoil across the world appears to be intensifying, there are various other interesting developments taking place within and around the BRICS nations. The series of events before and after the summit forces one to deep dive into what this bloc is upto. The divergent reactions of each of the countries to the imminent events is telling enough. While the BRICS bloc is still consolidating itself, there were also conversations around including Argentina and Saudi Arabia to the fold. Indonesia, Kazakhstan, UAE, Nigeria, Senegal and Thailand are potential strong contenders for the future membership. Given these and other happenings around the bloc, it is important that we analyse these developments from a people-centric lens.

Every year a number of civil society organisations, trade unions and people's movements come together to organise the People's Forum on BRICS. The forum makes an attempt to deliberate on the several aspects of the bloc, the developments over the past year and present a people's alternative for what is at best a loose high-level deliberation.

This year, under the banner of People's forum on BRICS, a roundtable was organised on 30th June, 2022 where a number of scholars and activists convened to review the developments relevant to the BRICS bloc. The roundtable was chaired by Trevor Ngwane from South Africa. The interventions at the roundtable were made by Boris Kagarlitsky, Lisa Thompson, Au Loong-Yu, Vijay Prashad, Ana Garcia and Adhemar Mineiro. The speakers at the roundtable touched upon various issues of importance and presented a country-level analysis. The talking points included -

- Multilateralism and partnership amongst the BRICS nations - challenges, threats
- Modalities of political and security cooperations in the current scenario
- BRICS and the reform of the global governance systems
- World economic recovery - trade, financial, and monetary cooperation

This roundtable resource booklet presents a clear transcription of the opening comments of the participants. These transcripts are mildly edited to bring cogency to the text.

With the support of our partners at the People's Forum on BRICS, this booklet will also be made available in other languages on our website - www.cenfa.org

People's Forum on BRICS
July, 2022

Interventions by Boris Kagarlitsky

Well, these years, which have passed since the formation of BRICS, have changed a lot because when BRICS was emerging there were a few hopes about BRICS becoming not necessarily an alternative but a factor of change, or maybe a shift towards a more balanced world and one that is a little less dominated by Western imperialism and so on. Since then, however, things have not unfolded in the manner we expected. The situations back then were also very different - when BRICS was emerging, Brazil had a progressive government, and India didn't have the current government under Narendra Modi which are both turning out to be a very difficult and unpleasant combination of right-wing populism and neoliberalism. Also, the developments in China are not very encouraging. I cannot say much about South Africa. But let me speak about Russia.

Now, if we were to discuss the Russian political and economic system, say 10 years ago or something, it was never democratic or progressive. However, we witnessed within the last 10 years, moreso in the last five years, constant deterioration of the quality of administration and politics in Russia, which also reflected the decline and crisis of Russian capitalism - a very typical example of peripheral capitalism. Capitalism which forms the kind of oligarchy based on extractionism and the export of raw materials while, at the same time, accumulating massive resources which are used for local and regional expansionism. So in that sense the term sub-imperialism is very adequate.

One can say, in a certain sense, that Russia as a country exporting raw materials to the world is very dependent on the world market and the centres of global capitalism. At the same time, Russian elites themselves, try to play the role of some kind of dominant imperialist force within the traditional region of the former Soviet Union and around it. Looking at the events in Ukraine, we can see that Russian elites treat Ukraine as a kind of former colony, which acquired a strange idea of becoming an independent country, something they consider to be unnatural. If you read official texts from Russian politicians, or watch Russian official television channels (though now there is no television except the government television) you will get to know how the very idea of an independent Ukraine is absurd to a certain set of people and that it cannot and shouldn't exist. The very idea that somebody exists as an independent country outside of the former Russian Empire, anybody who used to be part of the empire, is kind of unnatural.

However, there is one very important point we have to understand and make. Yes, the Russian state is extremely authoritarian and it is very much the capitalist extractionist regime in decline, because of the development of global trends, which do not benefit this kind of structure or state or oligarchy. But, at the same time, we should not forget that Ukraine is not a very nice place for workers and ordinary people either. The Ukrainian state is a very reactionary state. It is systematically discriminating Russian speakers, which form about half of the population of the Ukrainian Republic. In terms of labour rules, and exploitation of workers, in many ways, Ukraine is even worse than Russia. There are also very high levels of unemployment and impoverishment, and the destruction of what remains of the Soviet welfare state goes on both in Ukraine and in

Russia. So when we're looking at these two countries, we need to understand that there is no good guy here. However, having said all this, I still have to resist the viewpoint that the aggressive side in this conflict is Russia. It is the Russian government, and not Russian people, of course. These are not Ukrainian troops attacking Russians, and bombing Russian cities or shelling Russian cities, no. It is Russian troops shelling Ukrainian citizens and Russian aircraft bombing Ukrainian cities and so on. So in that sense, we have to be, on the one hand, very balanced in understanding this conflict, in understanding the class nature of both sides, and not having any illusions about any good guys being involved in this conflict.

However, especially as a rational socialist, I have to insist that the major responsibility for the conflict at this stage of the conflict, and I stress at 'this' stage of the conflict, is on Russian elites or the Russian government. We do not have time to go deep into the story of the conflict but during these years, situations changed and there were also problems on the Ukrainian side and I have to stress that we cannot say that it was always Russia which was the more expansionist side. Sometimes, Ukrainian elites are also to be blamed, they organised the coup d'état in 2014, and so on. But again, I stress that in this current stage of the events, the main blame is on the Russian elites and its government.

Speaking about what is happening inside the country, there is an ongoing attack on civil rights. However, there is a very strong and very effective resistance as almost daily, somebody goes to jail. I too spent 10 days in jail recently. In Russia it is considered to be a normal thing still the resistance goes on. I think it is very interesting that the left is very much kind of on their first line and it is very visible. Though official parties, including the parties which pretend to be on the left like the Communist Party or the Social Democratic Party of Russia, back the government totally on almost everything. These are official parties of the Duma which do not represent anybody anymore. However, I think that we have reasons to be optimistic, because we are not depressed, we are not demoralised. On the contrary, the elites are getting increasingly depressed and demoralised for a simple reason that they are not winning the war. The war is not going to be won by the Russian army.

Here in our country, there is a joke, which is a very specific Russian joke, that every time we lose a war, we organise a revolution. It actually did happen this way. Russia lost the Crimea War, which ended up in bigger, more serious and progressive reforms. Then the Russian-Japanese war was the first revolution. The First World War was lost and it was the second revolution for Russia. Afghanistan led to not necessarily a very good set of events i.e. the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also led to some bureaucratization in the former Soviet Union. So every time there is a war lost in Russia, there is some social and political change. And I think it is going to happen soon in this country as well, hence some reasons for optimism.

Finally, when I am speaking about BRICS, the official BRICS, the BRICS of elites, the BRICS of oligarchs, yes, there is not much to expect from it. But I think the reason for us to continue working on people's BRICS, building up people's BRICS, building up people's solidarities in these countries, is more necessary than ever. It is exactly what we have to continue doing.

Interventions by Lisa Thompson

Thanks for the opportunity to be part of this roundtable today. I think every year when we think this year is the most exciting and unprecedented, yet something else happens. And after two and a half years of having to deal with, analysing the effects of the pandemic, here we are now looking at how the Ukraine invasion is affecting us and affecting BRICS. Of course, there are a number of different angles to this. I called on my Master's students today to listen to the panel because these are the kinds of things we are discussing this week in our course on global governance. I've been trying to make them a little bit more aware of some of these debates, particularly the debate around the solidarity that is supposed to be part of BRICS and the Global South. So I would just like to throw out a couple of controversial thoughts today, since we are short of time, and not go into too much detail.

At this point I should mention that it was very interesting to read this year's Summit Declaration, which we've all been told by the Chinese ambassador and President to read very carefully. It is interesting to read in the sense that we know that one of the aspects that BRICS continues to play up is that BRICS as a block is a different configuration of both ideas and ways of collaborating and sustaining development that is a departure from the old North-South, post-colonial still-exploitative types of arrangements which are embedded in international organisations or international institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, and also in terms of OECD types of loans to the developing world.

So, we know that one of the major tickets to wanting to be on the BRICS bus is that this is supposed to be a new form of more inclusive, more transformational of the international sphere of collaboration and cooperation. So there is a great deal of emphasis on the ideational glue that holds BRICS together. For me, it was interesting this week because my master's students very quickly picked up on what this ideational glue is and why there are states in BRICS that consider themselves to be emerging economies. For those of us who deal with this topic everyday, we have kind of gotten used to using the phrase "emerging economy". But for the layperson, the anomaly is between the now number one economically strong country in the global sphere, China, being up there as the emerging economy, with India as number five and Russia also in the top 10. It does beg the question of why and how this block formed and what is the reason ultimately for such a diverse and ideologically diverse group to be actually collaborating and speaking about transformation in the global sphere.

The second point I want to make in terms of this more controversial take is that in discussing transformation and in upholding themselves as the bloc which sustains an idea of the Global South, there's also this light motif in all of the summits to say when they say multilateral transformation. But if we look at the last summit declarations, it is all about also enforcing a more balanced multipolar world and there is not much there in this summit declaration that shows any kind of transformation away from the liberal capitalist system that we already have. In fact, it is ironic that China is coming out as the most sturdy proponent of free trade in this year's BRICS summit declarations or even for the last few years. This begs the question of what sort of

transformation is BRICS really trying to encourage, and just how much is it about people-to-people, as both Trevor and Boris alluded to.

So just getting down to the nitty gritty of how these conversations affect us in Africa and southern Africa - COVID, the invasion of Ukraine and the questions around ideological glue which you know there isn't - what did these have in store in terms of changing things in 2022 and beyond? The bottom line is, if you're looking at it from a South African and inter-Africa perspective, I would say, not much, it is business as usual. Nothing really is changing. In fact, at the beginning of this year, if you just look at South Africa, the largest economic development initiatives i.e. the Special Economic Zones that we have in this country, has been approved. The environmental impact assessment went through despite a lot of protests and lobbying from environmental and other groups. The zone is going to be completely run by the Chinese investors. There are Chinese investment pledges to the scale of USD 1.1 billion. This figure is the investment drawn from the private companies alone. More investment is coming along for the flow of trade and what is called international development assistance to South Africa.

So we might ponder around what standpoints are being taken by individual leaders, and the wording around any kind of condemnation around human rights has been really subsumed into the summit declaration. But we know that the states in BRICS have been very guarded about what they have said, for understandable reasons. The declaration doesn't say much, except that they are upholding certain principles, again, of the UN Charter. For the rest, other than the state declarations made through BRICS, the actual real level of engagement around these topics as they percolate down to civil society, workers and trade unions are virtually naught.

The only thing I would say that has changed a little bit in South Africa is that there is now far more engagement by unions such as COSATU¹ and NUMSA², the two biggest unions, to say we need to look at the forms of trade and aid coming in from not only China but from all BRICS countries, but China in specific since it is our biggest investor, our biggest provider of international development assistance. So that is the only area right now where there is a little bit more of a critique as to the benefits of this kind of cooperation.

Rest, at the level of state, it is promoted and seen as the way to encourage sustainable development even with all the questions raised around job creation and who will get jobs with these large-scale investments, such as Musina-Makhado, and what kind of workers' rights will there be. We know that in Special Economic Zones in South Africa and elsewhere in the world, one of the things that is usually part of the Special Economic Zone package is to ensure that workers are not allowed to strike within the zones. So when we envisage a collaboration which is around the Global South, we think about the terms "inclusive development" very seriously, and we obviously have in our heads that this inclusivity has to percolate down at some point to a more workers' and community-level dialogue or forms of participation. But despite this base understanding some civil society organisations within the BRICS nations get involved in state-

¹ Congress of South African Trade Unions

² National Union of Metalworkers in South Africa

centric dialogue with a lot of posturing and a lot of ignoring of real ideological stances in favour of a very simple, superficial and superfluous narrative around ideational coherency. This is of concern to us and something we try to counter with the People's Forum of BRICS. Thanks a lot.

Interventions by Vijay Prashad

Dear friends, I am making this video from Havana, Cuba. The reason I am sending a video isn't because I found it too difficult to match my schedule with your program. But because the company Zoom, upon which you are holding your event, essentially has banned Cuba from participating in the Zoom network. And since I am in Cuba, I cannot join you on Zoom. Now I could have used other means - VPNs, and so on - but I was not prepared to do so. Partly because I think it is important for us to recognize the heinousness of US unilateral sanctions and the viciousness of US imperialism - the blockade against Cuba.

Cuba is an island with 11 million people who, in 1959, decided to tread on a path with great bravery. It is a difficult for a poor country to establish socialism, only 100 and some kilometres off the coast of Florida, while there exists a country, the United States of America, which has viciously tried to undermine the Cuban Revolution, and attempted several hundred times the assassination of the leader of that revolution, Fidel Castro, and used its immense power, both financial and military, to isolate Cuba and destroy any attempted revolution.

I am not naive, when I vehemently mention these attacks, it is difficult to build a revolution in a poor country. All revolutions, in fact, since the revolution against the Czarist empire in 1917, have taken place in poor countries. The pathways to build a future society out of the wretchedness and failures of capitalism, are difficult. They have been walked by the people in Vietnam, and in China. They've been walked by the people in Cuba. They are experiments in trying to produce a different world. And of course we recognize that since they are human beings trying to produce a different world, human beings will make all kinds of mistakes, all kinds of disasters, but we are trying to build something other than the wretchedness of the capitalist system.

Repeatedly, capitalism has had its turbulence, its complete collapse. In 2007-2008, we saw the failure of the Western financial system, the capitalist system. The housing market collapsed in the United States. This brought down, in real-time, the banking industry. And you see, it was as a consequence of the collapse of the Western capitalist system, the financial system and so on, that system which prosecutes the illegal unilateral sanctions not only against Cuba, but against Venezuela, Zimbabwe, about 30 countries out of 194 in the world experience unilateral illegal sanctions by the United States. That financial system collapsed in 2007-2008.

It was a consequence of that collapse and of the fact that the trade and development regime, constructed after World War II, accelerated after the debt crisis of the 1980s, was utterly unfair to the countries of the Global South. It was because of two things - the long-term recognition of the failure of the trade and development model of the Bretton Woods institutions and the like, and the proximate failure of the world financial system anchored by the Western governments, that pushed countries like India, Brazil, South Africa, and then later Russia and China into collaborating to produce different institutions. That was the genesis of the BRICS.

It was always clear that the BRICS's possibility to advance a different kind of order, a different trade and development system and of advancing something different, was rooted in the fact that the class politics in these countries would have to be changed and transformed. In other words, if the oligarchy dominated in Brazil, it would not be able to advance a new trade and development order precisely because Brazil would then be subordinate to the United States, with its oligarchy entirely subordinate to the United States. So under Michel Temer and Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil was not prepared to advance an alternative to the Western development and trade system.

I do not have any kind of essential critique of the BRICS. I do not believe that the BRICS essentially is good or bad. I believe the BRICS is only useful as a platform to advance, in a sense, an alternative trade and development system. It is only as good as the class politics of the countries that are members of BRICS. When there is a right-wing government in India, it is not available for a kind of transformative politics. But the potential of BRICS must be recognised. That is the first thing. Secondly, the BRICS nations are an instrument of a historical process that cannot be denied. The fact is, that as a consequence of the powerful energy supplies of Russia and the powerful trade surpluses of China produced by the dynamism of the Chinese economy, as a consequence of that, China and Russia are accelerating the integration of Eurasia, drawing in even India, which has a great deal of problems with China, problems that are historical.

Despite that, Japan, Australia, India, countries that are part of the so-called Asian NATO or the Quad, even they are drawn into the necessary integration of Europe and Eurasia, and to some extent, Australia as well. This natural integration of Eurasia is precisely what the United States is trying to block or delay with its pressure campaign against China regarding Taiwan and its pressure campaign against Russia regarding Ukraine.

In my opinion, the United States is imposing a conflict on Eurasia against the natural integration of this enormous landmass. BRICS plays a small role in this. I do not see why people get so hung up in trying to overinterpret BRICS. It is merely an instrument and it is only going to be as good as the class politics in the countries that belong to the BRICS states. I am speaking to you from Cuba, which is not a member of the BRICS. I spend most of my time these days in Latin America, in Chile, in Mexico, in Cuba, not members of BRICS. The mood in these countries is to seek an alternative to the US imperialist led world order. BRICS is merely a part of a long-term attempt to find a different pathway, a different kind of dispensation.

History has afforded us the following lesson: we have left any age of certainty behind and are now in an age of contradictions. We who are socialists must use every contradiction to advance the struggle for human liberation. If BRICS affords us a little bit of that contradiction, we advance through there. That is about it. Our goal is socialism. These are merely pathways - one way or the other - to advance those dreams. Thanks a lot.

Interventions by Au Loong-Yu

Thank you to the host and all the colleagues here for inviting me to this roundtable discussion under the banner of the People's Forum on BRICS. This year's official Summit was convened in the midst of two events. Firstly, the Russian invasion of Ukraine. And secondly, Beijing's annihilations of Hong Kong autonomy and also its increasingly hawkish attitudes towards Taiwan.

The Communist Party in China is also enthusiastically but rhetorically supporting Putin's war effort. But what is interesting to note is that there are still voices, among the Chinese establishments and people warning against supporting Putin. The background of this is that the CCP has been whipping up nationalism to boost this ruse in the past two decades. However, sometimes it has consequences for the party itself because now certain nationalists have reminded the party about previous Russian aggressions towards China. For instance, in 1860, China was forced to cede the territory of modern Vladivostok (Chinese- Hǎishēnwǎi) along with a big piece of land to Russia because by that time the Qing Dynasty in China was very, very weak. The CCP has never demanded that the ceded territory be returned to China and this has continuously annoyed the Chinese nationalists. Russia's imperialistic past continues to have a bearing on the debate about relations between Russia in China. And now, in light of the war in Ukraine, all these previous tensions which were swept below the carpet are now emerging and becoming visible. It is obvious that the relationship amongst the BRICS countries themselves will face more and more challenges. This is just one example.

For the moment, let us return to the two recent events I just mentioned. We as people from the BRICS countries simply cannot evaluate the recent BRICS Summit without first referring to what BRICS from below means in the first place. It simply means that we are judging the BRICS from an independent and people's point of view and this standpoint has been resonated in all the speakers' speeches.

The BRICS summit declaration mentioned briefly about the war but it also says it will continue to commit to multilateralism through upholding international law, including the Charters of the United Nations. Well, I think this is hypocritical to say the least when Russia is attacking another UN member state. I think Hong Kong was not mentioned, of course, because it is just too small. But although the size of Hong Kong is small, it was, I'm sorry to say that I have to use the past tense, the only city in mainland China which was allowed the freedom of speech and association and developments of social movement. In fact, in 2017, we were able to hold a BRICS from Below conference in Hong Kong. We collaborated with dozens of Hong Kong based organisations to make this happen, including the Confederations of Trade Unions. This was because Hong Kong enjoyed autonomy. But in 2021, the CTU was crushed under the regimes of threat.

Beijing also curbed Hong Kong's autonomy in 2020 when it imposed the national security law on Hong Kong, breaking its own promise of Hong Kong's autonomy. And with the fall of Hong

Kong, China has also sunk deeper and deeper into the hole of the Orwellian state. While the BRICS Summit was convening in China, no one could speak against the Chinese Communist Party or hold parallel BRICS from Below meetings in Hong Kong anymore. When I talk about Ukraine and Hong Kong, it does not mean I think of the words Russia and China. I am against all forms of state repression on people's rights, be it anywhere in the world. Therefore, I'm also against NATO, or its expansions towards the east. But surely, NATO's expansion per se cannot constitute a justification for Russia's invasion of Ukraine either. I think the cases of Russia and China are dangerously alarming to the people of BRICS nations, and to the whole world.

Two things: First is the idea of a nation as one set of people as a whole. This was what Putin's speech mentioned last year, when he talked about relations between Russia and Ukraine. Similar is the notion of the nation among the Chinese Communist Party's leadership. So, as per a single whole nation, it means that yes, we as Cantonese in Hong Kong are now suffering an infringement on our language rights that Beijing is forcefully trying to replace Cantonese with Mandarin as medium of instruction in the schools. One can imagine what their idea of a single-vote nation is. But, if it is just an idea, we can still talk, debate or resist it. But the problem is that these conversations have turned into a war in Ukraine and then there is Beijing's political war in Hong Kong (in a sense it is also semi-military because of the harsh police repression).

So there are two wars right now: In Ukraine, but also in Hong Kong. The BRICS from Below platform can no longer just talk about economic issues like investment projects or the governance of global capitalism and so on. Right now, there are big political issues, which will define the future for the coming decades. We can no longer be silent about all these things. But of course, if the same things were to happen anywhere else in the world, beyond BRICS, we should not be silent for that too.

For now, as my reference to BRICS from Below, we need an evaluation of BRICS as a whole. Before this evaluation is done, we should demand a pause to all new investment projects amongst the BRICS group. So we need to take a cold and sober look into this issue.

One final issue that I wanted to mention - there is a Hot War going on in Europe, and there is a big Cold War going on globally. There have been people calling for no Cold War and I agree with that. But we need to understand that the "no Cold War" slogan is not enough. "No war on the people" should be our call. We all know that only governments can fight a war, literally. The people, what should they do? If we only limit ourselves to a slogan of "no Cold War", then the people have only one choice. That of either supporting this government or the next government. The consequences at the end of the day fall on the people, who pay with their life, pay with their livelihood, pay by suffering. At all of the receiving ends it is the civilians, the people! We all know that undemocratic governments will shift all the burdens to the people. So even if it is just a war, we need to have a very clear people-centred position. It is not just the hot war going on in Ukraine. but there is also a war on the people by nearly all of the governments in the world. If we do not add this second sentence, the civilians, the people will be at loss. We should not be misled into supporting this or that government. We need a people-centred peace movement. Thank you very much.

Interventions by Ana Garcia

Thank you for the invitation. For our interventions from Brazil, me and Adhemar have divided our portions. I will bring a little bit of the geopolitical questions and issues. Adhemar will talk about the economic issues. But first of all, I want to really thank the coordinating team at the People's Forum on BRICS for continuing the process from last year, during India's presidency, till now, under the Chinese presidency. By taking part in this process, we are doing our bit to safeguard this very democratic space of civil society, social movements, NGOs, grassroots organisations. So thank you very, very much for keeping this going and keeping the space open for different voices, different positions, as we have here at this roundtable.

It is a very different time today than it was when the BRICS nations first came together. There were huge expectations of BRICS being sort of an alternative, or even a counter-hegemonic group, or coalition against the US power, presenting an alternative in terms of democratisation of the world order. I think that it did happen to some extent. Of course we have a much more plural and multipolar world now than in the beginning of the 1990s at the end of the Soviet Union. I think the BRICS do play an important role. But the capacity of BRICS to bring a real alternative in terms of a more socially, environmentally just world has been limited. BRICS has also had a limited or sort of reformist agenda in terms of the international financial architecture. However, BRICS is now merely a geopolitical alliance. This new characterisation of BRICS is what we need to deal with now. From a coalition of the Global South, which had a more economic, trade, investment proposal, now BRICS has become increasingly a geopolitical alliance facing the so-called West.

First point that I want to make is that these issues and questions of security are not particularly new. BRICS has had, in the last 5-6 years, an increasingly greater number of security issues in its final declarations such as cybersecurity, anti-terrorism, anti-drug traffic, and even anti-corruption. But then, we have had, in the last few years, and particularly after Trump came to power in the US, this increasing geopolitical position of containment of China in terms of its economic and technological rise. This has been a geopolitical issue for the BRICS. Now of course, we have Russia's war in Ukraine. I agree very much with the speaker before me and thank Boris for his statement today that this is an aggression occurring in the face of NATO's expansion.

To address Trevor's³ provocation in the beginning, but I do not agree with my close friend and colleague, Patrick Bond, when he says sub-imperialism is a general characterisation of the BRICS. I don't agree with that, because I do not think that fits in the case of China and Russia. I think that NATO was expanding much beyond the previous agreements and, of course, Russia reacted to that at the costs of the people. And that is very much right. I think now, besides the military war, we live in an economic, a moral and ideological war against Russia and I think this is very dangerous. It is not good for the people, for us in the Global South, for us in the periphery, to live with this moral and ideological war against Russia that we already had during the Cold War, and in the aftermath of the end of the Soviet Union.

³ Trevor Ngwane was chairing the roundtable

The main set of questions for us today should be - what is the people's take on the series of geopolitical events? What is the answer from the left, from socialists? What is the class character of all these occurrences? I want to make a point regarding how one can see the BRICS from each perspective.

BRICS is trying to accumulate material capabilities - military, economic, technological - to build its own power, particularly China and Russia, but also India in the face of the US and Europe. This is one way of seeing the BRICS and I have many colleagues here in Brazil, comrades on the left, who are defending Russia from that perspective. This is a very classical geopolitical perspective. Fortunately, we do have distinctions among the left here in Brazil. But there are other ways to look at the BRICS and I would say I look at the BRICS from the sides, which means horizontally. I can see the asymmetries, the differences, the inequalities amongst the BRICS countries; the huge weight of China, the increasing weight of the military and technological weight of India and Russia too. So we see the asymmetries amongst the BRICS, especially China's role in the case of South America. Brazil is exporting particularly agribusiness raw materials and mining raw materials to China whereas it is importing from China technological and manufacturing commodities. So China is building this international division of labour with us.

Then, if you look at the BRICS from below, that is our perspective, we have two different ways of viewing it -

One is the relations between BRICS and the other countries and regions of the Global South. So BRICS in Africa, BRICS in Latin America, dealing with poorer countries in our own regions. This is very important, because we do not see BRICS together with a coherent strategy towards Africa or Latin America, but acting individually. So we have a Chinese strategy towards Africa and Latin America, Russia's relations, historical ones, with African countries and with South American countries, India's relations with South American and African countries individually, so there is a 'bilateral-isation' of these relations. Then you have, of course, relations of exporting of raw materials, of building roads and railways over communities and territories, and of having these unequal trade relations individually with these countries and regions.

You also have, from the perspectives of BRICS from below, the issue of social forces, class and social struggles concerning major projects, and mode of production that has consequences like rising environmental destruction. There are also consequences towards women, indigenous and black populations in territories here in Brazil and other countries of the Global South.

I won't go into the years of the pandemic anymore but if we analyse this year, one very important issue emerges. BRICS is now a central space of articulation and coalition for Russia, and for Brazil, to not be isolated in the world order. I think this is very important to see. Last week's meeting was the first multilateral meeting where Putin could be present without being afraid of being constrained. Of course, Putin has not been constrained and it is a space of non-isolation of Russia. So this is very important and BRICS's expansion with Iran, Argentina and others is more important than ever now in this situation. I must also emphasise that BRICS has

become contradictorily a space of non-isolation for Brazil too. The country has not invested with Bolsonaro in BRICS at all but now Brazil is also there in a multilateral space, trying to not be completely insignificant and isolated, as it is internationally.

To wrap up, I think that BRICS could have played a historical role in trying to bring both parties towards peace negotiations. Of course, it could not and did not do this. So we need to think of and try to build from our sides as people and civil society, a multipolar world. I think this is very important but it needs to be also a socially, environmentally just multipolar world, and not a capitalist multipolar world with this increasing class and nature exploitation as we've been having. Thank you for having me here, I will pass on to my friend Adhemar.

Interventions by Adhemar Mineiro

Thanks to the organisers for the invitation to be part of this roundtable today. Good morning to you all. It's around 10:30am in Rio de Janeiro now, so, good morning. I am sharing this stage with my colleague Ana Garcia and I will be very brief as she has covered the geopolitical ground and I would just mention some points that I think are important. So the world is going through an important period of economic tumult. Points that were considered consolidated are now subject to possible review. The world based on free trade and free movement of capitals, in addition to the institutional framework built from the Second World War, is now under review.

This was already a movement that became progressively visible after the 2008 economic financial crisis. But that became evident after the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. In this environment, topics such as alternatives towards finance based on the US dollar, or deglobalization began to enter the agenda. Global production chains are in a shortening phase and nowadays, many conversations about the regionalization of international production chains are going on. It is a scenario in which the BRICS have to review the initial improvements, and disassociate themselves from a globalising perspective that at some point prevailed in the group. It is time to think about political solidarity for future development strategies but with more domestic and regional production.

Technological exchange, innovative finance, trade in national currencies, construction of new financial mechanisms, but above all, the search for a new discussion on development, which privileges aspects of people's interests, the sovereignty of countries, the defence of the environment, quality rather than quantity are essential in this new phase. We also know that the people and countries that have benefited from the status quo prevailing until now, will make enormous efforts to ensure that the situation in which they have obvious advantage over the rest of humanity does not change. In the case of Brazil, in addition to the changes in the international system, the country has gone through a complicated process in the last eight years, socially and politically, but also in its economy. The regrouped and radicalised conservative forces operated towards an increase in poverty, unemployment, a reduction in rights and, in short, an economic, social and political setback. This consumed the strength of the Brazilian people and social organisations, placed them in an historical defensive situation from which we are only now trying to get out, in turn consuming our strengths for a more active participation in international spaces.

We are not at a simple juncture and the changes that are required have multiple dimensions. As peoples and civil society organisations of the BRICS countries, we have to expand our solidarity and common work to reflect on this new world which is our challenge at the moment, but which is also an opportunity for us.

