

The Ghost of the Global South

Opportunities for a new multipolar world order

Uwe Hoering, October 2, 2023

The multi-layered conflict between China and the USA and their relationship with Russia and Europe determine the current geopolitical discussions and antagonisms. The Ukraine war has become a 'dress rehearsal' for a looming military confrontation in the Asia-Pacific region. Especially in the transatlantic discourse, the crucial role of the 'Global South' in this hegemonic realignment is often overlooked. However, the South's role will determine whether the conflict will escalate into a new bipolar bloc confrontation like during the Cold War or whether the adversaries will incorporate their hegemonic ambitions into a new, more equal or equitable multipolar world order.

Ein Gespenst geht um in der Welt – das Gespenst des Globalen Südens. Alle Mächte des alten Westens haben sich zu einer heiligen Konkurrenz um dies Gespenst verbündet. Der Globale Süden wird bereits von allen alten westlichen Mächten als eine Macht anerkannt.

I admit: Comparing the Global South with the "Ghost of communism" invoked by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their 1848 manifesto seems a bit far-fetched. But many comments in the run-up to the BRICS summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, in August 2023 carried similarly gloomy anticipations about a changing world order as in the mid-19th century, about the rise of a diffuse power whose outlines are very ambiguous - and consequently about the extent of the threat to the ruling powers.

The widely used term 'Global South' as a pendant to the 'Global North' is, like the now obsolete term 'Third World', both a self-attribution and an attribution by others for the developing and emerging countries. It was first used by the political activist Carl Oglesby in 1969 and introduced into the development policy debate by the *World Bank* at the end of the 1980s. It imagines an identity for both sides that does not exist. It simplifies the geopolitical and economic complexity and obscures the manifold differences and contradictions.

In some ways, however, the current view of the Global South is actually more like the situation after the Second World War, when the colonised countries won their independence. Back then, the spectre was also communism and, as today, the young People's Republic of China played a central role alongside the Soviet Union. A catalyst for the young nations' attempt to shape the post-colonial order was the **Bandung Conference** in 1955 with leaders from India, Egypt, China, Indonesia and other countries in Asia and Africa. There, "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" were formulated: Respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and cooperation, and peaceful coexistence.¹

During the Cold War, the post-colonial states were referred to as the Third World, as the "others" to the supposedly progressive and democratic West and to the socialist East, while starting from 1961, as the *Non-Aligned Movement*, they sought to secure for themselves space for self-determined development. These aspirations for autonomy vis-à-vis the former

¹ In 1957, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously committed itself to these principles.

colonial powers were put down partly with brute force, partly with the might of the capitalist world system. Efforts such as the proposal for a *New World Economic Order* after the 1973 oil crisis, which aimed to reduce the persistent imbalances and asymmetric dependencies between industrialised and developing countries, were stifled by the debt crisis in the 1980s and the structural adjustment programmes of the *International Monetary Fund* and the *World Bank*. Again and again, postcolonial interference and neoliberal development strategies disrupted attempts at self-determined, sovereign development in Africa, Asia and Latin America and established neoliberal elites in many countries that indirectly continued the rule of the colonial powers. With the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the collapse of the socialist economic bloc, the ghosts seemed definitely banished.

But with the rise of China since the beginning of the 1980s, the global economic and political balance of power between the geopolitical West and the rest of the world, and thus the position of the latter in globalised capitalism, began to shift fundamentally. A recent alert for the Western world was the summit of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa in Johannesburg. The five-member club BRICS, which has existed since 2010, has long been regarded as a loose discussion format with few tangible results. But now it is being classified as a Sino-Russian agenda, as a counterweight to the G-7 of the leading Western industrialised countries, even as a means of leveraging change in the world order.

The significance of the 15th BRICS Summit

So what happened? Unexpectedly, the five BRICS countries were able to agree in Johannesburg to offer membership to six more countries from January 2024. Besides Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates, Iran is also among them, a move that is considered a clear affront to the USA. This is surprising, because from a Western perspective it had been expected that India, which together with the USA is also a member of the Indo-Pacific security alliance Quad², South Africa and Brazil would tend to oppose China's and Russia's plans for membership expansion, because this could possibly weaken their own standing in the alliance. But it is now becoming apparent that this could only be the first step: three dozen other countries are said to have expressed an interest in joining, including also more democratic countries such as Indonesia and even the NATO member Turkey. This would then unite all the countries in BRICSplus, which, according to political analyst Tareq Hassan, "will decide the future of geopolitics"³. What is now being debated in the commentaries about the summit is whether BRICS will become an instrument of China and Russia through enlargement, whether countries like Argentina, India, Brazil and South Africa can still be a counterweight and whether enlargement will strengthen or weaken the alliance.

Another key project on the agenda in Johannesburg was the creation of a BRICS common currency. The intention is to reduce the dominance of the US dollar as the lead currency in the global financial system, as the most important medium of payment, for example in the oil sector, and as a weapon for sanctions, which might also be felt by countries other than Russia or Iran. However, no progress has been made in this respect and, according to experts, it is unlikely to be achieved in the near future. However, the use of national currencies is increasing in bilateral trade, in oil trade with Russia and Arab states with the 'PetroYuan' and

² The *Quadrilateral Security Dialogue*, a U.S. military alliance with India, Japan, and Australia initiated in 2007, was for a long time rather inconsequential, but is now being revitalized.

³ Tareq Hasan: The Future of Geopolitics Will Be Decided by 6 Swing States, in: *Modern Diplomacy*, 8.6.2023, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/06/08/the-future-of-geopolitics-will-be-decided-by-6-swing-states/>

in lending by China or the *New Development Bank* NDB, which was initially called the BRICS Bank when it was set up in summer 2014. For the Southeast Asian ASEAN countries in particular, the Chinese Renminbi now plays a "central role" (Simon 2021, 400). There are also considerations for a regional currency by Brazil and Argentina, now both members of BRICSplus. Thus, gradually, the importance of the US dollar could be eroded by "a thousand small cuts, not fatal, but very unpleasant", says Cobus van Staden of the *China Global South Project*⁴.

With the expansion of BRICS in Johannesburg and potential additional members, the global economic importance of the Global South could grow again after being severely weakened by the Covid 19 pandemic, the conflict between China and India, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and domestic political turmoil like during Jair Bolsonaro's term in office in Brazil. The five present member countries already represent 40 per cent of the world's population; after impressive growth rates in the first ten years of BRICS, they already account for 26.3 per cent of the gross national product, and their share of trade in goods is almost 20 per cent⁵. They have substantial industries with internationally active corporations as well as considerable military strength - albeit not least thanks to India and China. Trade among themselves is growing, again thanks to China, but only has a share of six percent of the total trade volume of these countries⁶.

As a result of the enlargement, the alliance gains, besides economically problematic countries like Ethiopia and Egypt, three important energy producers that would more than double its share of global oil production to 43 per cent and that are also financially strong, like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In addition, Argentina is a member of the Latin American triangle of countries with Bolivia and Chile, which possess the most important lithium deposits. Other producers of natural resources are on the list of candidates, such as Kazakhstan, Algeria and Bolivia, which are countries that are also needed and courted by the West in order to achieve its energy transition. One can be curious to see the next round of nominations, which - possibly at the next summit in Russia - could set additional key parameters for the future balance of power.

One precondition for the present importance of BRICS and the Global South was China's rise as a formidable challenge to the supremacy of the USA and the other industrialised countries. China's development strategy and its global expansion (*Going Global*) created not only new economic perspectives for them. The resulting conflict with the USA also strengthens their geopolitical relevance.

China's contribution to the economic strengthening of the Global South

The People's Republic of China, with its economic policy of a Developmental State with special Chinese characteristics such as the primacy of politics by the state and the Communist Party (Hoering 2019), has succeeded since the end of the 1970s in initiating an agricultural and industrial development that most other countries of the Global South could only dream of. Its elements such as state-regulated market economy, infrastructure development, subsidies

⁴ Quoted in: Gerald Imray, Russia, China look to advance agendas at BRICS summit of developing countries in South, Associated Press

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/investing/markets/indices/TXFO/pressreleases/19540598/russia-china-look-to-advance-agendas-at-brics-summit-of-developing-countries-in-south-africa/> (Abruf: 19.9.2023)

⁵ *Visual Capitalist*: <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/visualizing-the-brics-expansion-in-4-charts/>

⁶ *South China Morning Post*, Views of Brics as China-dominated misplaced, but the US needs to focus more on group, 21.8.2023, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3231810/views-brics-china-dominated-misplaced-us-needs-focus-more-group>

and protectionist regulation of trade and private-sector investment became an economic model for many countries.

Furthermore, China's geo-economic expansion, especially through infrastructure investments under the *Belt and Road Initiative* BRI announced in 2013 (Hoering 2018), functioned as a key instrument of economic inclusion of the Global South in a China-centric and quite asymmetric globalisation push. China provided the countries of the Global South with credit, infrastructure and goods that they did not receive from the West, or at least not on similarly favourable terms. For many of them, it became one of the most important investors, trading partners, bilateral lenders and development financiers. China is also increasingly supplying armaments and expanding military cooperation.

With the *New Development Bank* (NDB) (2014) and the *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank* (AIIB) (2015), whose founding members also include Germany, France and Italy, international financial institutions have emerged alongside the *World Bank* and its regional offshoot, the *Asian Development Bank* (ADB).

In addition to bilateral economic cooperation, Beijing is also trying to intensify multilateral economic collaboration. This includes agreements such as the *Asia-Pacific Regional Economic Partnership* (RCEP) and the intention to join the *Trans-Pacific Partnership* (CPTTP), the trimmed-down version of the *Transatlantic Partnership* (TPP), which the US left under US President Donald Trump. In both economic arrangements, close allies of the USA in Asia and Latin America are also members, along with countries of the Global South. In addition, the *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation* (SCO), founded in 2002, is becoming a security and economic centre of gravity in Central Asia. The original grouping with China, Central Asian states and Russia has since been joined by Iran, India and Pakistan. In Africa, too, Beijing is providing a boost for infrastructure development, trade relations and prestigious large-scale projects such as the headquarters of the African Union in Ethiopia with billions of Euros for Belt and Road and development cooperation as well as with the *Forum for Cooperation between China and Africa* FOCAC, accompanied by investments from Chinese corporations in digitalisation and mining.

While all this helped and still helps national economic and political elites to secure legitimacy as developmental states and means to secure their rule, it also intensifies internal conflicts over distribution, environmental destruction, corruption and indebtedness, leading to protests against Chinese influence and sometimes even to attacks on investments and citizens. Compared to the former era of systemic competition between the socialist bloc and the West, however, there is far greater economic and political space for countries in the Global South opening up, both for their national development as well as for reducing their dependencies on the geopolitical West.

When elephants fight

Already before China's impressive development, other Asian developing countries such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan were successfully catching up in industrialisation and matching Western industrialised countries, even becoming dangerous competitors at times. Different from them, however, Beijing is not so easily integrated into an international division of labour and the Western-dominated world order. The 2008 financial market crisis, with the USA as its epicentre and its global repercussions, is often seen as a key tipping point for the break-up of China's asymmetrical integration into global capitalism as the world's highly productive low-wage production centre, which was launched with its accession to the *World Trade Organisation* (WTO) in 2001 and dubbed "ChinAmerica" because of its mutual

usefulness. While the rise of China in the preceding three decades was an opportunity for the preservation of the Western-style capitalist world system, now with the obvious vulnerability of the industrial core countries to crises and Beijing's claim to become an equal power by means of economic modernisation programmes such as *Made in China 2025* (2015), it is becoming a threatening competitor.

With its strategy of a Spatial Fix (Harvey 2001), the expansion in time and space, for example through Belt and Road, to solve domestic obstacles to growth, it is increasingly claiming and occupying spaces in the Global South that Western capitalism itself needs to manage its crises. China's rise and growing competition is thus essentially different from the Asian Tiger States because it restricts global scope for accumulation and exploitation. Currently, this is evident in the question of control over resources for the next phase of a 'green capitalism'. As a result, the central role for further global economic development, which the Global South plays, is somewhat similar to the oil crisis in the 1970s. However, whereas at that time the crisis was just about very few resources and countries, now it is based on fundamental global economic and political power shifts and thus threatens the hegemonic leadership position of the USA.

In Western opinion of China's expansion, the governments of the Global South are often seen either as victims or as autocrats who only want to secure their power. This stereotyping neglects the fact that the states were, and are, definitely beneficiaries and often have their own national agendas, which do not always and necessarily correspond to China's interests. Their claim to sovereignty, the recognition of which has been a central guiding principle of China's global policy since Bandung, at least in rhetorical terms, is by no means mere rhetoric and is increasingly being represented with self-confidence vis-à-vis China as well.

China's economic and political-institutional offers have opened up a new perspective for these countries to loosen their dependence on Western industrialised countries and to utilise the opportunities for their own development agenda. This agenda will be less determined by external factors than in the past and more dependent on national power relations - which in turn opens up democratic scope for the rise of social and political alternatives in countries of the Global South, such as the "courageous and powerful social movements that have emerged in the BRICS countries" (Bond 2023).⁷

Thus, central mechanisms of the Western domination model over the Global South are shaking: the influence of Western-controlled institutions and corporations, the cooperation with corrupt elites, often underpinned by military support, and the accompanying repression of leftist, anti-capitalist or non-capitalist opposition or the co-optation of civil society movements. Unlike in the past, the geopolitical West now has fewer instruments of power to achieve its goals through its traditional means.

Competition for the Global South

In the conflict with China, the US government is pursuing a two-pronged strategy in which it is also trying to draw in its allies, sometimes with some pressure. Ideologically, this is framed as a battle for the preservation of the existing 'rules-based' world order, which is rooted in the Western system of values with its claim to universality:

⁷ Goeconomic and geopolitical shifts are widely discussed in the context of global hegemonic competition. However, to my knowledge, the impact of these shifts on the rise of new social movements and socio-ecological struggles in the global South, or on the wave of military governments in Africa, and thus on a new internationalism, is not yet sufficiently analyzed in Western discourse.

On one hand, it aims to bolster its own standing through a return to an industrial policy dominated by state politics with protectionism, subsidies, de-linking and risk mitigation – resembling in many respects Chinese economic strategies. On the other hand, it emphasises the officially announced intention ten years ago to contain China's expansion (*Pivot to Asia*). This includes the reinforcement of Western-oriented political and military alliances and the weakening of China's economy, especially by impeding its further technological rise. This has resulted in the current explosive confrontation of a trade, economic and technological power struggle as well as an escalation of armament and militarisation, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

For this US strategy to be successful, the positioning of the Global South plays a decisive role. After the end of the Cold War and with the emergence of new economic spaces for Western capital in Eastern Europe and China, it had lost political and economic importance for the West. This gap has been filled by China in recent years. To regain lost ground as a result of Belt and Road and the relocation of production from China to countries to the Global South, the West is trying to reduce China's attractiveness by luring it with BRI-like billion-dollar projects such as the European Union's *Global Gateway* and the *G7 Partnership for Infrastructure and Investment* PGII. However, in view of limited financial resources and little appetite by Western companies to be involved in the implementation like the Chinese state-owned corporations, these efforts are severely constrained.

At the same time, alliances in which China plays a significant role, such as BRICS and SCO, are discredited as irrelevant ("a little more than talking shops with no clear identity or agenda"), as losers ("groups (that) can serve as a diplomatic and geopolitical lifeline for members who find themselves internationally isolated"), as unprincipled fellows ("unconstrained by agreed norms and principles"⁸). The economic and political competition is being ideologised into a confrontation between authoritarianism and democracy and a threat to the global order.

China's contradiction

Entry points for winning back or at least neutralizing countries or alliances of the Global South in the confrontation with China can be found in the extensive ideological, political, and economic differences, conflicts, and tensions, both among themselves and in their attitudes toward China and the geopolitical West.

This is illustrated by the BRICS members. While they are united in their rejection of Western domination and, in part, in their search for decolonization, the enlargement, for example, adds new tensions to the old deep-seated conflict between China and India over territorial and regional hegemonic claims, or imports new ones like the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia. BRICSplus is heterogeneous and inconsistent, weak, characterized by contradictions and internal competition; moreover, the domestic politics of the individual member states are fragile, as is their commitment to the alliance. The implementation of joint projects, announced in an ambitious manner, such as a BRICS currency, has proved to be difficult.

Moreover, BRICS is an elite project, designed by governments to secure their interests, without the participation of broad populations, let alone the enthusiasm of political, social, or societal movements like those seen in Bandung or with the Non-Aligned Movement. Patrick Bond (2014), for example, is critical of the fact that the members would not behave much

⁸ All quotes taken from MERICS *China Security and Risk Tracker*, 03/2023, <https://merics.org/en/tracker/merics-china-security-and-risk-tracker-032023>

differently than Western industrialized countries in their respective regions and economic ambitions, being 'sub-imperial' and inextricably entangled in the prevailing capitalist order⁹. And, of course, neither the BRICS countries nor the broader grouping can represent the Global South as a whole. Whether the remaining smaller, economically weaker countries will benefit, is therefor an open question.

Like in the hegemonic confrontation, China is the elephant in the room in the constellation of the countries simplistically grouped as the Global South. On the one hand, China emphasizes its common history of colonialism and imperialism. However, its globalization strategy is largely shaped by its own interests, such as solving the internal accumulation and overproduction crisis in central areas of Chinese industry, and by geo-economic or even geopolitical interests, which are quickly interpreted in the West as a hidden imperialist plan.

China is at the same time advancing a economic model very similar to the Western development scheme - a strategy of growth, driven by debt (Bello 2019), that is paving the way for the expansion of an imperial way of life (Brand/Wissen 2017). Alternative approaches to development are largely absent. The power and competitiveness of state-sponsored transnational corporations from China have increased. But that does not prevent them from also cooperating with corporations from Western, capitalist countries, at least in certain areas. Currently, this mixture of 'competitor' and 'partner' can be seen in the acceleration of the extractivism of strategic, critical raw materials, which are necessary for the West as well as for China itself for a next, 'green' phase of capital valorisation.

A friend in need

The Chinese claim to be a historic part of the Global South, a good friend, or even one of its spokespersons, is met with widespread fear of asymmetrical dependence and dominance, with opposition and resistance. Beijing is trying to counter fears of being pinned down as a raw materials supplier with neo-colonial features by investing in value creation and green technology. Its contribution to the over-indebtedness of many countries, which is also a popular point of criticism in the West, is now forcing Beijing to undertake debt relief initiatives, sometimes together with Western bilateral creditors and multilateral financial institutions such as the *International Monetary Fund* (IMF). Chinese corporations, which operate hardly differently from their Western counterparts, are supposed to become "responsible" by adopting social and ecological guidelines modelled on the principles of corporate social responsibility in Western countries. The growing presence of Chinese parastatal security services after attacks on Chinese investments and citizens (Sukhankin 2023) is also a cause for concern, because they could promote a gradual process of militarization.

Another important field for China's activities are the United Nations. Inspired by the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the principle of 'one country, one vote', the UN is an important forum where the Global South sees itself represented and has some weight thanks to the voting system, currently expressed in its voting behaviour on the war in Ukraine. Beijing is working to strengthen and reform the United Nations, which is reflected in its close cooperation with the UN *Development Program* (UNDP), its role in the *World Health Organization* (WHO) and the *Food and Agriculture Organization* (FAO). It is thus accommodating initiatives to gradually reshape the system of international relations from within, whether just in its own

⁹ See also his recent post of August 22, 2023 (i.e., before the meeting), where he is rather skeptical about the prospects of "renewing the foundations of the fragmented BRICS confederation".

interests or also for the benefit of the other countries of the Global South remains to be seen. Recent Chinese initiatives such as a *Global Security Initiative* and a *Global Development Initiative* promise to strengthen the weight of the Global South within the United Nations.

Geo-economic fragmentation

However, the alliances or rather the entire Global South are not yet the new fearsome power bloc formation under Beijing's leadership or the breakthrough for a new, multipolar world order. The fear about the spectre exaggerates its real power.

Although claims of decolonization are growing stronger, organizing efforts in the Global South tend to focus on creating and strengthening pre-existing regional economies and political alliances, driving a "geo-economic fragmentation" of global economic interdependencies and multilateralism (IMF 2023): In Asia, for example, with the economic agreement RCEP, pushed by the Southeast Asian alliance ASEAN and the world's largest economic area to date; in Central Asia, through the SCO, based on a division of labour with Russia; in the Middle East, through the anchor countries Saudi Arabia and Iran, which recently seem to have been made up following Chinese mediation. South Africa's dominance in southern Africa could soon be supplemented by other economic heavyweights in West and East Africa, giving tailwind to plans for an *African Economic Community*. In Latin America, Brazil and the new BRICS-member Argentina are moving closer to each other.

This would create regions that are more self-reliant, cooperating with both Western industrialized countries and with China, while at the same time expanding South-South economic and financial cooperation through new initiatives and agreements, increasing the presently relatively small amount of trade among the BRICS countries. This could shift the focus of further regional and global development in the coming years. Opportunities for this are good thanks to the policies of economic disentanglement, risk reduction, and regionalization being advanced by both the Western industrialized countries and China. But for this to happen, the manifold internal and state-to-state contradictions must be bridged. And only if BRICSplus succeeds to coordinate these regional spaces, there is a prospect of an economically and politically strong alternative.

A long way becoming a „third force“

In any case, the perception that the Global South is being held together only by an antagonism to the West is not adequate, even if this plays an important role in their sceptical reading of the 'rules-based' order based on experiences with colonial domination, military interventions, neoliberal dogmas, economic gagging or double standards. Additionally, there is also an amalgam of numerous common interests and concerns articulated in a variety of different formations and constellations.

One example of this is the contentious relationship between China and India. The military stand-off in the Himalayas and India's interest in U.S. weapons and military cooperation fuel hopes of dividing BRICS, pitting key southern countries against each other, or of pulling them into the Western camp.¹⁰ But

¹⁰ A further test, whether there is a bloc formation progressing, was the absence of the presidents Putin and Xi from the G20 Summit in India in mid-August 2023, the meeting of important industrialized and emerging countries with invitations to more countries of the Global South. But the expected stallmate didn't happen and there was a joint final declaration, even if it was too weak in condemning Russia from the West's point of view.

„India has also expressed its own interest in counterbalancing Western hegemony in global forums, checking the dominance of the dollar, and curtailing liberal norms on sundry issues. On substantive matters, there is little indication that India is notably out of step with the rest of the BRICS.“¹¹

This assessment may reflect central concerns and conditions in many countries of the Global South. Moreover, India, like many other countries of the Global South, is economically dependent on continued cooperation with China for the time being. The close economic ties can hardly be cut or replaced by questionable Western alternatives in the short term. At the same time, these countries view the escalation in the hegemonic conflict and the danger of military confrontation in Asia with growing concern. Closer security cooperation with the U.S. and Western allies, which is emerging from the sides of India, Vietnam or the Philippines while intensifying close economic ties with China, is therefore a safeguard to prevent China's economic power from also translating into military dominance or even into a military threat. Such fears exist in particular in the Himalayas and in the South China Sea with China's territorial conflicts with neighbouring countries and, above all, with the escalation over Taiwan.

In this sense, the Global South is indeed a spectre: Its shape - be it its aversion to Western hegemony, be it its recourse to decolonization and to a shared colonial past and postcolonial experiences, be it its demand for a new, more equal and more just world order - is rather blurred. Its outlines are vague; strengths and weaknesses, intentions and actions are difficult to assess. The different economic and security interests are reflected in the formation of floating, multiple alliances and in the emergence of a new, active non-alignment. Incidentally, the same situation applies to some more industrialised countries such as Australia, Japan and South Korea, which seek to maintain economic relations with China but want to cooperate ever more closely with the U.S. and the West in military terms. Any attempt to win these countries over permanently to one side or the other is both difficult and uncertain, and turnarounds are a possibility at any time. On the other hand, this also complicates the perspective of the Global South becoming a "third force" (Weigelin-Schwiedrzik 2023) that could contain and alleviate the conflict between the U.S. and China and set certain restrictions for the adversaries - maybe together with Europe, Japan and India, which are likewise not interested in letting the confrontation get out of hand.

Whether a new multipolar world order will emerge from the current multi-layered conflicts driven by multiple interests, underlying causes and antagonisms, is an open question. Perhaps it will be shaped as a bipolar constellation with sub-hegemonic regional centres of gravity. And whether this can then be more stable, equal and equitable, more democratic and ecologically sustainable than the current order is a issue that is not at the very heart of the current power struggles.

It is therefore unlikely that there will be a 'Manifesto of the Global South' any time soon that would set out the goals, common positions and strategies by disclosing "its outlook, purposes, tendencies before the whole world", as Marx and Engels envisioned with the Manifesto of the Communist Party. The final declaration of the Johannesburg summit is certainly no such thing. Neither was it to be expected from leaders like Lula da Silva, Putin, Modi, Xi and Ramaphosa. Thus, the Global South will remain a spectre for some time to come. But while it has grown stronger, there is no real threat of a global mobilization against the old powers.

The inclusion of the African Union was a sign of recognition of the increased importance of the Global South beyond its previous members in the G20.

¹¹ Mohamed Zeeshan: India's Influence in BRICS is Waning, in: The Diplomat, 28.8.2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/indias-influence-in-brics-is-waning/>

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