A hollow show of unity at the BRICS summit

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Leaders of the BRICS group of countries met in New Delhi last weekend, agreed unanimously on a 140-paragraph declaration and posed for photo-ops all which was designed to put on a show of unity under the global shadow of trade war and war. The declaration called in general terms for peace and cooperation and criticised the use of unilateral sanctions and trade penalties but failed to name US imperialism as the chief author of escalating international economic and military conflict.

The BRIC grouping emerged in 2006 with a meeting of the foreign ministers of Brazil, Russia, India and China in the wake of the US-led wars of aggression against Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Its first leaders' summit took place in Russia in 2009 in the aftermath of the 2008-09 global financial crisis. South Africa joined in 2010 creating its current acronym—BRICS.

The punishing US-led sanctions imposed on Russia following its military intervention in Ukraine in 2022 and the Trump administration's trade war against the world have pushed a number of countries to turn to BRICS as a potential economic counterweight. In the last two years another five countries have joined—Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2024 and Indonesia in 2025. Saudi Arabia is yet to formalise its membership. Ten others attended the summit as partner countries.

That the BRICS summit was held at all is testament to the nervousness in ruling circles internationally over the economic and military aggression of the Trump administration. All of the countries involved in the summit have been impacted by unilateral US tariffs and the huge disruption to energy supplies triggered by the US-Israeli war on Iran. Yet the lengthy New Delhi Declaration seeks to paper over the disparate geo-political positions of the participants by the diplomatic expedient of failing to name, let alone condemn, the US.

The 2025 BRICS summit in Rio de Janeiro, while not naming the US or Israel, did condemn their joint military strikes that year on Iran's nuclear facilities as "a violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations." In response to the all-out war of aggression launched this year by the US and Israel, the grouping failed to do even that. A BRICS meeting of foreign ministers in May could not agree on a joint statement on the continuing US-Israeli war on Iran.

The summit last weekend limited itself to expressing "deep concern over the continued escalation of tensions" in the Middle East and called for "maximum restraint" on all sides. Both Iran and the UAE, which serves as a base for US military operations and has been the subject of Iranian retaliation, are BRICS members. A reportedly frosty meeting and photo-op on the sidelines of the summit between the Iranian and UAE representatives cannot patch up irreconcilable differences amid the ongoing war.

Chinese President Xi Jinping made his first visit to India in almost seven years to attend the summit. However, his photo-op with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and superficial gestures of cooperation and peace do nothing to alter the underlying rivalry and tensions that led to violent border clashes in 2020. India has integrated itself into the accelerating US preparations for war against China through its strategic partnership with Washington, growing military cooperation including expanded war games and close involvement with US military allies—Japan and Australia—through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

Modi used the opportunity to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin and to strengthen longstanding economic and strategic ties between the two countries to reach a target of $100 billion in annual bilateral trade by 2030, including increased Russian arms sales to India. Despite considerable pressure from

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Washington and the imposition of huge US tariffs on India for refusing to stop importing Russian oil, Modi has refused to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Significantly, the escalating US-NATO war in Ukraine against Russia was omitted altogether from the New Delhi Declaration.

All of the BRICS members have been hit to a greater or lesser extent by Trump's unilateral tariffs. Last year as the BRICS summit convened in Rio de Janeiro, Trump lashed out on social media with the extraordinary threat that any country aligning itself with "the Anti-American policies of BRICS" would be hit with an additional 10 percent tariff.

BRICS last weekend was very cautious in its criticisms, not wanting to invite further US penalties. It simply raised concerns over the distortion to international trade of "unilateral tariff and non-tariff measures" and expressed opposition to sanctions imposed without UN authorisation. Again, Trump and Washington were not named.

The US economic measures following the eruption of the Ukraine war including the freezing of Russian assets in the US and locking Russian banks out of the SWIFT interbank transfer system sent shock waves around the world. However, efforts by BRICS to establish alternative financial and trading mechanisms have been limited. No agreement has been reached on an alternative gold-backed currency to the US dollar and last weekend's summit only agreed to encourage the expansion of trade and investment deals in local currencies.

The BRICS summit once again reiterated its "commitment to strengthening multilateralism and multipolarity" to counter the predatory actions of the imperialist powers and push for a greater say in global institutions including the UN, the World Bank and the IMF. However, amid the emerging world war, the BRICS gathering in New Delhi, riven by widely disparate geo-political and economic interests, demonstrated its inability to take a clear stand against the criminal actions of US imperialism and its allies.

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