



Degree Program in Politics: Philosophy and Economics

Course of International Relations.

# Saudi Arabia and the BRICS.

Prof. Raffaele Marchetti

---

SUPERVISOR

Ysé Rulence - Matr. 105492

---

CANDIDATE

Academic Year 2023/2024

# **TABLE OF CONTENT**

<b>TABLE OF CONTENT</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>ABSTRACT – KEY WORDS</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>ACRONYMS &amp; ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICAL CONTEXT AND EXPLANATIONS OF THE BRICS DECISION TO ENLARGE THEIR MEMBERSHIP</b> .....	<b>17</b>
SECTION 1 : GEOPOLITICAL INTERESTS FOR THE BRICS AND SAUDI ARABIA TO JOIN FORCES.    17	
1. <i>A more powerful organization on the international scene.</i> .....	<i>17</i>
1.1.1. BRICS international positioning in the frame of classical International Organizations. ....	18
1.1.2. Their possible strategic will: could they become a relevant political actor? .....	20
2. <i>Putting together countries from different regions of the world: the Middle East.</i> .....	<i>23</i>
1.2.1. Political coordination and strategies among the BRICS+.....	23
1.2.2. Saudi Arabia’s relation with the singular BRICS countries. ....	25
SECTION 2 : ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC INTERESTS TO THE ENLARGEMENT .....	29
1. <i>The potential future of these expanding economies.</i> .....	<i>29</i>
2.1.1. Increasing GDP, incomes, and standards of living.....	29
2.1.2. Economic health comparing the West: could they overcome the existing economic order? ....	32
2. <i>The oil industry: a strategic resource to control.</i> .....	<i>34</i>
2.2.1. Synthesis of the oil trade today with the main producers and exporters. ....	34
2.2.2. The BRICS versus the West in their oil needs: the West in between dependency and transformation.....	36
SECTION 3 : COULD THE BRICS CREATE A DEFENSE ALLIANCE? .....	39
1. <i>Saudi Arabia’s dependence on the US for defense matters.</i> .....	<i>39</i>
3.1.1. The need for American security supplies.....	39
3.1.2. Agreements among security and the strategic geographical position for the US. ....	42
2. <i>Initiatives of the BRICS to develop their national security forces.</i> .....	<i>44</i>
3.2.1. Stronger and independent armies in the BRICS: Russia and China. ....	44

3.2.2. Saudi Arabia’s military cooperation with BRICS countries.....	46
<b>CHAPTER 2: A RISKY DECISION FOR THE WEST OR THE EAST?.....</b>	<b>49</b>
SECTION 1 : THE GROWING OF A ‘TWO-BLOCK’ LOGIC.....	49
1. <i>The increasing concept of ‘anti-West’ within the BRICS.</i> .....	49
1.1.1. Special relationship between China and Russia and the will to exclude the West.....	50
1.1.2. The ambiguous politics of Saudi Arabia towards the West and the East.....	52
2. <i>The political blockades between the ‘blocks’.</i> .....	54
1.2.1. International inability to common purposes: the UN’s inefficiency to unify. ....	54
1.2.2. The example of the war in Ukraine and the increasing division.....	56
SECTION 2 : THE DISRUPTION OF US SUPREMACY VERSUS THE RISE OF CHINA .....	58
1. <i>The risks for the US.</i> .....	58
2.1.1. The possible ‘de-dollarization’ politics. ....	59
2.1.2. The goals of the Renminbi.....	61
2. <i>The BRICS, a group neither united at 5... nor 10.</i> .....	63
2.2.1. China as the leader of the BRICS, seeking hegemony? .....	63
2.2.2. Disagreements among the BRICS members: the Saudi-Iranian case.....	65
SECTION 3 : THE BRICS AS THE LEADER OF A NEW WORLD ORDER?.....	66
1. <i>The insights of a new world order because of an irreconcilable confrontation between East and West.</i> .....	66
3.1.1. The three types of bipolarities: political, structural, and value. ....	67
3.1.2. Road to multilateralism or multipolarity and the end of the US hegemony?.....	68
2. <i>The reverberations in the Middle East area of Saudi Arabia’s shift in relationship from the US to the BRICS block.</i> .....	70
3.2.1. Disruptions in the Middle East. ....	70
3.2.2. Saudi Arabia integration: a chance for the development, the integration, and the sustainability of the BRICS. ....	71
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>SOURCES .....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>TABLE OF ANNEXES.....</b>	<b>88</b>

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

I would like to thank Jean-Pierre Dormois, Professor at Sciences Po Bordeaux, for agreeing to supervise my bachelor thesis and for assisting me in writing it. He transmitted to me his knowledge and infinite curiosity about the world's Economy and International Relations. His enthusiasm and passion for the world and for Peter Zeihan were really inspiring.

Likewise, I would like to thank Raffaele Marchetti, Professor of International Relations, and his assistant Sofia Eliodori, for having trusted me and accepting to supervise my bachelor thesis remotely. I can thank him for the great knowledge on International Relations, he gave me in Rome last year, because I have been passionate about his seminar. I can thank Sofia Eliodori for her precious advice during the reflection and the writing process.

Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my mother and father for their continuous support, listening, and encouragement. I could not forget to thank my friends for having gone through long writing sessions with me. The daily support of my loved ones represents an important part of this work.

## ***ABSTRACT – KEY WORDS***

### **Abstract:**

The decision of the BRICS on August 2023 to enlarge their membership towards five new countries, namely Iran, the UAE, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Saudi Arabia, caused an earthquake in the international existing order. Will this lead to a new existing order with the BRICS representing the alternative voice to the West? The BRICS have faced difficulties in defining their political and economic goals, but it turned to Saudi Arabia, particularly, which represents a chance for its development. Saudi Arabia is a strategic partner in growing alliances and concluding agreements, as well as it is also a region full of tensions between regional conflicts and great powers seeking influence. This thesis analyzes the consequences of the integration of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS, to the extent that it represents both an opportunity and a disruption. To do so, it underlines the ambiguity of the politics of Saudi Arabia, between political rapprochement and alignment with the South-South cooperation and American military protection and energy (in)security agreements it shares with the US. It also studies the potential of the BRICS to challenge and dethrone the US unipolarity, either as a group by establishing a bipolar or a multipolar system or individually especially with China and its hegemonic intentions. In the end, the real challenge for the BRICS, to become a relevant political and economic actor, will be to make very diverse countries, even long-lasting enemies for some of them, sit at the same table to agree upon strategic decisions, as some states wish to establish a common currency.

### **Key words:**

BRICS; Saudi Arabia; Middle East; energy; geopolitics; oil; military resources; bipolarity; multilateralism; de-dollarization.

## **Résumé :**

En août 2023, les BRICS ont pris la décision d'élargir leur composition à cinq nouveaux membres : l'Iran, les Émirats arabes unis, l'Égypte, l'Éthiopie et l'Arabie Saoudite, provoquant un véritable tremblement de terre dans l'ordre international. Les BRICS sont-ils l'incarnation d'une nouvelle voix alternative à l'Occident ? Après de nombreuses difficultés dans la définition claire de leurs objectifs politiques et économiques, les BRICS se sont tournés vers l'Arabie Saoudite, entre autres, pour contribuer au développement du groupe. L'Arabie Saoudite est un partenaire stratégique avec lequel il est pertinent de nouer des alliances et de conclure des accords, mais c'est également une région en tension, entre conflits régionaux et quête d'influence des grandes puissances. Ce mémoire analyse les conséquences de l'intégration de l'Arabie saoudite dans les BRICS, dans la mesure où elle représente à la fois une opportunité pour les BRICS et une perturbation dans l'ordre mondial. Pour ce faire, il souligne l'ambiguïté de la politique de l'Arabie saoudite, entre rapprochement politique et alignement avec la coopération Sud-Sud, et protection militaire américaine et accords pour son (in)sécurité énergétique qu'elle partage avec les États-Unis. Il étudie également le potentiel des BRICS à défier et à détrôner l'unipolarité américaine, soit en tant que groupe en établissant un système bipolaire ou multipolaire, soit individuellement, en particulier la Chine et ses intentions hégémoniques. *In fine*, le véritable défi des BRICS réside dans la divergence de ses membres, parfois même ennemis de longue date. Si les BRICS souhaitent devenir un acteur politique et économique international, ils devront faire s'asseoir à la même table ses 10 pays membres pour s'accorder sur une politique commune et des décisions stratégiques fortes, telles que la création d'une monnaie commune.

## **Mots-clés :**

BRICS ; Arabie Saoudite ; Moyen-Orient ; énergie ; géopolitique ; pétrole ; ressources militaires ; bipolarité ; multilatéralisme ; dé-dollarisation.

## **ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS**

ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ATC = Agreement for Technical Cooperation

BRICS = Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

CIPS = Cross-Border Interbank Payment System

EU = European Union

FMS = Foreign Military Sales

GCC = Gulf Cooperation Council

GDP = Growth Domestic Product

HDI = Human Development Index

IBRD = International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

IDA = International Development Association

IMF = International Monetary Fund

NAFTA = North American Free Trade Agreement

NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NDB = New Development Bank

OPEC = Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

PBOC = People's Bank of China

PPP = Purchasing Power Parity

SCO = Shanghai Cooperation Organization

SWIFT = Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication

UAE = United Arab Emirates

UN = United Nations

UNESCO = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNOCT = United Nations Office for Counter-Terrorism

UNSC = United Nations Security Council

USMTM = United States Military Training Missions

WHO = World Health Organization

WTO = World Trade Organization

## **INTRODUCTION**

The recent announcement of the BRICS' decision to enlarge their membership towards six new countries from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, paved the way for many wonderments about current geostrategic and economic alliances. On August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023, during the XV summit of the BRICS organized in Johannesburg, the five countries that currently compose the group called the 'BRICS'<sup>1</sup> agreed upon the accession and the membership to six new countries which are: Argentina (the country has then declined the BRICS' offer<sup>2</sup>), Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

In the First Chapter of the thesis, we will assess the reasons why the BRICS decided to involve new countries, firstly considering the political and geopolitical context (Section 1). This unforeseen political decision was described by current members as a huge success, as Chinese President Xi Jinping congratulated "*a large historical enlargement*"<sup>3</sup> and forecasted a "*bright future for the BRICS*"<sup>4</sup>. In the BRICS's group functioning during summits, decisions of this type require a consensus; thus, they had to negotiate to find a compromise, especially for the admissions criteria. However, the criteria remain ambiguous – which is probably a strategic choice of their own. Hasni Abidi, an Algerian political specialist and researcher at the Centre d'Études et de Recherche sur le Monde Arabe et Méditerranéen, stated "*The conditions for joining the group are ambiguous, and the group maintains ambiguity [...]. The economic criterion is not the only one, as shown by the fact that countries such as Indonesia and Nigeria, whose economies are stronger than those of new members [such as] Ethiopia and Egypt, have not been admitted*"<sup>5</sup>. At this point, we may hypothesize that Russia and China were the strongest supporters for such an enlargement as they are the largest BRICS members and stand up against a current

---

<sup>1</sup> BRICS stands for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa

<sup>2</sup> 'Argentina Formally Rejects Invitation to Join BRICS', *Le Monde.Fr*, 29 December 2023, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/12/29/argentina-formally-rejects-invitation-to-join-brics\\_6386345\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/12/29/argentina-formally-rejects-invitation-to-join-brics_6386345_4.html).

<sup>3</sup> Bruno Philip, 'BRICS Decide to Welcome New Members, under Pressure from Beijing and Moscow', *Le Monde.Fr*, 25 August 2023, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/08/25/brics-decide-to-welcome-new-members-under-pressure-from-beijing-and-moscow\\_6108157\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/08/25/brics-decide-to-welcome-new-members-under-pressure-from-beijing-and-moscow_6108157_4.html).  
[https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/08/25/brics-decide-to-welcome-new-members-under-pressure-from-beijing-and-moscow\\_6108157\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/08/25/brics-decide-to-welcome-new-members-under-pressure-from-beijing-and-moscow_6108157_4.html).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Hasni Abidi [@hasniabidi], 'Les conditions d'adhésion au groupe #BRICS2023 sont ambiguës et le groupe entretient cette ambiguïté. Son expansion n'est pas acquise par tous afin de garder son efficacité et éviter son éclatement. D'où l'idée de #BRICS+, idée repoussée par les nouveaux candidats. #BRICS2023 a... <https://t.co/mgx0RXCL0a>', Tweet, *Twitter*, 24 August 2023, <https://twitter.com/hasniabidi/status/1694679921631617512>.



‘West alliance’, as we may refer to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the American-European influence in the world. Moreover, when looking at the geographical position of the future-new members of the BRICS, we may assume that it is very “*Middle East centric*”<sup>7</sup> as Sanusha Naidu, a policy analyst and researcher at the Institute for Global Dialogue, stated. This could have geopolitical implications, as the center of the interests, policies, and actions may be more located in the Middle East region, potentially leaving Brazil and South Africa a bit left out.

Furthermore, the Second Section of the First Chapter will also assess the economic reasons for which the BRICS undertook this decision last August. On the economic level, the decision of the BRICS to involve Saudi Arabia, together with the UAE, will probably disrupt and strengthen the economy of the Arab region. According to Worldometer, Saudi Arabia is the second top oil producer country in the world, right after the US and before Russia<sup>8</sup>. On the oil consumption side, China and India are the top second and third oil consumers, after the United States (US)<sup>9</sup>. This is why we could consider that such a political alignment between one of the top oil producers and top oil consumers could lead to an economic – in the oil industry mainly – association and merger, and thus to the exclusion of the West, or at least, preferred policies among the newly 10-member BRICS group. Nevertheless, the integration of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS is not completely an unforeseen event as Jim O’Neil had already highlighted 11 countries with the potential to join the BRICS in 2008 and Saudi Arabia was part of it, with Iran<sup>10</sup>. Ethiopia, Egypt, and the UAE were probably not enough developed when Jim O’Neil made his point in 2008. Also, while we will look at the initial aim of the BRICS organization, the enlargement could conduct to a political group and could let us think its creation and the decisions coming from it might be in clear opposition with Western-oriented organizations, such as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union (EU), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the G8, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These suppositions will be worth looking at in the development of the following chapters and sections.

---

<sup>7</sup> Sumayya Ismail, “‘A Wall of BRICS’: The Significance of Adding Six New Members to the Bloc”, Al Jazeera, accessed 5 January 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/24/analysis-wall-of-brics-the-significance-of-adding-six-new-members>.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Oil Production by Country - Worldometer’, accessed 5 January 2024, <https://www.worldometers.info/oil/oil-production-by-country/>.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Oil Consumption by Country - Worldometer’, accessed 5 January 2024, <https://www.worldometers.info/oil/oil-consumption-by-country/>.

<sup>10</sup> Axelle Degans, *Les Pays Émergents : De Nouveaux Acteurs : BRIC's : Brésil, Russie, Inde, Chine... Afrique Du Sud - Sciences Po Bordeaux* (Ellipses, 2011).

In order to grasp the real tension in the subject and to understand why the integration of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS will bring such changes, we need to briefly present Saudi Arabia, in its economic and geopolitical aspects. Saudi Arabia is essentially known for its exceptional resources in petroleum, as well as for its Islamic aspirations. It is a globally important country as it is an essential member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) group. According to the OPEC website, the OPEC group is a “*permanent intergovernmental organization of 13 oil-exporting developing nations that coordinates and unifies the petroleum policies of its Member Countries*”<sup>11</sup>. It was created in 1960 by 5 members which were Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Venezuela, and Saudi Arabia. The economy of Saudi Arabia highly depends on oil, as the amount of oil and gas natural fields are drawn on the Annex 1 map<sup>12</sup>. The first strike of oil in Saudi Arabia goes back to 1938 in the Dammam oilfield<sup>13</sup>. Saudi Arabia corresponds to the definition of what is called an “*oil-based economy*”<sup>14</sup>, but it tries to diversify its economy to become a “*knowledge-based economy*”<sup>15</sup>. While oil is still a crucial feature in the Saudi GDP, the share of oil in Saudi Arabia’s economy decreased in the last decades. According to the World Bank, in 1979, 87,1% of the Saudi GDP came from oil rents while in 2021, the oil rents participated only 23,7% of the country’s GDP<sup>16</sup>. Saudi Arabia is thus not the most oil-dependent country, as oil represents a higher share of GDP in Libya, Iraq, the Republic of Congo, and Angola<sup>17</sup>. Thus, Saudi Arabia appears as a strategic country and arouses the interests of many other countries, to become an ally to develop preferred economic relations for oil. This is the case of Russia, which is a member of the OPEC+ group, an organization merging OPEC members and oil producers non-OPEC members to agree on common oil policies. Thereby, the entrance of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS organization could potentially create, or reinforce, the links and the economic alliances of those countries. We could easily imagine BRICS countries deciding upon common strategic oil policies, in disfavor of non-BRICS countries, especially the West.

However, Saudi Arabia and the US were well-known for being strategic allies for decades, as Section 3 in the First Chapter will develop. To question the possible disruption in their relationship, we need first to assess their links and the domains concerned. The

---

<sup>11</sup> ‘OPEC : About Us’, accessed 5 January 2024, [https://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/17.htm](https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/17.htm).

<sup>12</sup> Annex 1

<sup>13</sup> David Rigoulet-Roze, *Géopolitique de l’Arabie Saoudite - Sciences Po Bordeaux* (Armand Colin, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Anna Llanos-Antczak, ‘Perspectives of Shifting From Oil-Based Economy to Knowledge-Based Economy in Saudi Arabia’, *Journal for Perspectives of Economic, Political, and Social Integration* 28, no. 2 (2023): 7–40, <https://doi.org/10.18290/pepsi-2022-0006>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> ‘World Bank Open Data’, World Bank Open Data, accessed 5 January 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org>.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Oil Revenue by Country, around the World’, TheGlobalEconomy.com, accessed 5 January 2024, [https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/oil\\_revenue/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/oil_revenue/).

alliance and alignment between the US and Saudi Arabia are about one century old; their diplomatic relations started in the 1930s and they became allies after the end of the Second World War when they signed the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement in 1951<sup>18</sup>. Since Quincy's pact, the United States has overseen the security in Saudi Arabia in exchange for abundant and affordable oil<sup>19</sup>. This is why the relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia is often referred to as 'oil against security'. Since then, the US and Saudi Arabia have kept a special bond over economic and defense industry issues, while they share major disagreements in their values – American liberalism, democracy, and capitalism against Saudi conservatism and Islamic monarchy -<sup>20</sup>. The dependence of the US on Saudi oil is one of many ties that bind both countries together. Also, the will of the US to be present, influence, and control the Middle East creates an opportunity for an alignment between them. David Long defines their fields of relation as “oil, military, economic, and political”<sup>21</sup>, as well as characterizes it as “ambivalence”<sup>22</sup>, probably due to their ideological and interest divergences as the US's support for Israel for instance<sup>23</sup>. Despite different diplomatic crises, especially during the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, they managed to maintain their alliance. While the main fields of cooperation are arms and oil, they also developed commercial financial relations, as well as the prohibition for the US to intervene in Saudi Arabian domestic affairs<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, the alliance allows the USA to be militarily present in the Middle East, a strategic position to control other countries' actions, such as Iran, which has been the USA's enemy since the Iranian revolution in 1979. This strategic position was priceless during the two Gulf wars because US soldiers could be based in Saudi Arabia<sup>25</sup>. Thus, the US and Saudi Arabia share advanced diplomatic relations, especially in the defense and energy fields. However, the recent announcement of Saudi Arabia joining the BRICS calls into question these relations, as Saudi's interests, may become more South and East-centered and alienate its alliance with the US.

---

<sup>18</sup> 'Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V - Office of the Historian', accessed 5 January 2024, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v05/ch10subch2>.

<sup>19</sup> Alain Désiré Taïno Kari, *Les relations américano-saoudiennes depuis la fin de la guerre froide: l'alliance stratégique à l'épreuve des cultures* (Paris (France): L'Harmattan, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Laurie Mylroie, 'DAVID LONG, "The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies" (Book Review)', *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 20, no. 2 (1986): 232-.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Taïno Kari, *Les relations américano-saoudiennes depuis la fin de la guerre froide*.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Taïno Kari.

Before deepening further analysis into the consequences and the impacts of such new members in the BRICS which we will assess in the Second Chapter, it is essential to get an elementary knowledge and understanding of what the term ‘BRICS’ stands for, how the group was created, its initial purpose as well as its evolution during the years, its political and economic position, its decisions and actions. The ‘BRICS’ acronym was first introduced by Jim O’Neil<sup>26</sup>, a specialist in economics at Goldman Sachs, in 2001 in a study entitled “Building Better Global Economic BRICS” in *Global Economics Papers*<sup>27</sup>. Brazil, Russia, India, and China were then identified as ‘emerging countries’ with the most potential growth during the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in particular thanks to technological improvement. These countries managed to perfectly enter and catch up with the global economy, as in 2004, they were already among the first 15 countries in the world for Growth Domestic Products (GDP). In addition to exceptional economic growth, these countries have an important regional influence in their respective part of the globe. Brazil is the economic leader in the Americas and in the Southern Common Market (Mercosur). India and China are competing for the regional leadership in Asia. Considering GDP and influence, China can be considered as the Asian leader and India as the Indo-Pacific one. Finally, the largest country on earth, Russia, has kept an influence over the former area of the Soviet Union region and positions itself against NATO, and *de facto* against the EU. They organized their first meeting in 2009, “*the four BRICs held their first summit, and two years later they were joined by South Africa, creating the five-member BRICS group*”<sup>28</sup>. It takes its origin after the 2008 global economic crisis and the need to reform the international financial system. Indeed, South Africa has the strongest and most developed economy in Africa. Originally, the BRICS were only defining themselves as a “*grouping of nations*”<sup>29</sup>; however, with time, their ambitions have evolved towards a “*political club*”<sup>30</sup>. This innovative organization is often seen as a “*reinforcement of the need for greater South-South cooperation and representative of concerns of the three important regions of the South, namely, Africa, Asia, and South America*”<sup>31</sup>. Today, the countries composing the BRICS almost match the economic development of Western countries and weigh a lot in the global economy, as we will see with the economic war between China and the US in the development of the thesis.

---

<sup>26</sup> Peter Lowe, ‘The Rise of the BRICS in the Global Economy’, *Teaching Geography* 41, no. 2 (2016): 50–53, <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.sciencespobordeaux.fr/stable/26455170?sid=primo>.

<sup>27</sup> Axelle Degans, *Les Pays Émergents : De Nouveaux Acteurs : BRIC's : Brésil, Russie, Inde, Chine... Afrique Du Sud - Sciences Po Bordeaux* (Ellipses, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Lowe, ‘The Rise of the BRICS in the Global Economy’.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Urvashi Sarkar, ‘BRICS: An Opportunity for a Transformative South?’, *South Asian Survey* 21, no. 1–2 (1 March 2014): 127–37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0971523115592495>.

Accordingly, in the Second Chapter of the thesis, we will assess how the two-block logic is growing in the world. Saudi Arabia and the BRICS are two poles of strategic political competition, with undeniable economic issues. The recent decision of the BRICS to enlarge its membership by including Saudi Arabia, and four other countries, will eventually impact the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the West, especially its special ties with the US, and will increase rivalries between the South-East and the West. These explanations will be enlightened by the First Chapter thanks to which we will have a perfect understanding of the context and the issues at stake in considering the BRICS' enlargement. Accordingly, the second Chapter will be partly dedicated to the ambiguity of Saudi Arabia towards both the West and the East – or the South, represented by the BRICS. This ambiguity is the illustration of the political blockades existing between the blocks and their inability to act as a unified group. The thesis will aim to evaluate whether the BRICS can act internationally as a group or is too much impeded by internal disagreements. Moreover, the Asian leader, China, could represent the Global South leader in opposition to the West and the US. While China could represent a leader of the BRICS and push the organization forward in its political and economic development, it could also use the BRICS as a springboard for its growth to embody the great power able to challenge the US. In the end, the remaining question will be to check whether the BRICS, as a group, or represented by China could challenge the international existing order or not, as the entry of Saudi Arabia into the group depicted an ideological change in the vision of world stability and balance.

This is what will be at the center of this analysis, to answer the main following research question:

### **What could be the consequences of Saudi Arabia joining the BRICS?**

This main research question leads us at least to four different sub-questions, which the different chapters and sections will attempt to answer. Why did the BRICS decide to include Saudi Arabia among the BRICS permanent members? How does Saudi Arabia's integration into the BRICS calls into question its economic and defense ties with the United States? How might the enlargement of the BRICS towards Saudi Arabia change the world's stability? Is the enlargement of the BRICS leading to the return of a 'bipolar' world between the Global South and the West, taking the special case of Saudi Arabia?

This thesis will aim to answer these crucial questions highlighted. The hypothesis we can assess at this point is that, indeed, the enlargement of the BRICS is likely to push for the return of a 'bipolar' world between the South-East and the West, as the unipolarity of the

world is already questioned. This is why this topic is such important. Indeed, the insecurity about the future in the frame of the growing membership of the BRICS lacks reliable sources whereas it could completely transform the world's leadership and stability.

The methodology used will include a mainly qualitative analysis, supported also by the collection of quantitative data, mostly regarding the economic layers of the players involved. Behind the research question, for the analysis, we will consider both dependent and independent variables, always in the filter of Saudi Arabia's case study. The dependent variable is the consequence of the enlargement of the BRICS, such as the changes and disruptions in the Saudi Arabia-US ties. The independent variables are the causes of such a change, which are the reasons and explanations for the merger between Saudi Arabia and the BRICS. The reasons are diverse and require further analysis.

Thus, to answer the research question, we will draw a global picture of the issues at stake between Saudi Arabia, the BRICS, and the US. Firstly, we will assess the political context and the explanations for which the BRICS decided to enlarge their membership, especially towards Saudi Arabia, by looking more in-depth into the geopolitical and economic interests of such a cooperation. This will allow us to deepen the analysis of the current situation and the current alliances, particularly the one between the US and Saudi Arabia. The Second Chapter will be dedicated to the potential consequences and risks together with potentially new world systems stability considerations, with the growing of a 'block' of powers in opposition with the West, led by Russia and China.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The term ‘BRICs’ was first introduced in 2001 by Jim O’Neil<sup>32</sup>, a specialist in Economics at Goldman Sachs, in a study entitled “Building Better Global Economic BRICs” in *Global Economics Papers*<sup>33</sup>. This paper presented the back-then world economic and geopolitical situation with the 4 growing market economies: Brazil, Russia, India, and China. The starting point of the analysis was the expected increasing GDP in these emerging economies always in comparison with the G7 group. Since then, the BRICs have been considered as an existing group and have been subjected to much research, papers, and analysis.

Many research articles and books have emerged around the topic of the BRICS. Since the creation of the BRICS, those emerging countries have been at stake, and have been in the consideration of many geopoliticians. Most of these authors analyze the BRICS from the perspective of emerging countries as new international actors weighing more in the international system. It is the case of Axelle Degans<sup>34</sup>, who states how these countries have succeeded in their geopolitical and economic development, for instance with exceptional economic growth and better living conditions. Choosing the example of the G20 taking the place of the G7 and China being the first world exporter, she affirms that they have managed to be on the winner’s side of globalization. The inputs of Peter Lowe are a little bit different. Indeed, he states that those states will surely become “*powerful players in the geopolitical world landscape of the future*”<sup>35</sup>. However, he nuances their potential path by saying that some of them are regional powers and not global powers, such as South Africa. He also refers to Henry Ford who said: “*Coming together is a beginning; keeping is progress; working together is success*”<sup>36</sup>. To what concerns the potential of the BRICS in changing the balance of power in the international system, Peter Lowe said “*only time will tell if the BRICS can work together long-term to create a more equitable and multipolar world order*”<sup>37</sup>. However, by evoking the possibility of the BRICS creating a multipolar world order, we can assess the importance of such an organization.

---

<sup>32</sup> Lowe, ‘The Rise of the BRICS in the Global Economy’.

<sup>33</sup> Jim O’Neill et al., ‘Goldman Sachs Economic Research Group’, no. 66 (2001).

<sup>34</sup> Axelle Degans, *Les Pays Émergents : De Nouveaux Acteurs : BRIC’s : Brésil, Russie, Inde, Chine... Afrique Du Sud - Sciences Po Bordeaux* (Ellipses, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Lowe, ‘The Rise of the BRICS in the Global Economy’.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

To what concerns Saudi Arabia, there are also many books assessing the history of the country, in its economic and geopolitical aspects. The oil feature in Saudi Arabia is the most common prism through which authors decide to analyze the Middle East state. Some authors also focus their studies on the explanation of how Saudi Arabia became an “oil-based economy”<sup>38</sup>, as Anna Llanos-Antczak does, turning into one of the most powerful states in the Middle East region. The links it maintains with the rest of the world are mostly revolved around oil issues. Almost all sources about Saudi Arabia refer to its relationship with the US, a topic on which of the most reliable resources is a book written by the French scholar David Rigoulet-Roze entitled *Géopolitique de l’Arabie Saoudite*<sup>39</sup>.

To assess their strategic ties as well as their divergences and how their relations might overcome some ideological issues. Alain Désiré Taïno Kari has tried to theorize the reasons for which those countries, which everything seems to oppose, have built a strategic and political alliance<sup>40</sup>. Oil and defense issues are mostly what link the two countries together. David Long tries to summarize their relationship in three major axes<sup>41</sup>. The first one is the “petroleum relationship”<sup>42</sup>, on which cooperation has existed since the 1930s. The second one is their mutual relation with Israel, as it is probably their biggest divergence. The third one is the “encirclement syndrome”<sup>43</sup> of Saudi Arabia, feeling surrounded by neighboring threats, implying the defense relation they have with the US. These three axes are the reasons why David Long calls their relationship “ambivalent”<sup>44</sup>. The very nature of their relationship will be at the basis of the analysis, as it might evolve due to the entrance of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS.

Given that the announcement of new members into the BRICS is quite recent and the consequences concern future features, there is not a lot of established literature yet on this subject. However, there are many articles on the relations between the great powers such as China, Russia, and the US. The evolution of such powers is a piece of key information in the understanding of the current world order and how it may evolve in the future decades. As said earlier, Peter Lowe referred to the possibility of a “multipolar world”<sup>45</sup>, especially due

---

<sup>38</sup> Llanos-Antczak, ‘Perspectives of Shifting From Oil-Based Economy to Knowledge-Based Economy in Saudi Arabia’.

<sup>39</sup> David Rigoulet-Roze, *Géopolitique de l’Arabie Saoudite - Sciences Po Bordeaux* (Armand Colin, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> Taïno Kari, *Les relations américano-saoudiennes depuis la fin de la guerre froide*.

<sup>41</sup> Hermann Frederick Eilts, ‘DAVID E. LONG, “The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies” (Book Review)’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987): 380–83.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Mylroie, ‘DAVID LONG, “The United States and Saudi Arabia’.

<sup>45</sup> Lowe, ‘The Rise of the BRICS in the Global Economy’.



to the decline in the US superpower. Other articles refer to a form of “*bipolarity*”<sup>46</sup> or even a “*co-governance (G2)*”<sup>47</sup> between the US and China. We could assume that the strengthening of the BRICS organization could give even more power to China to rival the US, particularly in creating organizations to compete with the currently dominant ones such as the World Bank, the G7, and the IMF for instance.

To assess the potential consequences of the enlargement of the BRICS and thus to answer the main research question, we will need to assess every aspect of the relations and the features of the three actors we will analyze: Saudi Arabia, the BRICS, and the US. Thanks to the existence of a large literature on those characteristics, the development and the identification of potential consequences will be achievable.

---

<sup>46</sup> Zhao Huasheng, ‘The Coming Bipolarity and Its Implications: Views from China and Russia’, BRICS, accessed 5 January 2024, <http://infobricts.org>.

<sup>47</sup> *Zhao Huasheng*.

# **CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICAL CONTEXT AND EXPLANATIONS OF THE BRICS DECISION TO ENLARGE THEIR MEMBERSHIP.**

In the first Chapter of the thesis, we will assess the political context and the potential reasons for the BRICS decision to include 5 new countries from the Middle East. These reasons can be divided into three main categories: geopolitical, economic, and military. Thus, Section 1 will be dedicated to analyzing the geopolitical strategic interests on the international scene for the BRICS to enlarge their membership and to include Saudi Arabia, which can be seen as a way to create an alternative political order to the Occidental one. Section 2 is more focused on economic interests and especially the oil issues, as Saudi Arabia is the oil cradle, and it already trades a lot with the US. Finally, Section 3 will be about the military interests and the existing military agreements between the BRICS, Saudi Arabia, and the US.

## **Section 1 : Geopolitical interests for the BRICS and Saudi Arabia to join forces.**

Section 1 of this first chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the place in the world of the BRICS as a group and of the countries individually. Indeed, in the first subsection, we will look at their position in the existing organizations and their ability to create new international organizations (1.1.1.), as well as their capacity to become relevant political actors on the international scene (1.1.2.). Then, in a second subsection, the analysis will be dedicated to the common goals the ten countries share (1.2.1) with a focus on the relationship Saudi Arabia maintains with the other BRICS countries (1.2.2.).

### **1. A more powerful organization on the international scene.**

The enlargement of the membership of the BRICS is expected to increase their power on the international scene, as they will have more impact on the world economy and

diplomatic relations. The BRICS organization was not identified as a unitary political actor, because its sphere of activity was not focused on a specific domain such as economy or defense, in opposition with already existing Western organizations with precise scopes. According to Peter Lowe, in 2011, the BRICS were still seen as an “*assortment of countries with similar economic characteristics rather than as a legitimate ‘grouping of nations’*”<sup>48</sup>. However, there might have been a shift in their objectives, as their economic growth allowed them to increase their geopolitical impact. This was also the analysis of Peter Lowe in 2016, who said that “*the BRICS have ambitions to organize themselves into a ‘political club’, allowing them to convert their economic power into greater geopolitical influence*”<sup>49</sup>. This is why, before deepening the analysis into the impact of the enlargement, we need to determine the position and importance these countries and the BRICS organizations have on the international system.

### 1.1.1. BRICS international positioning in the frame of classical International Organizations.

Individually, the countries initially composing the BRICS have gone through exceptional economic growth in the last decades. These features that will be detailed further in the thesis are linked to their enhanced political importance in the world.

The BRICS countries are already present in the existing international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund<sup>50</sup> and the World Bank<sup>51</sup>, the latter is a collective name under which there are both the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Development Association (IDA). International Organizations have “*compulsory power in that they control material resources that can be used to influence others. For example, the World Bank has money, and the UN peacekeepers have weapons*”<sup>52</sup>; this is why they have paramount importance in global politics in shaping global trends for states to follow. The new BRICS members are members of those international – but Western-created – organizations. To assess the BRICS countries’ power and position in the international system, it is also relevant to remember the role and weight of the permanent members of the United

---

<sup>48</sup> Lowe, ‘The Rise of the BRICS in the Global Economy’.

<sup>49</sup> *Lowe*.

<sup>50</sup> ‘List of Members’ Date of Entry’, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/memdir/memdate.htm>.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Member Countries’, Text/HTML, World Bank, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/leadership/members>.

<sup>52</sup> Georg Sørensen et al., *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, Eighth Edition, Eighth Edition (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

Nations Security Council (UNSC), which includes China and the Russian Federation<sup>53</sup>. Brazil is the second most-elected country, after Japan, as a temporary member of the Security Council<sup>54</sup>. Thus, the presence of the BRICS countries, including the new ones, associated with a predominant role in the largest and most important international organization – the United Nations – emphasizes their ability to influence international political and economic decisions. It might also be relevant to note that while the G7 meetings have existed since the end of the Bretton Woods system in 1971 and the first oil crisis in 1973, including countries like France, the UK, Germany, Italy, USA, and Japan, we have seen the emergence since the late 1990s of larger summits like the G20. In consideration of the G20, we remark on the presence of all the initial BRICS countries, in addition to Saudi Arabia, as showing their importance in international governance and global economic weight, as the G20 represents 85% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP)<sup>55</sup>.

Some authors see the BRICS as an alliance being a “*counterweight to Western-dominated organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund*”<sup>56</sup>. The BRICS’s will to create an alternative to Western organizations became even clearer when in 2014 they announced the creation of the New Development Bank (NDB) based in Shanghai with as its main objectives to “*finance future infrastructure and sustainable development projects in each member country, as well as in other emerging economies*”<sup>57</sup>. The budget allocated to the New Development Bank in 2023 consisted of 119,76 million USD<sup>58</sup> while the budget in 2018 was 55 million USD<sup>59</sup>, highlighting the continuous increase of the BRICS bank’s importance in the world and profitability for its founding countries. In 2014, the BRICS summit in Brazil also gathered upon the creation of a USD 100 billion fund to “*steady the currency markets*”<sup>60</sup> to contain capital volatility by reducing currency devaluation or capital flight.

Those countries’ desires to develop their world influence may be also seen in their foreign policy actions. We could refer to the desire of Russia to evolve from a regional power in

---

<sup>53</sup> ‘On What Basis Was Security Council Permanent Membership Granted? - Ask DAG!’, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://ask.un.org/faq/14518>.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Countries Elected Members | United Nations Security Council’, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/countries-elected-members>.

<sup>55</sup> ‘G20 Members’, G20, accessed 12 January 2024, <http://g20.org.tr/about-g20/g20-members/>.

<sup>56</sup> Lowe, ‘The Rise of the BRICS in the Global Economy’.

<sup>57</sup> *Lowe*.

<sup>58</sup> ‘NDB-Budget-Disclosure-2023.Pdf’, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/NDB-Budget-disclosure-2023.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Budget-Summary-for-CY2018.Pdf’, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Budget-summary-for-CY2018.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> Lowe, ‘The Rise of the BRICS in the Global Economy’.

Eastern Europe to a global power. The decision of Putin to wage war in Ukraine can find explanations in International Relations theories as Putin's policy seems to corroborate with the concept of foreign policy continuity. While Russia has seen its power diminished since the end of the USSR, it has the will to become a regional hegemon, to reaffirm its influence and control over the region. Moreover, as John Mearsheimer "*blames the US for the crisis in Ukraine*"<sup>61</sup>, the war in Ukraine is probably also the result of NATO's expansion in Eastern Europe. In both statements, the goal of Russia is the same: the search for regional power. Concerning the BRICS's aspiration to extend its influence onto the world stage, we could also refer to the recent interest of its members in hosting international events such as the Olympic Games and the Football World Cup. For instance, Brazil hosted the Summer Olympic Games in 2016, Russia hosted the Winter Olympic Games in 2014, and China in 2022<sup>62</sup>. Looking at the FIFA World Cup, South Africa hosted the competition in 2010, Brazil in 2014 and Russia in 2018<sup>63</sup>.

Thus, we have seen how the BRICS have emerged and become influential on the international scene through their presence, and sometimes predominance, in long-lasting International Organizations, in addition to creating an alternative system to these Western organizations. However, even if their will is such, they might not be able to become a relevant political actor in the frame of the BRICS organization, particularly due to a limited influential potential in comparison with the West and to internal divergences and disagreements.

### 1.1.2. Their possible strategic will: could they become a relevant political actor?

As Urvashi Sarkar stated, the creation of the BRICS is seen as the "*reinforcement of the need for greater South-South cooperation and representative of concerns of the three important regions of the South, namely, Africa, Asia and South America*"<sup>64</sup>. It was also perceived as a "*possible counter to the G-7*"<sup>65</sup>. Many authors and politicians of South countries draw criticism about the existing international order system, especially about international organizations saying that the

---

<sup>61</sup> Isaac Chotiner, 'Why John Mearsheimer Blames the U.S. for the Crisis in Ukraine', *The New Yorker*, 1 March 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-john-mearsheimer-blames-the-us-for-the-crisis-in-ukraine>.

<sup>62</sup> 'List of Olympic Host Cities – Architecture of the Games', accessed 12 January 2024, <https://architectureofthegames.net/olympic-host-cities/>.

<sup>63</sup> 'The History of World Cup in Football', accessed 12 January 2024, <https://www.footballhistory.org/world-cup/index.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Sarkar, 'BRICS'.

<sup>65</sup> *Sarkar*.

decisions are totally driven by rich, Western and Northern countries. This was the case of the Brazilian president Lula da Silva in 2009 when he referred to *“broken paradigms and failing multilateral institutions”*<sup>66</sup>. As we referred to in the previous subsection, the BRICS’ new multilateral organization, the NDB, is a clear sign of their aspiration to become a strategic and relevant actor on the international scene, for what concerns economic and political decisions and leadership.

However, while the BRICS have succeeded in developing a voice on the international scene, together with their exceptional economic growth, they face internal divergences that prevent them from becoming a relevant political actor capable of creating an alternative global governance system. Among other scholars, this is the analysis of Urvashi Sarkar in one of his articles entitled *“BRICS: An Opportunity for a Transformative South?”*. Indeed, he wrote:

*“BRICS is not a radical revolutionary grouping that seeks to dramatically overturn the existing system of global governance. Rather, it is a conservative attempt by Southern powerhouses to earn what they see as their rightful place on the world stage”*<sup>67</sup>.

According to some authors, the BRICS do not seem to have enough cooperative ambitions to become the equivalent of the G7 or even to create an alternative to the IMF or the World Bank. This is particularly due to a lack of internal alignment in economic and political decisions, which is emphasized by this sentence: *“BRICS have been marked by problems similar to traditional North-South cooperation, such as the definition of initiatives based on geopolitical, economic, investment and trade promotion interests of the more powerful players”*<sup>68</sup>. Another source of conflict between the BRICS revolves around strategic rivalry and interests, indeed, *“Russia, China, and India, in particular, have overlapping spheres of influence, all wanting to exert their dominance as regional powers in Asia”*<sup>69</sup>.

Contrarily to the Northern and wealthy countries, the BRICS countries also face national challenges that prevent them from becoming an international leader and model. These socio-economic challenges lay in poverty, unemployment, inequality, violence, repression, and many other factors that affect the development of their societies<sup>70</sup>. They represent also different economic markets and political models, which makes it difficult for them to agree on common policies. While Brazil has experienced a *“lower growth rate than the BRICS average”*<sup>71</sup>,

---

<sup>66</sup> Sarkar.

<sup>67</sup> Sarkar.

<sup>68</sup> Sarkar.

<sup>69</sup> Lowe, ‘The Rise of the BRICS in the Global Economy’.

<sup>70</sup> Sarkar, ‘BRICS’.

<sup>71</sup> Lowe, ‘The Rise of the BRICS in the Global Economy’.

Russia, besides having the highest GDP per capita of the BRICS initial members, faces geopolitical tensions with most of the Western European countries after the breaking of the war in Ukraine. On the other hand, Russia managed to increase its cooperation with Eastern and Southern countries, such as China. Poverty and demography are the two main challenges of India, while China faces an “*overheated economy, unmanageable debts, and the possibility of a serious economic crash*”<sup>72</sup>. Lastly, South Africa’s challenges are violence and unemployment among the black community. Thus, these countries overlook extremely diverse national issues which might be, and should be, their priority, consequently putting the world governance further back.

To assess the importance of the BRICS countries in the international system and their potential to become world leaders and models, it might be relevant to analyze whether they are considered democratic, as democracy is the most accepted and recognized regime to gain power and to be credible on the international scene. Being a democracy is often linked with better diplomatic relationships, and thus enhances the state to become a relevant superpower. A global democratic ranking can be found in Annex 2<sup>73</sup>. Indeed, we acknowledge that in 2022, Brazil had a score of 6.78 out of 10 (10 being the most democratic. For instance, Norway is often considered the most democratic country and holds a score of 9.81), South Africa had 7.05, and India was 7.04. These scores are quite high, especially when we compare to the USA, having a score of 7.85. However, Russia holds 2.28 and China 1.94. These two low scores may be a further explanation of why the BRICS might not be able to impose their governance, as they are seen as unexemplary political models. The external image it reflects is important for a state to become a politically relevant actor. Indeed, most International Relations scholars stated that democracies are better at maintaining their international commitments. For instance, Kurt Taylor Gaubatz affirmed that “*an examination of the durability of international military alliances confirms that those between democratic states have endured longer than either alliances between nondemocracies or alliances between democracies and nondemocracies*”<sup>74</sup>.

While, with time, the initial countries composing the BRICS have managed to impose themselves in a certain way by creating international organizations and by weighing more and more on the international market and diplomacy, they face challenges to affirm their desire. However, their enlargement towards five new countries might change this dynamic and help them in becoming a relevant political actor. Moreover, the enlargement is mainly focused on

---

<sup>72</sup> Lowe.

<sup>73</sup> Annex 2

<sup>74</sup> Kurt Taylor Gaubatz, ‘Democratic States and Commitment in International Relations’, *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (1996): 109–39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2707000>.

the Middle East, which is a growing region, especially in geostrategic interests. From now on, some members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) are also members of the BRICS. This is the case with Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia<sup>75</sup>. This is a clear opportunity for the BRICS in their capacity to influence decisions, particularly in the economic and energy sector. This economic power of the BRICS+ is an obvious tool to influence global political, economic, diplomatic, and strategic policies. The economic and energy interests will be analyzed in the following section (Section 2), while for now, we will focus on the political strategies and positions of the former BRICS towards the Middle East.

## **2. Putting together countries from different regions of the world: the Middle East.**

The Middle East is probably the region with the most tensions and conflicts in the world. This is due to many global strategic interests and resources, such as enormous wells of oil. Therefore, it is a strategic economic decision for the BRICS to enlarge their membership to almost only countries of the Middle East. Moreover, these countries share lots of similarities with Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, for what concerns economic interests in oil production and oil export, and political goals to become great powers on the international scene. More precisely, we will analyze the specific links between Saudi Arabia and the three main BRICS countries, namely Russia, China, and India. These common interests and similarities might also be emphasized by the enlargement of membership, which may allow more cooperation and agreements among the ten countries.

### **1.2.1. Political coordination and strategies among the BRICS+.**

The BRICS+ countries, beyond their divergences, share common political goals to develop their economic influence in the world, as well as to create an alternative to the West with a Southern and Eastern political influence. All ten countries share the same goal: strengthen their position in the world by cooperating. In this paragraph, the objective is to check to what extent they share the same objectives and strategies.

---

<sup>75</sup> 'OPEC : About Us'.



We have seen in the previous subsection how the BRICS five original countries have managed to develop a common strategy with the creation of international organizations. It seems to be relevant to reassess what are the BRICS strategies as defined in 2015 in their official document *The Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership*<sup>76</sup>: *“striving for inclusive economic growth to eradicate poverty, tackle unemployment and promote social inclusion (the BRICS core objective); consolidating efforts to ensure a higher quality of growth by promoting innovative economic development based on advanced technology and skills development; striving for further engagement and cooperation with countries that are not members of the BRICS”*<sup>77</sup>. The formulation of these purposes allows us to identify three main areas of cooperation which, as we will see later on, are similar to Middle Eastern countries. The first one is *“economic cooperation”*<sup>78</sup> which has been brought about through trade and investment agreements, such as the BRICS Business Council, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and the New Development Bank. The second one can be referred to as the *“exchange between people”*<sup>79</sup> with the existence of common policies over culture, sport, education, and cinema, developed thanks to the establishment of specific institutions and multilateral forums like the Youth Diplomats’ Forum, the BRICS Civil Forum, and the Media Forum. The third one is *“political and security cooperation”*<sup>80</sup>, which has the declared objective of creating a more balanced and multilateral world, as we argued in the previous subsection.

On the other hand, it is necessary to look at the political goals of the Middle East to assess whether they might be coherent and easily mergeable with the ones of the BRICS founders. We know that the Middle East is a region of tension as *“Geopolitics is the motivation behind most international conflicts, as countries seek to advance their strategic interests and protect their national security in a world where power and resources are limited”*<sup>81</sup>. Those conflicts are often linked to very valuable and with a high enrichment potential, natural resources, and strategic locations as the *“competition for the waters of the Nile Rivers”*<sup>82</sup>, the *“conflicts over key Middle Eastern port cities”*<sup>83</sup> and the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein in 1990 for territorial and oil wells. Many conflicts in the region have been driven or exploited due to religious interests or disagreements. Religion is one of the reasons explaining the long-lasting opposition between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shiite Iran. However, these countries have understood their potential to be

---

<sup>76</sup> ‘The Strategy for BRICS Economic Strategy’, accessed 15 February 2024, <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/150709-partnership-strategy-en.html>.

<sup>77</sup> ‘What Is BRICS and What Are the Goals of This Alliance | TV BRICS, 25.01.23’, TV BRICS, accessed 14 January 2024, <https://tvbrics.com/en/news/what-is-brics-and-what-are-the-goals-of-this-alliance/>.

<sup>78</sup> ‘What Is BRICS and What Are the Goals of This Alliance | TV BRICS, 25.01.23’.

<sup>79</sup> ‘What Is BRICS and What Are the Goals of This Alliance | TV BRICS, 25.01.23’.

<sup>80</sup> ‘What Is BRICS and What Are the Goals of This Alliance | TV BRICS, 25.01.23’.

<sup>81</sup> ‘The Quantum Politics of the Middle East’, Middle East Institute, accessed 14 January 2024, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/quantum-politics-middle-east>.

<sup>82</sup> ‘The Quantum Politics of the Middle East’.

<sup>83</sup> ‘The Quantum Politics of the Middle East’.

leaders in some domains and decided to agree on economic policies, and collectively safeguard their shared interests and the main source of their wealth: oil. This is the core reason for the creation of OPEC, as we will analyze it more in the following section (Section 2). Moreover, we can refer to the “*Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements*”<sup>84</sup> which is a bilateral agreement between the UAE and India signed in 2022 to deepen economic and strategic ties by simplifying the trading rules and customs procedures and lowering or eliminating the tariffs to develop market access. This is a clear sign of the will to cooperate between the two countries, highlighting even more their common objectives. There is also the creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council<sup>85</sup> (GCC), with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait, since 1981 with objectives of a customs union, a common market, and a common currency. The common market was launched in 2008, the customs union was finalized in 2015. The Arab states affirmed their will to develop their influence through soft power and by hosting international events. Consistently with this purpose, Qatar hosted the 2022 Football World Cup, and some Formula 1 competitions will be located in the region for the 2024 season, in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, in Sakhir in Bahrain, in Doha in Qatar, and finally in Abu Dhabi<sup>86</sup>. These events are also important in the inclusion of such countries in the international dynamics.

Thus, the posture and actions of the countries of the Middle East, especially the UAE and Saudi Arabia, seem suitable and ready to embrace the postulate of common political and economic goals also when considering the initial BRICS countries. The Middle Eastern countries mentioned are seeking new economic and political cooperation and aim to become relevant enough on the international scene to be recognized as part of the main actors in international decisions. Thus, the merger between those countries reflects their desire to enhance their common political goals. Despite disagreements and differences, their will to develop an international voice of the Global South probably brings them together.

### 1.2.2. Saudi Arabia’s relation with the singular BRICS countries.

---

<sup>84</sup> ‘Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements’, Ministry of Economy UAE, accessed 14 January 2024, <https://www.moec.gov.ae>.

<sup>85</sup> ‘العربية الخليج لدول التعاون لمجلس العامة الأمانة’, accessed 14 January 2024, <https://www.gcc-sg.org/en-us/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Formula 1 Announces Calendar for 2024’, accessed 14 January 2024, <https://www.formula1.com/en/latest/article.formula-1-announces-calendar-for-2024.XL3c5Cxi0Z0QzPrUu5izL.html>.

As the thesis focuses on the special case of Saudi Arabia, we will now analyze what were the ties linking together Saudi Arabia and the five BRICS countries, which led to the accession of this country into the group. While it is difficult to find relevant sources assessing the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the BRICS as a group, there are many regarding the relations between the Middle Eastern monarchy and China, Russia, and India. These forms of cooperation might be strengthened in the framework of the BRICS+ while for now, they represent more ties between single countries.

Firstly, the relationship between China and Saudi Arabia is questioned by Naser M. Al-Tamimi, a prominent scholar in Economics and specialist in the Middle East and energy interests, considering whether it is a “*marriage of convenience*”<sup>87</sup> or a “*strategic alliance*”<sup>88</sup>. As Saudi Arabia is one of the main producers of oil, their relations are revolved around it, as “*oil trade is at the heart of Sino-Saudi relations*”<sup>89</sup>, but there might be also issues of a challenge to the “*American order in the Middle East*”<sup>90</sup> or even to “*provide Saudi Arabia with a political and military alternative to America*”<sup>91</sup>. The author further affirms that “*it is unlikely that China would replace the US as a political, let alone military protector of Saudi Arabia*”<sup>92</sup>, referring to the long-lasting political and military relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia, to which we will come back in Section 2 and Section 3. To what concerns economic interactions, the bilateral trade between China and Saudi Arabia cannot be denied. Indeed, in 2021, Saudi Arabia exported \$48.7B to China, which was mostly Crude Petroleum for the amount of \$38.8B<sup>93</sup>. These exports have increased of 20.4% in comparison to 1995<sup>94</sup>. Saudi Arabia is the first Chinese oil supplier, “*making up 18% of China’s total crude oil purchases*”<sup>95</sup> in 2022. However, in 2023, Russia overtook Saudi Arabia’s place and became the Chinese top oil supplier<sup>96</sup>. On the other side, China has exported \$29B to Saudi Arabia, mainly in broadcasting equipment, cars, and light fixtures, with an increase of 14.3% in compared to 1995<sup>97</sup>. Some Chinese and Saudi companies in the

---

<sup>87</sup> Yitzhak Shichor, review of *Review of China-Saudi Arabia Relations, 1990-2012: Marriage of Convenience or Strategic Alliance?*, by Naser M. Al-Tamimi, *Middle East Journal* 68, no. 4 (2014): 649–51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43698193>.

<sup>88</sup> *Shichor*.

<sup>89</sup> *Shichor*.

<sup>90</sup> *Shichor*.

<sup>91</sup> *Shichor*.

<sup>92</sup> *Shichor*.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Saudi Arabia (SAU) and China (CHN) Trade’, The Observatory of Economic Complexity, accessed 15 January 2024, <https://oec.world/en>.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Saudi Arabia (SAU) and China (CHN) Trade’.

<sup>95</sup> ‘Saudi-China Energy, Trade and Investment Ties’, *Reuters*, 6 December 2022, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/world/saudi-china-energy-trade-investment-ties-2022-12-06/>.

<sup>96</sup> ‘Top Oil Exporter Saudi Arabia Loads Up on Russian Diesel’, *Bloomberg.Com*, 17 March 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-03-17/top-oil-exporter-saudi-arabia-loads-up-on-russian-diesel>.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Saudi Arabia (SAU) and China (CHN) Trade’.

financial and military sectors have concluded agreements, which participate in the development of the relationship between both states.

Secondly, the ties between Saudi Arabia and Russia forecast what we can call cooperation, while the history between the two is also made of crises and accusations. They met in 2015 in Sochi, but this meeting “*did not result in a signing of military or economic deals*”<sup>98</sup>. However, their diplomatic relations emphasize a will of both sides to deepen ties, “*even though it is now heavily dependent and defined by the Syrian crisis*”<sup>99</sup>. Furthermore, what links Russia and Saudi Arabia is the oil trade, but with exports from Russia mainly, while Saudi Arabia produces enough oil for its own needs. Still, “*Saudi Arabia imported a record of 910.000 metric tons of fuel oil from Russia in June*”<sup>100</sup> 2023<sup>101</sup>. Russia exported \$2.21B to Saudi Arabia, mainly in refined petroleum for \$892M, wheat and barley. These exports have known an increase of 9.82% compared to 1995. These oil trading links are reinforced by the OPEC+ relations, which refer to the OPEC members and non-OPEC members as Russia. Saudi Arabia and Russia are the two great producers of oil, as Saudi Arabia produces 10.4 million barrels per day for a total of 28.7 from OPEC. Russia produces 10.3 million barrels per day for a total of 16.5 from non-OPEC members<sup>102</sup>.

Thirdly, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and India is important as they represent “*the two dominant member countries of their respective regional blocks*”<sup>103</sup> regarding their economic power and considering the South-Asia region for India. They are important trade partners. India’s exports to Saudi Arabia represent \$8.69B, the main products being refined petroleum, rice, and hydrocarbons<sup>104</sup>. The Saudi exports to India represent \$25.6B, the main products being crude petroleum, petroleum gas, and refined petroleum<sup>105</sup>. In 2019 they agreed upon a

---

<sup>98</sup> Maxim Suchkov, ‘Contemporary Russia-Saudi Relations: Building a Bridge of Cooperation over the Abyss of Discrepancies’, *Iran & the Caucasus* 20, no. 2 (2016): 237–51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26548893>.

<sup>99</sup> Suchkov.

<sup>100</sup> Jeslyn Lerh, ‘Saudi Arabia Imports Record Russian Fuel Oil in June as Trade Grows’, *Reuters*, 13 July 2023, sec. Energy, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/saudi-arabia-imports-record-russian-fuel-oil-june-trade-grows-2023-07-13/>.

<sup>101</sup> Annex 3

<sup>102</sup> ‘What Is OPEC+ and How Is It Different from OPEC? - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)’, accessed 15 January 2024, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=56420>.

<sup>103</sup> Muhammad Azhar, ‘Economic Cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia: Performance and Prospects’, *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 2 (2008): 323–34, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40262573>.

<sup>104</sup> ‘India (IND) and Saudi Arabia (SAU) Trade’, The Observatory of Economic Complexity, accessed 15 January 2024, <https://oec.world/en>.

<sup>105</sup> ‘India (IND) and Saudi Arabia (SAU) Trade’.

*“Strategic Partnership Council”*<sup>106</sup> for *“energy security, trade, investment, defense and security, healthcare, food security, culture and community welfare”*<sup>107</sup>.

Thus, Saudi Arabia maintains close bilateral relations with at least the three larger countries of the BRICS: China, Russia, and India. These ties revolve mainly around economic agreements and trading interests. However, economic cooperation often leads to diplomatic peaceful relations and the will to maintain these relations. Saudi Arabia maintains also diplomatic, political, and economic relations with the four other new BRICS members, namely Iran, Egypt, and the UAE. These relations are emphasized by their geographical closeness as well as their economic interests, especially in the oil sector with the OPEC organization. What brings those countries together is also their political regime model – while there are also differences -, as they reject the democratic-republican Western mode, and their will to defend the interests of Islam through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation<sup>108</sup>, as they are Islamic states. Indeed, Russia is considered an *“oligarchic authoritarianism”*<sup>109</sup>, China as an authoritarian regime, and Saudi Arabia as an absolute monarchy.

In conclusion, while the ties are currently mainly linking single countries together, with bilateral trade and agreements, these similarities and these links that bring the five initial members and the five new members of the BRICS are all we can understand as the reasons for this enlargement. We can guess that a country with totally different political goals and economic interests might not have been invited to join the BRICS in the first place. The new BRICS+ group may thus deepen even more their ties, to become a relevant organization on the international scale.

---

<sup>106</sup> ‘Embassy of India, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia : India-Saudi Bilateral Relations’, accessed 15 January 2024, <https://www.coiriyadh.gov.in/page/india-saudi-bilateral-relations/>.

<sup>107</sup> Statesman News Service, ‘India, Saudi Will Take Strategic Partnership to next Level: PM’, *Asia News Network* (blog), 12 September 2023, <https://asianews.network/india-saudi-will-take-strategic-partnership-to-next-level-pm/>.

<sup>108</sup> ‘Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs’, accessed 15 February 2024, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/OIC.en.mfa>.

<sup>109</sup> Karine Clément, ‘Russie : un autoritarisme oligarchique’, in *Manuel indocile de sciences sociales*, Hors collection Sciences Humaines (Paris: La Découverte, 2019), 613–23, <https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.coper.2019.01.0613>.

## **Section 2 : Economic and strategic interests to the enlargement**

The Middle East is the cradle for many economic interests, particularly oil ones. This resource is strategic to control and is thus an opportunity for the five BRICS countries. It could potentially lead to the restructuring of the international economy, still today dominated by Western countries, under US hegemony. Indeed, in the Second section, we will analyze the common features of the BRICS members (2.1.1.) and then challenge its potential to disrupt the existing economic order (2.1.2.). Moreover, we will focus on the specific oil industry and analyze its main features (2.2.1.) and finally, we will draw the current situation linking – or delinking – the West and the BRICS within oil matters (2.2.2).

### **1. The potential future of these expanding economies.**

Brazil, Russia, India, South Africa, and China were all considered emerging economies at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when they decided to create a cooperation group, the BRICS. Indeed, their GDPs have evolved exceptionally way, especially the Chinese one. These characteristics were promising for their influence on the world economy. However, the BRICS still struggle a lot with national inequalities and poverty, which prevent them from becoming the first world's economic power. Once more, the enlargement of five new countries, especially Saudi Arabia, aims at strengthening their economic power.

#### **2.1.1. Increasing GDP, incomes, and standards of living.**

Among many differences between the BRICS+, they share one common feature: their recent and impressive fast economic development. Indeed, in opposition to the Western domination countries such as the US and Europe, the BRICS countries were considered “*emerging markets*”<sup>110</sup> and not completely developed economically. Developing countries are often defined as “*a country with a relatively low standard of living, underdeveloped industrial base, and moderate to low Human Development Index (HDI)*”<sup>111</sup>. Accordingly, in this paragraph, we will

---

<sup>110</sup> ‘Jim O’Neill: Is the Emerging World Still Emerging? – IMF F&D’, accessed 18 January 2024, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2021/06/how-to-build-a-better-data-economy-haksar.htm>.

<sup>111</sup> ‘What Is a Developing Country | Educational Pathways International’, accessed 15 February 2024, <https://www.educationalpathwaysinternational.org/what-is-a-developing-country/>.

analyze their economic performances and positions vis-à-vis the other countries, to assess their economic weight and thus their potential weight as an economic cooperation group.

In 2022, in terms of GDP per capita, the United Arab Emirates reached sixth place in the ranking, the US is ranked eighth, Saudi Arabia twentieth, Russia fifty-second, and China seventy-second<sup>112</sup>. We can highlight the fact that the UAE and Saudi Arabia seem to be leaders of the Middle East in terms of economic development which might be extremely beneficial for the BRICS+ group. Nevertheless, these figures are the rankings of the GDP per capita, in which we need to consider the very different demographical situations among the 10 countries. Indeed, if we only look at the GDP in 2022 then the ranking is different with the US and China at the first and second place. India comes fifth, Russia eighth, Brazil eleventh. While these more populated countries managed to reach the top of the ranking, Saudi Arabia maintains its place at the seventeenth place. Thus, in comparison with the rest of the world, and especially to occidental countries that have had a developed economy for decades or even centuries, the BRICS+ countries have managed to become as relevant and weight as any other developed country. The concept of developed countries, and by extension of developing countries, comes from the development theory that considers “*inequalities in standards of living, inequalities in income/wealth, health, and nutrition*”<sup>113</sup>. However, the economic leader country of the group is China<sup>114</sup>, with a 2021 GDP worth “*more than double that the other four BRICS combined: almost \$18 trillion compared with Brazil (\$1.6 trillion), Russia (\$1.8 trillion), India (\$3.2 trillion), and South Africa (\$400 billion)*”<sup>115</sup>. The US remains the first GDP in the world with \$23 trillion and “*the largest in the world in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms*”<sup>116</sup>. Purchasing Power Parities are defined by the OECD as “*rates of currency conversion that equalize the purchasing power of different currencies by eliminating the differences in price levels between countries*”<sup>117</sup>. “*PPPs are simply price relatives that the ratio of the prices in national currencies of the same good or service in different country*”<sup>118</sup>. In the economic development of the BRICS, we highlight an important part of the world’s largest companies that come from the BRICS countries, mostly from China. For instance, State Grid comes in third place, China National Petroleum in fifth place,

---

<sup>112</sup> ‘GDP per Capita - Worldometer’, accessed 18 January 2024, <https://www.worldometers.info/gdp/gdp-per-capita/>.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Concepts of Inequality’, accessed 15 February 2024, [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/wess/wess\\_dev\\_issues/dsp\\_policy\\_01.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/wess/wess_dev_issues/dsp_policy_01.pdf).

<sup>114</sup> Annex 4

<sup>115</sup> ‘The BRICS Countries: Where next and What Impact on the Global Economy?’, *Economics Observatory* (blog), accessed 18 January 2024, <https://www.economicsobservatory.com/the-brics-countries-where-next-and-what-impact-on-the-global-economy>.

<sup>116</sup> ‘The BRICS Countries’.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Purchasing Power Parities - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) - OCDE’, accessed 18 January 2024, <https://www.oecd.org/fr/sdd/prix-ppa/purchasingpowerparities-frequentlyaskedquestionsfaqs.htm>.

<sup>118</sup> ‘Purchasing Power Parities - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) - OCDE’.

and Sinopec Group in sixth place<sup>119</sup>. In the 2023 Fortune Global 500 ranking, the second place is occupied by the Saudi Arabian company Saudi Aramco<sup>120</sup>. This is also proof of the importance of Saudi Arabia in today's world economy, mostly thanks to its oil industry as Saudi Aramco is an oil company.

These economic developments led to a needed enhancement of the incomes and thus the living standards of the national populations. However, poverty, with the lack of healthcare and economic sufficiency, is still one of the major challenges of these countries, especially India and China. Reducing inequalities is essential to lower *“crime rates, stronger trust and social cohesion and better population health”*<sup>121</sup> and for *“stability, attracting investment and well-functioning government institutions”*<sup>122</sup>. The 2012 Oxfam study highlighted that *“income inequality is increasing in almost all countries in the G20, even while it is falling in many low income and lower – middle income countries”*<sup>123</sup>. However, according to Milanovic's calculation in 2012, *“global inequality is roughly the same today as it was in the last 1980s and is not decreasing”*<sup>124</sup>. Inequality concerns both the inequality of opportunity and of outcome<sup>125</sup>. The income inequalities remain well above the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), while we still observe a slight decrease in national income inequalities in each BRICS country, except Brazil<sup>126</sup>. The “Divided We Stand” 2011 OECD study on global inequalities identified four explanations of inequalities in developing countries: *“Labour force inequalities”*; *“Spatial divides”*; *“Gaps in education”*; and *“Barriers to employment and career advancement for women”*<sup>127</sup>. Moreover, national companies became international ones and account today for a significant share of the world's largest companies, as is the case for Tencent or Alibaba<sup>128</sup>.

Thus, all the BRICS countries and the five new members, especially Saudi Arabia, have gone through exceptional economic growth that completely changed the features of the world economy and the world market. While these countries weigh more and more on the international economic system, it proves the relevance of the BRICS+ group as an economic leader, and as the top companies of the world emphasize. However, while it could have

---

<sup>119</sup> ‘Global 500’, Fortune, accessed 18 January 2024, <https://fortune.com/ranking/global500/>.

<sup>120</sup> ‘Global 500’.

<sup>121</sup> ‘Inequalities Matters: BRICS Inequalities Fact Sheet’, accessed 18 January 2024, <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/276312/ib-inequality-matters-brics-140313-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

<sup>122</sup> ‘Inequalities Matters: BRICS Inequalities Fact Sheet’.

<sup>123</sup> ‘Inequalities Matters: BRICS Inequalities Fact Sheet’.

<sup>124</sup> ‘Inequalities Matters: BRICS Inequalities Fact Sheet’.

<sup>125</sup> ‘Concepts of Inequality’.

<sup>126</sup> Annex 5

<sup>127</sup> ‘Inequalities Matters: BRICS Inequalities Fact Sheet’.

<sup>128</sup> ‘Largest Chinese Companies by Market Capitalization’, accessed 12 January 2024, <https://companiesmarketcap.com/china/largest-companies-in-china-by-market-cap/>.



reduced drastically the inequalities and thus the poverty in these countries, the level of inequalities has remained the same as in the 1980s. All these challenges question the potential of the ten countries, both individually and as a group, to overcome the EU and the US.

### 2.1.2. Economic health comparing the West: could they overcome the existing economic order?

While we acknowledge an increase in the BRICS' GDP, we have also highlighted how impacted they are by inequalities. This is why we can question to what extent the BRICS+ could overcome the EU or the US in economic terms. Nevertheless, the economic sustainability of a country is not only linked to its level of GDP but also the living standards of the population, the repartition of the wealth among the people, and the technological development for instance. Still, the five members of the BRICS represent *"40% of the global population and a quarter of global GDP"*<sup>129</sup>. We acknowledge that the BRICS share of the global economy *"has increased from 8% in 2001 to 26% today, while the share of the G7 countries has fallen from 65% to 43%"*<sup>130</sup>.

On the one hand, even if we consider the development of the BRICS also through the creation of new international organizations, authors as Jamie Shea, a specialist in Peace and Security and former Deputy Assistant at NATO affirms that *"the BRICS has failed to be a major player in the global diplomatic or economic scene"*<sup>131</sup>. This is essentially due to a lack of institutionalization with a permanent structure and agenda. It is also due to the heterogeneity of the BRICS with *"divisions and conflicting priorities"*<sup>132</sup>. Also, the economic growth of these countries needs to be questioned as their *"growth rates have slowed considerably. On average, they have been less than 1% annually for Russia, Brazil, and South Africa, and around 6% for China and India since 2013"*<sup>133</sup>. Also, due to the war in Ukraine, Russia faces economic sanctions and the *"rouble has lost nearly 30% of its value against the US dollar"*<sup>134</sup>. This emphasizes doubt in the rouble and Russia's capacity to maintain itself as an economic great power. Moreover, China faces economic difficulties with Evergrande's bankruptcy, as being the second largest real estate company in China, and *"a rise in unemployment among 16- to 30-year-olds to just under 30%"*<sup>135</sup>.

---

<sup>129</sup> EPIC, "The BRICS Are Back, but for What Purpose?", *Friends of Europe* (blog), 4 September 2023, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/critical-thinking-the-brics-are-back-but-for-what-purpose/>.

<sup>130</sup> EPIC.

<sup>131</sup> EPIC.

<sup>132</sup> EPIC.

<sup>133</sup> EPIC.

<sup>134</sup> EPIC.

<sup>135</sup> EPIC.

Another feature of the low risk for the BRICS to overcome the current dominant economies is their lack of attraction to “foreign talent”<sup>136</sup>, in opposition to the very attractive United States. The capacity of a state to attract new talents is a specificity of developed countries. Developed countries are defined regarding their income per capita, level of industrialization, standards of living, technological infrastructure, and level of HDI<sup>137</sup>. Indeed, for instance, “California, with a population of 40 million, has a GDP equal to India’s with less than 3% of its population”<sup>138</sup> as well as “New York City has a GDP greater than that of Saudi Arabia, three times that of the United Arab Emirates, four times of South Africa, and at least ten times that of Ethiopia”<sup>139</sup>. Furthermore, what concerns military power, the US is still the number one power, regarding GDP (\$25 462 700 000 000 in 2022), GDP per capita (\$75 269 in 2022) and share of the world GDP (25.32% in 2022).

On the other hand, one domain in which the BRICS might want to challenge the US to potentially overcome the first economic power in the world is the monetary sector. Indeed, the BRICS has been said to be working on “creating its own currency”<sup>140</sup> to dethrone the US dollar, the principal currency in the world and used “in more than 80 percent of international trade”<sup>141</sup>. The desire to develop a new currency is accordingly tied up with the growing tensions between some countries of the BRICS and the Western countries, especially the US. We could think of the tensions going on with the war in Ukraine for instance, as we will analyze more in Section 1 of Chapter 2.

Thus, the BRICS organization, even if it will be strengthened by enlarging its membership to 10 countries, doesn’t seem in a favorable position to overcome – or even to be a “strategic threat to the United States”<sup>142</sup> – the current economic order and hegemony. Indeed, the alliance of the BRICS will probably help China to develop its international economic power, but “Beijing is just learning how to build long-lasting alliances, Washington has centuries worth of experience in spearheading and managing complicated but mutually beneficial bilateral and multilateral partnerships”<sup>143</sup>. The BRICS group might seem like an opportunity for single countries to develop individually,

---

<sup>136</sup> George Monastiriakos, ‘The BRICS Is Not a Strategic Threat to the United States’, *Geopolitical Monitor* (blog), 7 September 2023, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/the-brics-is-not-a-strategic-threat-to-the-united-states/>.

<sup>137</sup> ‘What Is a Developed Economy? Definition, How It Works, HDI Index’, Investopedia, accessed 15 February 2024, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/d/developed-economy.asp>.

<sup>138</sup> Monastiriakos, ‘The BRICS Is Not a Strategic Threat to the United States’.

<sup>139</sup> *Monastiriakos*.

<sup>140</sup> Sumayya Ismail, ‘Can BRICS Dethrone the US Dollar? It’ll Be an Uphill Climb, Experts Say’, Al Jazeera, accessed 19 January 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/8/24/can-brics-dethrone-the-us-dollar-itll-be-an-uphill-climb-experts-say>.

<sup>141</sup> *Ismail*.

<sup>142</sup> Monastiriakos, ‘The BRICS Is Not a Strategic Threat to the United States’.

<sup>143</sup> *Monastiriakos*.

thanks to the support of the group, rather than the group becoming an actual international actor itself. The hegemonic power of the US and its allies, particularly the EU, is quite not questioned at all by the emergence and then development of the BRICS+. However, they may have one strategic tool to influence international economic policies: oil.

## **2. The oil industry: a strategic resource to control.**

The constant and increasing need for energy production and consumption leads to the development of world energy. While many new energy technologies emerge, *“in the long-term perspective, fossil fuels will remain the most important source of energy, especially in production countries”*<sup>144</sup>. As the oil demand never stops increasing, it is a strategic resource to possess in a territory and to control. The production of much oil gives strategic economic power to one country, together with a capacity to influence prices and policies. Moreover, the OPEC – and the OPEC+ - organization controls most of the oil production which lets the Western countries in between dependency and the needed transformation towards sustainable energy.

### **2.2.1. Synthesis of the oil trade today with the main producers and exporters.**

The three largest oil-producing and exporting countries in the world are – from the first to the third - the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. Still today, *“the oil and gas complex will remain important for the entire world community since it occupies 60% of the global energy consumption”*<sup>145</sup>. Indeed, the US yearly oil production is 14,837,639,510 barrels per day; Saudi Arabia’s is 12,402,761,040; and Russia’s is 11,262,746,200<sup>146</sup>. Then comes China in fourth position, the United Arab Emirates are eighth, and Brazil in ninth for instance. Thus, all countries of the BRICS, are identified as major oil producers, except for the first one which is the US. On the other hand, the top oil consumers are the United States first, then China, India, Japan, Russia, and Saudi Arabia<sup>147</sup>. The US daily oil consumption is equal to 19,687,287 barrels which corresponds to 20.3% of the world share. Then China’s is equal to 12,791,553

---

<sup>144</sup> I. V. Provornaya et al., ‘Features of the Petroleum Products Pricing in Russia, in the USA, and Saudi Arabia’, *Energy Reports, Technologies and Materials for Renewable Energy, Environment and Sustainability*, 6 (1 November 2020): 514–22, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.egy.2020.09.029>.

<sup>145</sup> *Provornaya et al.*

<sup>146</sup> ‘Oil Production by Country - Worldometer’.

<sup>147</sup> ‘Oil Consumption by Country - Worldometer’.

corresponding to 13.2% of the world share, while China is only fourth in the producing countries<sup>148</sup>. Taking the example of a European country, France is thirteenth in the ranking of oil consumption while France is only forty-third in the production ranking<sup>149</sup>.

Saudi Arabia has the second oil reserve and oil production in the world and is sixth in the world for oil consumption<sup>150</sup>. Saudi Arabia is part of the OPEC organization and is the first producer by far with 10.4 million barrels per day<sup>151</sup>, before Iraq and the United Arab Emirates. There is also the OPEC+ organization which is composed of OPEC members and non-OPEC participants, Russia comes right after Saudi Arabia with a production of 10.3 million barrels per day<sup>152</sup>. According to its official website, the mission of the OPEC organization is to:

*“Coordinate and unify the petroleum policies of its Member Countries and ensure the stabilization of oil markets in order to secure an efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consumers, a steady income to producers and a fair return on capital for those investing in the petroleum industry”<sup>153</sup>.*

Accordingly, this group of countries has the power to influence prices and policies in the oil trade.

Some studies have identified the main factors influencing the oil pricing of the domestic markets of Russia, the US, and Saudi Arabia:

- “1. The most significant factor in the formation of prices for oil products in Russia is the state tax policy in the analyzed industry;*
- 2. The prices of oil and gas products in the domestic market of Saudi Arabia are more dependent on the cost of oil production and refining costs;*
- 3. Prices of petroleum products in the US domestic market are closely related to the cost of oil production”<sup>154</sup>.*

In the OPEC organization, the average annual OPEC crude oil price has largely increased from 1960 to 2023. Indeed, as we can see in the Annex 6 graph, the average price in US dollars was 11 dollars per barrel, compared to 110 in 2012, which is a ten-times increase<sup>155</sup>.

---

<sup>148</sup> ‘Oil Consumption by Country - Worldometer’.

<sup>149</sup> ‘Oil Production by Country - Worldometer’.

<sup>150</sup> ‘Saudi Arabia Oil Reserves, Production and Consumption Statistics - Worldometer’, accessed 20 January 2024, <https://www.worldometers.info/oil/saudi-arabia-oil/>.

<sup>151</sup> ‘What Is OPEC+ and How Is It Different from OPEC?’

<sup>152</sup> Annex 6

<sup>153</sup> ‘OPEC : Our Mission’, accessed 20 January 2024, [https://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/about\\_us/23.htm](https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/23.htm).

<sup>154</sup> Provornaya et al., ‘Features of the Petroleum Products Pricing in Russia, in the USA, and Saudi Arabia’.

<sup>155</sup> ‘OPEC Crude Oil Price Statistics Annually 1960-2023’, Statista, accessed 20 January 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262858/change-in-opec-crude-oil-prices-since-1960/>.

In 2023, the average price for one barrel is about 83 US dollars<sup>156</sup>. Oil prices also fluctuate due to international events and are affected frequently by oil crises and oil shocks, like in 1971 when the Bretton Woods system was stopped, and the Yom-Kippur War started in 1973. Also, the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 led to the second oil crisis. The third oil crisis happened in 2008 after the *“growing demand from China, India, Brazil and other emerging economies set in motion an upward price trend that accelerated suddenly in the first half of 2008 at the time of the global economic crisis”*<sup>157</sup>. The price of the barrel went up from \$96 in January 2008 to \$144 in July 2008<sup>158</sup>. Oil prices fell in 2014 and 2015 and started to recover in 2016, *“due to the decision of Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Qatar, and Russia to freeze production”*<sup>159</sup>. Recently, between the fourth trimester of 2022 and the first trimester of 2023, fuel prices have decreased in South Africa, Turkey, and Morocco while it has a little increase in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates<sup>160161</sup>.

Thus, the oil industry in the world is pretty much concentrated among a few countries and they are pretty much all in the OPEC organization, apart from the US and Russia. Saudi Arabia is one of the most important oil producers and thus its entry into the BRICS, together with the UAE, may change the geopolitics and the strategic issues on oil. Being such an essential resource for all countries in the world, the major producers have the power to influence prices and oil policies. Indeed, the control of such a resource is crucial and the BRICS+ may strengthen their power in this domain.

### 2.2.2. The BRICS versus the West in their oil needs: the West in between dependency and transformation

As we have seen in the previous part of the development, the first oil consumer in the world is the United States. Then, the following most important consumers are the larger members of the BRICS+ countries, and right after there are European and Western countries such as Germany (10<sup>th</sup>), Canada (9<sup>th</sup>), France (13<sup>th</sup>), and the UK (15<sup>th</sup>) for instance<sup>162</sup>. When

---

<sup>156</sup> Annex 7

<sup>157</sup> ‘A Brief History of Oil Prices’, accessed 20 January 2024, <https://www.planete-energies.com/en/media/article/brief-history-oil-prices>.

<sup>158</sup> ‘A Brief History of Oil Prices’.

<sup>159</sup> ‘A Brief History of Oil Prices’.

<sup>160</sup> Intratec Solutions, ‘Fuel Oil Price | Saudi Arabia — Q1 2023’, *Intratec Products Blog* (blog), 18 September 2023, <https://medium.com/intratec-products-blog/fuel-oil-price-saudi-arabia-q1-2023-37d5e01157a3>.

<sup>161</sup> Annex 8

<sup>162</sup> ‘Oil Consumption by Country - Worldometer’, accessed 20 January 2024, <https://www.worldometers.info/oil/oil-consumption-by-country/>.

we analyzed the most important oil producers, France was ranked in the forty-third place<sup>163</sup>, which implies that France is highly dependent on oil imports. Indeed, “*France imports 64% of its oil consumption*”<sup>164</sup>. According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, in 2021, “*France imported \$16.B in crude petroleum, becoming the 15<sup>th</sup> largest importer*”<sup>165</sup> and crude petroleum “*was the 5<sup>th</sup> most imported product in France*”<sup>166</sup>. In 2021, Italy “*imported \$31B in crude petroleum, becoming the 7<sup>th</sup> largest importer of Crude Petroleum*”<sup>167</sup>. The imported oil comes mainly from the US, Nigeria, Algeria, Kazakhstan, and Libya.

The case of the United States is also relevant as crude petroleum is both the 3<sup>rd</sup> most exported product and the US is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest exporter and oil is also the 2<sup>nd</sup> most imported product and the US is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest importer<sup>168</sup>. The countries to which the US imports the most oil are Canada, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Russia, and Colombia<sup>169</sup>. Whereas France seems to deal more with non-BRICS members and might be less impacted by the enlargement of the BRICS, the US imports lots of oil from both Saudi Arabia and Russia. Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the EU has agreed upon sanctions regarding the gas and oil market with Russia. One of the sanctions consisted of the EU reducing by 90% its imports of Russian oil. Also, the EU and the G7 have decided to put an upper limit to the barrel of oil at \$60. As for Saudi oil, the special relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia is worth analyzing as it may be subjected to changes with the entry of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS. Accordingly, “*Saudi Arabia was the largest U.S. trading partner in the Middle East in 2005*”<sup>170</sup>. In 2005, they had agreed upon “*bilateral negotiations on terms of Saudi accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO)*”<sup>171</sup>. However, to focus on the oil industry, the US oil imports from Saudi Arabia are still high but “*decreased by over 1 billion barrels per day*”<sup>172</sup>, which means that the US is no longer dependent on Saudi Arabia’s oil, and this is probably why Saudi Arabia is turning more to Russia and China as trading partners.

---

<sup>163</sup> ‘Oil Production by Country - Worldometer’, accessed 20 January 2024, <https://www.worldometers.info/oil/oil-production-by-country/>.

<sup>164</sup> ‘France Oil Reserves, Production and Consumption Statistics - Worldometer’, accessed 22 January 2024, <https://www.worldometers.info/oil/france-oil/>.

<sup>165</sup> ‘Crude Petroleum in France’, The Observatory of Economic Complexity, accessed 22 January 2024, <https://oec.world/en>.

<sup>166</sup> ‘Crude Petroleum in France’.

<sup>167</sup> ‘Crude Petroleum in Italy’, The Observatory of Economic Complexity, accessed 15 February 2024, <https://oec.world/en>.

<sup>168</sup> ‘Crude Petroleum in United States’, The Observatory of Economic Complexity, accessed 22 January 2024, <https://oec.world/en>.

<sup>169</sup> ‘Crude Petroleum in United States’.

<sup>170</sup> Alfred B. Prados and Christopher M. Blanchard, ‘Saudi Arabia: Current Issues and U.S. Relations’ (Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service, 2006), <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metacrs10311/>.

<sup>171</sup> Prados and Blanchard.

<sup>172</sup> ‘U.S. Petroleum Imports from Saudi Arabia 2022’, Statista, accessed 22 January 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/191215/petroleum-imports-into-the-us-from-saudi-arabia-since-2000/>.

The decrease in the dependency of the US – and of other Western countries – towards the Middle East is linked with an energy transformation. This is due to a change in American policies, as they decided to “*improve energy security and reduce imports*”<sup>173</sup>. Thus, the US produces the equivalent of “*40 percent of its total oil consumption*”<sup>174</sup> and since July 2014, “*the United States had overtaken Saudi Arabia to become the world’s leading oil producer*”<sup>175</sup>. However, there is one possible domain of cooperation which is “*to conclude a so-called 123 agreement (based on section 123 of the U.S. Atomic Energy Act)*”.<sup>176</sup> In such a decision, the US is in a dominant position. It would also mean a lot for the Sino-Saudi Arabian relations. Once again, nuclear power proves how the US remains independent from Saudi Arabia. The need for such transformation emerged with the disruption of the international economic trade system with oil crises as well as the increasing tensions, for instance with Russia in the framework of Ukraine’s invasion, that led to energy insecurity for dependent countries. The will to develop energy security can be also within the EU, with for instance the adoption of the REPowerEU Plan in 2022. This EU initiative has objectives to “*save energy, produce clean energy and diversify its energy supplies*”<sup>177</sup>. It also aims “*to increase Europe’s strategic resilience and make it less dependent on Russian gas imports*”<sup>178</sup>. Also, Saudi Arabia has launched the Vision 2030 program to diversify and socially transform its economy to reduce its dependence on oil<sup>179</sup>.

In short, the West has been highly dependent on Saudi Arabia and other BRICS countries such as Russia for oil imports. Still, today the need for more independence and energy security can be seen in the transformation of the oil policies in these countries. However, the West and especially the US is leading a transformation, both in renewable energies and national sources of energy to ensure energy sovereignty, which drives Saudi Arabia and the US apart from one another. Indeed, the US production of oil has not stopped increasing since 2008, to reach 13 308 000 barrels per day in November 2023<sup>180</sup>. Saudi Arabia is still highly dependent on the US for defense matters especially the procurement of weapons and

---

<sup>173</sup> Robert Mason, ‘Back to Realism for an Enduring U.S.-Saudi Relationship’, *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 4 (2014): 32–44, <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12093>.

<sup>174</sup> Mason.

<sup>175</sup> Mason.

<sup>176</sup> Mason.

<sup>177</sup> ‘EU Energy Platform’, accessed 22 January 2024, [https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/energy-security/eu-energy-platform\\_en](https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/energy-security/eu-energy-platform_en).

<sup>178</sup> ‘EU Energy Platform’.

<sup>179</sup> ‘Vision 2030: Le Projet Du Siècle - Politique Internationale’, accessed 31 January 2024, <https://politiqueinternationale.com/revue/n165-larabie-tentee-par-la-reforme/dossier-special/vision-2030-le-projet-du-siecle>.

<sup>180</sup> ‘U.S. Field Production of Crude Oil (Thousand Barrels per Day)’, accessed 15 February 2024, <https://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/hist/LeafHandler.ashx?n=pet&s=mcrfpus2&f=m>.

military devices. To what concerns the BRICS, there is no such cooperation among oil that has been created and for now, the oil issues remain at the national level of each country.

## **Section 3 : Could the BRICS create a defense alliance?**

Military, security, and defense issues meet such strategic interests that the BRICS's potential to become defense allies is questionable. While the US maintains an important control in the military sector in Saudi Arabia, its influence seems to be decreasing as the Middle East aligns more and more with China and Russia. To explain this statement, we will analyze first the dependence of Saudi Arabia on American military supplies (3.1.1) and then their common military agreements (3.1.2). Afterward, a focus will be placed on the Chinese and the Russian armies in their growing power (3.2.1). Finally, we will assess the existing military agreements between Saudi Arabia and BRICS countries (3.2.2).

### **1. Saudi Arabia's dependence on the US for defense matters.**

Saudi Arabia appears highly dependent on the US for defense supplies, as the principle of 'oil against security' intends. Indeed, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the US is often depicted as a two-way relation, with the US being dependent on Saudi oil, and Saudi Arabia being dependent on the military supplies of the US. The cooperation between the two countries lies in both those strategic areas. The Saudi imports of arms come from the United States for 70% of the total imports, highlighting the profound and enduring military cooperation between the two. Still, their cooperation has been threatened by many ideological oppositions on regional conflicts and because of public opinion. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the degree of formalization of such cooperation to evaluate its sustainability over time.

#### **3.1.1. The need for American security supplies.**



Since 1945, Saudi Arabia and the US have been building a relationship around trade, particularly in the oil and defense sectors. This is referred to as an “*enduring economic, strategic, and cultural alliance*”<sup>181</sup> in trading “*Peace through Commerce*”<sup>182</sup>. Their trading relationship is seen in the US being Saudi Arabia’s third trading partner in imports, after China and the UAE<sup>183</sup>. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia was ranked “*as the US’s 23<sup>rd</sup> largest export market*”<sup>184</sup>. Still today the US are the first defense economy in the world. Indeed, according to the Global Firepower ranking based on available firepower, the US is top first followed by Russia, China, and India - thus followed by BRICS members<sup>185</sup>. Saudi Arabia is ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> in the Global Firepower ranking, far behind the main BRICS members (Brazil being 12<sup>th</sup>), of Egypt (15<sup>th</sup>) and Iran (14<sup>th</sup>), but ahead of some new BRICS members (UAE being 51<sup>st</sup>, Ethiopia being 49<sup>th</sup>, Iraq 45<sup>th</sup>)<sup>186</sup>. The US manages to maintain its dominant position, which could explain why Saudi Arabia finds interest in dealing arms with the Americans.

Concretely, in 2021, Saudi Arabia exported \$16.5K of weapons which makes Saudi Arabia only “*the 118<sup>th</sup> largest exporter of weapons in the world*” and weapons were the “*21<sup>st</sup> most exported product in Saudi Arabia*”<sup>187</sup>. Saudi Arabia mainly exports weapons to Italy, India, the Netherlands, Australia, and Kuwait<sup>188</sup>. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia imported weapons for \$903 million, “*becoming the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest importer of Weapons in the world*” and weapons were “*the 19<sup>th</sup> most imported product in Saudi Arabia*”<sup>189</sup>. The weapons imported by Saudi Arabia mainly come from the United States at 70%, and then from South Korea, Spain, Slovakia, and Czechia<sup>190</sup>. However, we note a decline of \$10 million imports value in the imports of American weapons in compared to 2020<sup>191</sup>. On the other hand, we remark a prodigious growth in the Saudi Arabian weapons imports from Canada, with an increase of 900% and \$7.49 million, especially in armored combat vehicles. Also, the weapons trade between Saudi Arabia and China has an increase of 127% which corresponds to \$362 million additional in

---

<sup>181</sup> ‘The US-Saudi Trade Relationship: Peace through Commerce’, accessed 29 January 2024, <https://english.aawsat.com/node/3771681>.

<sup>182</sup> ‘The US-Saudi Trade Relationship’.

<sup>183</sup> ‘Saudi Arabia (SAU) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners’, The Observatory of Economic Complexity, accessed 29 January 2024, <https://oec.world/en>.

<sup>184</sup> ‘The US-Saudi Trade Relationship’.

<sup>185</sup> ‘2024 Military Strength Ranking’, accessed 29 January 2024, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php>.

<sup>186</sup> ‘2024 Military Strength Ranking’.

<sup>187</sup> ‘Weapons in Saudi Arabia’, The Observatory of Economic Complexity, accessed 29 January 2024, <https://oec.world/en>.

<sup>188</sup> ‘Weapons in Saudi Arabia’.

<sup>189</sup> ‘Weapons in Saudi Arabia’.

<sup>190</sup> Annex 9

<sup>191</sup> ‘Weapons in Saudi Arabia’.

comparison with 2020<sup>192</sup>. We can also highlight an increase in the weapons imports from South Africa. The increase of trade with China and South Africa appears in accordance with the entrance of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS emphasizing their common interests and economic ties also through bilateral agreements.

To deepen the analysis into the actual arms trading links between the US and Saudi Arabia, according to Alfred Prados and Christopher Blanchard, from 1997 to 2004, the American arms imported into Saudi Arabia amounted to \$7.3 billion for arms ordered for the 1997-2004 period by Saudi Arabia while the US arms delivered in 2004 to Saudi Arabia amounted \$22.9 billion<sup>193</sup>. These impressive figures are probably the result of the Iraq invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the insecurity environment of the following years. The US-Saudi Arabia military and diplomatic relationships go back to 1945 but became deeper after the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the Iran revolution in 1979. In 1979, Iran became a Shiite opponent to the Sunni Saudi Arabia. While the US had close relations with the Iran Shah before the revolution, the US was then seen as enemies of the new regime and saw its embassy being attacked in 1979<sup>194</sup>. Indeed, in 1980, President Jimmy Carter declared that *“the United States would use its military resources to defend American interests in the Middle East if necessary”*<sup>195</sup> which led then to the increase of the US military presence in the region. The following event strengthening the ties between the two was the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990. The US decided to launch *“Operation Desert Shield to defend Saudi Arabia”*<sup>196</sup> which was transformed in 1991 into *“Operation Desert Storm”*<sup>197</sup> to liberate Kuwait. Since then, their military relations have been at stake while today *“one of Washington’s most important priorities is to help the kingdom provide for its own security”*<sup>198</sup> for the US to focus on other strategic regions. To reach its objectives, the US cooperates with the Saudi government through three main organizations that are: The United States Military Training Mission to Saudi Arabia (USMTM), The Office of the Program Manager, Saudi Arabian National Guard (OPM-SANG), and the Ministry of Interior-Military Assistance Group (MOI-MAG) which transitioned to the US Army Military Assistance Group (USA-MAG)<sup>199</sup>.

---

<sup>192</sup> ‘Weapons in Saudi Arabia’.

<sup>193</sup> Prados and Blanchard, ‘Saudi Arabia’.

<sup>194</sup> ‘1979: Iran and America’, Brookings, accessed 15 February 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/1979-iran-and-america/>.

<sup>195</sup> Bilal Y Saab, ‘After Oil-for-Security’, February 2023, <https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/2023-02/Saab%20-%20After%20Oil-for-Security%20-%20A%20Blueprint%20for%20Resetting%20US-Saudi%20Security%20Relations.pdf>.

<sup>196</sup> Saab.

<sup>197</sup> Saab.

<sup>198</sup> Saab.

<sup>199</sup> Saab.

Thus, to develop an effective army and effective defense capacities, Saudi Arabia highly relies on the United States. These ties have been at stake since 1945 but have been much developed after the different wars in the Middle East in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, this dependence relationship can be compared to the dependence of the US on Saudi oil. This is why the relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia is often defined as ‘oil for security’. However, as we have nuanced the ties among oil between the two countries, we may do the same for the defense ones, as we highlighted the decrease of the weapons imports from the US and the increase from China.

### 3.1.2. Agreements among security and the strategic geographical position for the US.

As we have seen in the previous subsection, the US is the *“kingdom’s main security partner and source of arms ever since World War II, providing it with \$140 billion in military assistance”*<sup>200</sup> and more than \$100 billion in active Foreign Military Sales (FMS) cases<sup>201</sup>, mainly because they share common interests in the stability of the region. However, the two countries have never agreed upon a *“defense treaty nor has the United States ever offered it any kind of security guarantee”*<sup>202</sup> and their relations are founded on a long-time friendship and cooperation. The US had established a non-official security umbrella over Saudi Arabia. Even during the 1990-91 Gulf War, there was no such security agreement. Still, on May 8, 2023, they signed the extension of a 2008 agreement, the Agreement for Technical Cooperation (ATC)<sup>203</sup>. This program focuses on helping and advising the Saudi government to develop its military capacities. Indeed, the polity of the US does not seem to hold the security and defense of Saudi Arabia but rather to help its ally become autonomous in the defense field.

In the current American-Saudi relationship, *“Saudi Arabia is reportedly demanding a formal security guarantee from the United States in return for normalizing diplomatic relations with Israel”*<sup>204</sup> while the US has never concluded a security guarantee to a *“country outside NATO’s 30 members besides South Korea and Japan – not even Israel, its closest Middle East ally”*<sup>205</sup>. The need for Saudi Arabia to conclude a security agreement with the US lies in its inability to become a *“stand-alone*

---

<sup>200</sup> ‘Should the United States Provide Saudi Arabia a Security Guarantee? | Wilson Center’, accessed 31 January 2024, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/should-united-states-provide-saudi-arabia-security-guarantee>.

<sup>201</sup> ‘U.S. Relations With Saudi Arabia’, *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed 31 January 2024, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-saudi-arabia/>.

<sup>202</sup> ‘Should the United States Provide Saudi Arabia a Security Guarantee?’

<sup>203</sup> ‘U.S. Relations With Saudi Arabia’.

<sup>204</sup> ‘Should the United States Provide Saudi Arabia a Security Guarantee?’

<sup>205</sup> ‘Should the United States Provide Saudi Arabia a Security Guarantee?’

*military power capable of dealing with Iran*<sup>206</sup> as Iran has always been a major threat to the Saudis. Some sources of the American government, according to Reuters, have nevertheless said that the possibility of a full treaty is unlikely rather than a “*mutual defence alliance*”<sup>207</sup> still with a provision of US protection if Saudi Arabia was under attack, as the Saudis ask.

While there is no such defense agreement between the two countries but rather a military friendship and trade, this cooperation is also the result of the Americans’ will. During the first Gulf War, the Americans could establish themselves directly in Saudi Arabia to protect its ally, Saudi Arabia, and then to defend Kuwait from the invasion of Iraq<sup>208</sup>. Saudi Arabia needed the help of the Americans to maintain stability in the kingdom. It was also a strategic position to maintain a preferred treatment for the Saudi oil trade and to maintain the American presence in the Middle East. The American presence in the region creates an occidental influence and prevents Islamic nationalism from developing too much<sup>209</sup>. Thus, it allows a form of protection for Israel from Islamic neighboring countries, also with the possibility of the US to intervene, if something occurred, easily and fast. Today, there are about 2 700 American soldiers in Saudi Arabia<sup>210</sup>. Indeed, the United States has a strategic interest in maintaining its relationship with Saudi Arabia. However, there are about 13,500 American soldiers in Kuwait<sup>211</sup>, which balances the idea of an exclusive defense cooperation between the US and Saudi Arabia. The UK also holds a military base in Saudi Arabia<sup>212</sup>. Neither Russia nor China has a military base in Saudi Arabia.

However, after the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, the relations between the Americans and the Saudis have been deteriorating. The American public opinion became quite anti-Saudi Arabia after the reveal that 15 out of 19 terrorists in the 2001 attacks were Saudis<sup>213</sup>. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia refused to host Americans in their ‘war against terrorism’. Still, the Saudi government showed cooperation in helping the American government fly over Iraq as Saudi Arabia, being an ally of the US, is also often targeted by

---

<sup>206</sup> ‘Should the United States Provide Saudi Arabia a Security Guarantee?’

<sup>207</sup> Samia Nakhoul et al., ‘Exclusive: US-Saudi Defence Pact Tied to Israel Deal, Palestinian Demands Put Aside’, *Reuters*, 29 September 2023, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-saudi-defence-pact-tied-israel-deal-palestinian-demands-put-aside-2023-09-29/>.

<sup>208</sup> Taïno Kari, *Les relations américano-saoudiennes depuis la fin de la guerre froide*.

<sup>209</sup> Taïno Kari.

<sup>210</sup> Jacob Knutson, ‘Where U.S. Troops Are Stationed in the Middle East’, *Axios*, 31 October 2023, <https://www.axios.com/2023/10/31/american-troops-middle-east-israel-palestine>.

<sup>211</sup> Knutson.

<sup>212</sup> ‘List of Countries with Overseas Military Bases’, in *Wikipedia*, 11 February 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List\\_of\\_countries\\_with\\_overseas\\_military\\_bases&oldid=1206177843#Russia](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_countries_with_overseas_military_bases&oldid=1206177843#Russia).

<sup>213</sup> Taïno Kari, *Les relations américano-saoudiennes depuis la fin de la guerre froide*.

Al Qaeda<sup>214</sup>. Yet, the American presence in Saudi Arabia is highly contested by the local population<sup>215</sup>.

In short, there are existing partnerships linking Saudi Arabia and the United States but there is, up to now, no defense or security agreements. The US has no binding obligation to protect Saudi Arabia nor to intervene in the case of aggression. Still, as we have seen with the number of arms trading and the cooperation among military knowledge cannot be denied nor reduced. Moreover, the military cooperation does not benefit only Saudi Arabia. Indeed, the US makes the most of its military presence in the Middle East region. Finally, the ‘oil against protection’ principle coming from Quincy’s Pact of 1945 needs to be questioned as the US imports of Saudi oil decrease and part of the Saudis are reluctant to the American-Saudi cooperation. Still, the relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia appears as an obstacle for the BRICS group to create a defense alliance.

## **2. Initiatives of the BRICS to develop their national security forces.**

While we have already analyzed how the US is still dominant in the military area and maintains close relations with Saudi Arabia, especially in military supplies, we acknowledge an increasing development of the BRICS countries’ independent armies. Indeed, China and Russia aim at being autonomous from the US and managed to develop large and powerful armies, in investment and human terms. Also, in the last decade, Saudi Arabia expanded its military relations with the BRICS countries, even before becoming a permanent member of the club. This can be considered as a way to counterbalance the US military power and hegemony, maybe not under the name of the BRICS group but rather through a single state’s military power.

### **3.2.1. Stronger and independent armies in the BRICS: Russia and China.**

The BRICS organization is not a military alliance like NATO is. The BRICS’ cooperation is rather focused on economic and trading partnerships. While the BRICS itself

---

<sup>214</sup> Taïno Kari.

<sup>215</sup> Taïno Kari.

has not formalized a defense agreement, the rising independent military powers of its members are willing to change the existing security order in the world.

The Chinese army has been growing for decades, trying to compete with the US very much ahead in terms of technology, military, and human supplies. Some scholars explain that “*as long as Beijing chooses not to use those resources to develop a superpower’s military capability, the world will remain unipolar*”<sup>216</sup> since China is already competing with the US on the economic level. However, the defense spending in the BRICS is increasing. Indeed, in 2022, four BRICS countries were in the top 5 of the highest military spending in the world, behind the US; China comes second, Russia third, India fourth and Saudi Arabia fifth<sup>217</sup>. The US is far ahead with military spending equal to \$877 billion in 2022. China spent \$292 billion and is thus far ahead of the following ones in the ranking. Russia spent \$86.4 billion, India \$81.4 billion, and Saudi Arabia \$75 billion in 2022. No country can currently compete with the US and with China, the two greatest economic powers, by far. At this point, we can easily make a parallel between economic power, thanks to GDP, and military power, as defense needs lots of investments to develop.

While the military spending has been increasing in current USD in the US, China, Russia, and even Saudi Arabia; we note that in percentage of GDP, the military spending has been decreasing since the 1990s. For instance, the US spent about \$47 billion on military expenditure in 1960 compared to \$877 billion in 2022<sup>218</sup>. However, in 1990, the military expenditure represented 9% of the American GDP while it represents only 3.5% of the 2022 GDP<sup>219</sup>. Since the increase in military spending is strongly correlated with GDP growth, we can also look at the evolution of this ranking: the US, China, and Russia have been in the top 3 since 1993. However, India and Saudi Arabia have largely increased in the ranking while other Western countries, such as Japan, France, and Germany, have decreased<sup>220</sup>.

On what concerns the military size, there are some worth noting differences with the military budget. To assess the global military strength of a state, we need to look also at its size in the

---

<sup>216</sup> Roberts Cynthia, Leslie Armijo, and Saori Katada, ‘Global Power Shift: The BRICS, Building Capabilities for Influence’, in *The BRICS and Collective Financial Statecraft*, ed. Cynthia Roberts, Leslie Armijo, and Saori Katada (Oxford University Press, 2017), 0, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190697518.003.0002>.

<sup>217</sup> ‘Military Spending by Country Worldwide 2022’, Statista, accessed 1 February 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262742/countries-with-the-highest-military-spending/>.

<sup>218</sup> ‘Military Expenditure (Current USD) - United States’, World Bank Open Data, accessed 1 February 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.CD?locations=US>.

<sup>219</sup> ‘Military Expenditure (% of GDP) - United States’, World Bank Open Data, accessed 15 February 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org>.

<sup>220</sup> Annex 10.

number of soldiers it can deploy, including the soldiers on active duty, the reservists, and the paramilitary members. Still, to have a clear idea of the military strength we should look at the ranking of the number of active-duty military personnel. In this ranking, China comes first with more than 2 million active soldiers<sup>221</sup>. Then, there is India with about 1.5 million and the US with 1.3 million<sup>222</sup>. Russia is only fifth and Saudi Arabia is not in the top 10<sup>223</sup>.

Thus, we have looked at the military power of the BRICS countries taken independently, which is an important feature in the world's military stability and balance of power. The Chinese, Indian, and Russian armies are trying to compete with the US' technological advancement. Notwithstanding, they have difficulties catching up with the US, but they have one strong tool: human capabilities, and this explains why the Chinese and Indian are the largest militaries in human strength. This analysis considers the BRICS countries independently, showing how they might change the world military order. However, the thesis analyzes the BRICS as a group and its potential military consequences.

*“The BRICS club is not a military alliance, nor does it have any potential whatsoever to become one: in this sense, the BRICS as a group does not pose a security challenge to the global stability”<sup>224</sup>.*

### 3.2.2. Saudi Arabia's military cooperation with BRICS countries.

In the last few years, there has been a military alignment between Saudi Arabia and the initial BRICS countries, especially China. In January 2016, Saudi Arabia and China declared the establishment of a *“comprehensive strategic partnership”*<sup>225</sup> to enhance their security cooperation, particularly in the fight against terrorism. The military cooperation between the two countries could be seen in the number of political visits and the arms trade, with for example the opening of a drone manufacturing facility in Saudi Arabia<sup>226</sup>. More recently, and before agreeing to enter the BRICS, Saudi Arabia has approved *“to join a China-led security*

---

<sup>221</sup> ‘Military Size by Country 2024’, accessed 1 February 2024, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/military-size-by-country>.

<sup>222</sup> ‘Military Size by Country 2024’.

<sup>223</sup> ‘Military Size by Country 2024’.

<sup>224</sup> Cynthia, Armijo, and Katada, ‘Global Power Shift’.

<sup>225</sup> ‘The Strategic Value of China for Saudi Arabia and the Limitations’, accessed 2 February 2024, <https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/perspectives/pdf/eColumn1.pdf>.

<sup>226</sup> ‘The Strategic Value of China for Saudi Arabia and the Limitations’.

*bloc*<sup>227</sup> which can be seen as a sign of a step away from the US and an alignment with the Global South. This decision led to the establishment of Saudi Arabia's status as a *"dialogue partner in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization"*<sup>228</sup> which is a political, security, and trade alliance that gathers China, Russia, India, Pakistan, and other Central Asian nations. The organization also includes Observer States such as Afghanistan and Iran and Dialogue Partners such as Azerbaijan, Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia<sup>229</sup>. The main activities of this international organization are regional security development, counterterrorism issues, and the prevention of extremism<sup>230</sup>. What is furthermore interesting is that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is recognized by the UN, as it benefits from the observer status in the UN General Assembly and has developed many partnerships with UN Agencies, such as the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the UN Office on Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) to give an illustration<sup>231</sup>. There are also attempts at security cooperation agreements between Saudi Arabia and India. For instance, they signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation in 2014 and a Joint Committee on Defence Cooperation<sup>232</sup>. They have agreed to engage in *"training and capacity building exercises, intelligence sharing, and maritime security"*<sup>233</sup>.

In short, this military cooperation of Saudi Arabia with some first members of the BRICS, essentially China and India as analyzed, are explicit signs of a tendency to pursue a political and military alignment with these countries. By doing so, Saudi Arabia publicly affirms its desire to get closer to the Global South and the BRICS, recalling that many of those agreements were signed years before the announcement of Saudi Arabia joining the BRICS. While there is no evidence of an increase in the BRICS military power as a club, since there is no such agreement, it is a sign of the military growth of those countries independently and their capacity to join forces. Thus, with the joining of Saudi Arabia in the BRICS, the possibility of military development in the BRICS as a club can be questioned as, for instance, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization includes already 6 of the now 10 BRICS members

---

<sup>227</sup> Ruxandra Iordache, 'Saudi Arabia Takes Step to Join China-Led Security Bloc, as Ties with Beijing Strengthen', CNBC, 29 March 2023, <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/03/29/saudi-arabia-takes-step-to-join-china-led-security-bloc-as-ties-with-beijing-strengthen.html>.

<sup>228</sup> Iordache.

<sup>229</sup> 'Shanghai Cooperation Organization | Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs', accessed 2 February 2024, <https://dppa.un.org/en/shanghai-cooperation-organization>.

<sup>230</sup> 'Shanghai Cooperation Organization | Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs'.

<sup>231</sup> 'Shanghai Cooperation Organization | Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs'.

<sup>232</sup> Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, 'India-Saudi Security Ties Getting Stronger', accessed 2 February 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/india-saudi-security-ties-getting-stronger/>.

<sup>233</sup> Rajagopalan.



(China, India, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt), either in full membership, as observer states or as dialogue partners<sup>234</sup>.

---

<sup>234</sup> 'Shanghai Cooperation Organization | Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs'.

## **CHAPTER 2: A RISKY DECISION FOR THE WEST OR THE EAST?**

The Second Chapter is more focused on the consequences of the entry of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS. Indeed, we will assess the potential disruptions and risks for both the BRICS and the Western block. Accordingly, Section 1 will be dedicated to the BRICS representing an alternative to the unipolar system. In Section 2, we will analyze how the opposition between China and the US guides the opposition between the BRICS and the West. Finally, Section 3 will focus on the possible changes in the world system, between bipolarity and multipolarity.

### **Section 1 : The growing of a 'two-block' logic.**

The development of the BRICS both in its membership and in its international weight on political and economic decisions changes the international existing order. The BRICS have managed to create an alternative voice to the West, mainly founded on anti-West positions. Indeed, the BRICS may appear as an opposing block, the one of the Global South. It is why, the first Section of the second Chapter will be dedicated to the relationship Russia and China have developed independently from the West (1.1.1) and then to Saudi Arabia's political ambiguity towards both 'blocks' (1.1.2). Furthermore, we will deepen the analysis of the inability of the countries to unify and agree on a common polity, as the failures of the UN highlight (1.2.1). Finally, the last paragraph will be dedicated to the war in Ukraine, to illustrate once again the international division among the BRICS and the West (1.2.2).

#### **1. The increasing concept of 'anti-West' within the BRICS.**

While we acknowledge the development of 'anti-West' policies and protests with the international political influence of the Russian-Chinese couple, we also denote the ambiguity of Saudi Arabia. Indeed, the Saudi regime is impeded by its special strategic and military relationship with the US and the growing economic ties and political alignment it has with

China and Russia. Still, the unilateral logic of the US existence at the end of the Cold War seems quite contested and refuted by countries and people.

### 1.1.1. Special relationship between China and Russia and the will to exclude the West.

The relationship between China and Russia is defined by some authors as a “*marriage of convenience*”<sup>235</sup> arguing that it is unlikely that the two countries become any closer. Another point of view asserts that, both having the US as a rival for their national objectives, could “*eventually form an anti-US, anti-Western alliance*”<sup>236</sup>. Still, while it will be difficult to predict the future of the relations between the Asian and Eastern European leaders, we need to capture the very nature of their relationship.

The Sino-Russian relationship goes back to the post-World War II period, with the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance signed in 1950 and came to an end in 1980<sup>237</sup>. China refused to renew its cooperation with Russia until the end of the Cold War. In 1994, they agreed upon a constructive partnership, and in 1996, they announced their first strategic partnership<sup>238</sup>. This was seen as the ideological continuity of the Cold War opposition to the West and the US and the desire to shape a more multipolar international system<sup>239</sup>. The opposition with the West was harsh in the 1990s, as Russia was seeing NATO’s expansion to contain Russian power and China was battling with the US to enter the WTO. On July 16, 2001, they signed the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation<sup>240</sup>, which enhanced their cooperation in different spheres, especially in consulting each other for security matters. It, thus, promoted the “*strengthening of stability and the establishment of an atmosphere of mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation in the regions*”<sup>241</sup>. Their will to develop cooperation probably comes from their common opposition to Western organizations, such as NATO expansion and intervention in Kosovo in 1999<sup>242</sup>. In 2001, China had no such other

---

<sup>235</sup> Fu Ying, ‘How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow Are Close, but Not Allies’, *Foreign Affairs* 95 (2016): 96, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/fora95&id=122&div=&collection=>.

<sup>236</sup> Ying.

<sup>237</sup> Elizabeth Wishnick, ‘Russia and China’, *Asian Survey* 41, no. 5 (2001): 797–821, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2001.41.5.797>.

<sup>238</sup> Wishnick.

<sup>239</sup> Wishnick.

<sup>240</sup> Joseph A. Rapone and Ii, ‘The Treaty of Good Neighborly Friendship and Cooperation Between the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China: Implications for America’s Policy Toward China?’ (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, 9 April 2002), <https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA401691>.

<sup>241</sup> Wishnick, ‘Russia and China’.

<sup>242</sup> NATO, ‘NATO’s Role in Kosovo’, NATO, accessed 7 February 2024, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_48818.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48818.htm).

treaty of friendship as it signed with Russia. However, the two countries have made publicly clear that such a treaty does not constitute an alliance, with no mutual defense clause comparable to NATO's Article 5. Still, they are bound by the obligation to inform the partner in case of threat and by the interdiction to conclude agreements with countries that could *"harm the security, sovereignty, or territorial integrity of the partner"*<sup>243</sup>. They seem to get quite along with one another, as, for instance, China reacted positively to Russia's military intervention in Syria<sup>244</sup>. This was also a strategic choice of Beijing to appear as a legitimate actor in the global fight against terrorism. Accordingly, along with Russia and Serbia, China does not recognize Kosovo's 2008 independence and considers NATO's intervention a violation of Serbia's *"sovereignty and territorial integrity"*<sup>245</sup>. In the case of the Russian annexation of Crimea, the Chinese position was more neutral. When Russia intervened in Crimea, the UN General Assembly voted on a resolution, which Western countries were in favor of, Russia rejected it and China abstained<sup>246</sup>. China viewed the resolution of the UN as a *"form of meddling"*<sup>247</sup> in the internal affairs of Ukraine. As China follows the principle of *"noninterference in each other's internal affairs"*<sup>248</sup> of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, it did not support Russia's position towards Crimea which explains the abstention from a vote for the UN resolution.

However, few divergences between Russia and China prevent them from forming a closer and deeper alliance. For instance, they are competitors in Central Asia for *"energy development and transportation projects"*<sup>249</sup>. Also, they are both limited in their mutual relation by their need to develop each one its relationship with the West as Elizabeth Wishnick stated *"both need the US more than they need each other, especially for economic cooperation and educational exchanges"*<sup>250</sup>. In addition, as emphasized by the example of Crimea, they lack mutual support for territorial claims. The same policy could be seen in Russia, maintaining a *"strict neutrality"*<sup>251</sup> in the case of the South China Sea. They have, moreover, very different approaches to economic

---

<sup>243</sup> Wishnick, 'Russia and China'.

<sup>244</sup> 'China on Russia's Intervention in Syria', OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, 19 January 2016, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2016-01-19/china-russias-intervention-syria>.

<sup>245</sup> 'China Expresses Support for Serbia in Renewed Kosovo Clashes Involving NATO Troops', AP News, 30 May 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/china-serbia-kosovo-nato-45db1658df5b57bfeca8c9354a2fff6f>.

<sup>246</sup> Zhang Lihua, 'Explaining China's Position on the Crimea Referendum', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed 7 February 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/01/explaining-china-s-position-on-crimea-referendum-pub-59600>.

<sup>247</sup> Lihua.

<sup>248</sup> Lihua.

<sup>249</sup> Wishnick, 'Russia and China'.

<sup>250</sup> Wishnick.

<sup>251</sup> Marcin Kaczmarek, 'Russia-China Relations and the West', Research Reports or Papers (Centre for Transatlantic Relations, March 2017), <https://archive.transatlanticrelations.org/publication/russia-china-relations-west-marcin-kaczmarek/>.

globalization; Russia appears as “*the populist, anti-globalization*”<sup>252</sup> whereas China stands as a “*supporter of globalization*”<sup>253</sup>.

Thus, China and Russia share two essential common features that provide them a good starting point for cooperating: their rejection of the US claim of unilateralism and the Western domination of the world, and the fact that neither of them would criticize the other’s domestic political system regarding its one<sup>254</sup>. Yet, there is a growing tendency in both countries of an ‘anti-West’ logic, nevertheless, this is not a proof of the BRICS becoming a relevant counter-West opposition but rather a proof of the BRICS countries individually deepening their areas of cooperation.

### 1.1.2. The ambiguous politics of Saudi Arabia towards the West and the East.

Saudi Arabia both has close strategic relations with the West, especially with the US and at the same time develops its relations with China and the South; this is why we could refer to ‘ambiguous politics’. Saudi Arabia is also defined by its challenges in “*its security lies in the West, its prosperity in the East*”<sup>255</sup>.

An ambiguous policy of Saudi Arabia can be seen in its relationship with Israel and its position regarding the old conflict between Israel and the Arab states of the region. The scholar E.G.H. Joffe refers to Saudi Arabia maintaining “*its ambiguous status as the guardian of Islamic orthodoxy and a Western ally*”<sup>256</sup>. Still, with the recent war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, the Saudi foreign ministry affirmed that “*no diplomatic relations*”<sup>257</sup> could be maintained with Israel without the creation of a recognized and independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital and without the cessation of “*aggression on the*

---

<sup>252</sup> Kaczmariski.

<sup>253</sup> Kaczmariski.

<sup>254</sup> Kaczmariski.

<sup>255</sup> ‘Fraught Relations: Saudi Ambitions and American Anger’, IISS, accessed 8 February 2024, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/survival-online/2022/12/fraught-relations-saudi-ambitions-and-american-anger/>.

<sup>256</sup> E. G. H. Joffé, ‘Relations between the Middle East and the West’, *Middle East Journal* 48, no. 2 (1994): 250–67, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4328690>.

<sup>257</sup> Reuters, ‘Saudi Arabia Reiterates No Diplomatic Relations with Israel without Independent Palestinian State’, *The Hindu*, 7 February 2024, sec. World, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/saudi-arabia-reiterates-no-diplomatic-relations-with-israel-without-independent-palestinian-state/article67820813.ece>.

*Gaza Strip*<sup>258</sup>. While Saudi Arabia maintains a strategic partnership with the US for defense matters, there are growing tensions between the two, as, in 2019, Joe Biden referred to Saudi Arabia as having “*very little social redeeming value in the present government in Saudi Arabia*”<sup>259</sup> and defined the country as a “*pariah state*”<sup>260</sup>. Their relationship deteriorated even more when the US was reluctant “*to provide defensive systems to counter Iranian and Houthi air attacks*”<sup>261</sup> and then Saudi Arabia developed its links with Russia for armament. Thus, Saudi Arabia finds itself in the middle of the interests of the West and the ones of the South-East.

The recent alignment of Saudi Arabia and China can be clearly explained by the growing distance between Saudi Arabia and the US, especially in public opinion. In a study conducted by the Washington Institute in March 2022<sup>262</sup> analyzing the views on US relations on par with other world powers in the Middle East, the results leave no doubt. To the question “*How is it important to have good relations with the United States?*”, 41% of the Saudi respondents answered “*very important*” or “*somewhat important*” which is less than half of the respondents. Moreover, to the question “*Our country cannot count on the United States these days, so we should look more to Russia or China as partners*”, 53% of the Saudis that responded to the survey answered, “*strongly agree*” or “*somewhat agree*”, which is more than the half and 10 percentage points more than in Egypt for instance (43%). In addition, 54% of the Saudi respondents consider “*very important*” or “*somewhat important*” to have good relations with China, and 49% for Russia. Hence, we can quite easily understand from this survey that the Saudis are somehow reluctant to pursue their relations, as they were, with the US and are predominantly in favor of developing more relations with China and Russia. These results corroborate the entry of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS.

Accordingly, Saudi Arabia maintains a form of ambiguity in its international position towards the West and the South-East, while the interests of the latter are clearly in opposition to the ones of the former. Still, we can acknowledge the growing tendency of Saudi Arabia towards the South-East, through agreements with China, India, and Russia, common interests, and similar political authoritarian regimes. This tendency can also be seen in public opinion thanks to the Washington Institute survey. The ambiguity seems to fade with the entry of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS.

---

<sup>258</sup> Reuters.

<sup>259</sup> ‘*Fraught Relations*’.

<sup>260</sup> ‘*Fraught Relations*’.

<sup>261</sup> ‘*Fraught Relations*’.

<sup>262</sup> ‘*In 2022 Polls, Views on U.S. Relations On Par with Other World Powers in the Middle East | The Washington Institute*’, accessed 2 February 2024, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/2022-polls-views-us-relations-par-other-world-powers-middle-east>.

## **2. The political blockades between the 'blocks'.**

The growing of the 'two-block' logic, as questioned in the previous subsection, also leads to international political blockades and the inability to act internationally. This is why we will look at the examples, the one of the UN and the specific case of the war in Ukraine. Indeed, in the last few years, we have acknowledged some failures or inefficiency in conflicts, as the permanent members of the UN have very different allies and interests in the world, some being part of the BRICS and others being Western states. The same assessment can be made with the example of the war in Ukraine, as it enhances the international division between the BRICS and European countries including the US. Saudi Arabia showed once again its ambiguity as the regime decided to remain neutral to maintain its relations with both blocks.

### **1.2.1. International inability to common purposes: the UN's inefficiency to unify.**

The UN's ability to act internationally, which means to deliver resolution in case of wars or needed intervention, is much prevented by the disagreements among the five permanent members of the Security Council, which are China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The other non-permanent members currently are Algeria, Ecuador, Guyana, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, and Switzerland<sup>263</sup>.

The UN peacekeeping operations require three main principles<sup>264</sup>. The first one refers to the consent of the parties. The second one is impartiality, which differs from neutrality or inactivity, the UN should only in its very objective. The last principle of UN peacekeeping operations is the non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate. For instance, one of the failures of the UN can be found with the genocide of Rwanda when their agreements were far short of what was needed or in Syria when member states could not

---

<sup>263</sup> 'Current Members | United Nations Security Council', accessed 10 February 2024, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/current-members>.

<sup>264</sup> 'Principles of Peacekeeping', United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed 10 February 2024, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/principles-of-peacekeeping>.

agree on how to act<sup>265</sup>. In the case of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Russia supported the regime of Bashar al-Assad, on the one hand, and on the other hand there were the US, the UK, and France supported the opposition to the Syrian government. Due to this disagreement, the UN was mostly considered inefficient in adopting a resolution to address the conflict. On the recent war between the Gaza Strip and Israel, the UN General Assembly has managed to agree on a “*resolution demanding a ceasefire and humanitarian pathways for civilians in Gaza*”<sup>266</sup> with 14 countries voting against including the US and Israel and 55 abstentions. The UN appears – once again – as inefficient in its capacity to bring all countries together on common decisions. Back in October 2023 at the UN Security Council (UNSC), the US and European states were mainly focused on defending Israel’s right to defend itself whereas countries from the Global South condemned all types of harm against civilians<sup>267</sup>. Also, Brazil strongly criticized the UN for “*the council’s delay in approving a resolution regarding the conflict between Israel and the Islamic group Hamas*”<sup>268</sup>, because the US vetoed the Brazilian resolution proposal. The policy of the US is compared to the Russian policy in the Ukrainian war, as Alexander Langlois stated. In fact, the UN seems inefficient when comes to strategic decisions over protected – or allied – regions of the world. This can be easily explained by the five permanent members of the UNSC being economic, political, and military rivals, as we can refer to the opposition between the US and the Russian-Chinese couple. These conclusions may be emphasized by the growth of the BRICS, as the group weigh more on the international scene and has become the voice for most of the Global South countries represented at the UN.

At this point, we can refer to Minh-Thu Pham who analyzed the links between the BRICS and the UN saying that the power of the BRICS will be developed thanks to the relations it develops with UN Global South countries as well as it will help these countries to develop more their voice and to weight more on the international scene.

---

<sup>265</sup> Minh-Thu Pham, ‘A UN Expert on the Institution’s Successes, Failures, and Continued Relevance’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed 10 February 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/09/21/un-expert-on-institution-s-successes-failures-and-continued-relevance-pub-90610>.

<sup>266</sup> Alexander Langlois, ‘Why Can’t the United Nations Agree to a Ceasefire in Gaza?’, <https://www.newarab.com/> (The New Arab, 1 November 2023), <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/why-cant-united-nations-agree-ceasefire-gaza>.

<sup>267</sup> Langlois.

<sup>268</sup> ‘Brazil Criticizes UN Security Council Impasse: “We Failed”’, Agência Brasil, 31 October 2023, <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/en/internacional/noticia/2023-10/brazil-criticizes-un-security-council-impasse-we-failed>.



*“The expansion of the BRICS can bring those countries greater leverage at the UN, which is the only forum where the rest of the developing world is represented alongside the most powerful”<sup>269</sup>.*

To reinforce his idea, she wrote: *“If BRICS+ and others want to lead or influence the so-called Global South, they need to go where those countries are, and that’s the UN”<sup>270</sup>*. In the end, she concludes that the UN’s difficulties come from a *“tension built into the UN’s fabric”<sup>271</sup>*, mainly because it was founded by Western states.

Thus, the UN often appears as inefficient internationally when a conflict occurs and represents divergent interests for the permanent members, who have the veto power. Moreover, the growing voice of South countries and their alignment in their position, mainly in opposition to the Western countries, will probably be further enhanced by the enlargement of the BRICS and its growing international political weight, especially within the UN organs. Still, questions could be raised on the relevance of the current permanent members of the UNSC, they could be changed or become elected members as the other 10 to allow more representation of all regions of the world.

### 1.2.2. The example of the war in Ukraine and the increasing division.

According to many authors, the war in Ukraine either transformed the international political and economic landscape or is simply an illustration of such an ongoing transformation. Indeed, the Russian invasion of Ukraine created the need for military assistance and created inflation as well as disrupted the global supply chains due to economic sanctions applied to Russia<sup>272</sup>. Most of the BRICS countries, excluding Russia obviously, have abstained from taking sides in the conflict and *“called for a resolution of the war through peaceful means”<sup>273</sup>*. They have all insisted on the need for multipolarity the international stability. The position of the BRICS countries has been neither to support Russia in its decision to invade Ukraine nor to share the Western blame with Russia. A relevant example of this policy is

---

<sup>269</sup> Pham, ‘A UN Expert on the Institution’s Successes, Failures, and Continued Relevance’.

<sup>270</sup> Pham.

<sup>271</sup> Pham.

<sup>272</sup> APRI, ‘Evolving Multilateralism: BRICS, the EU and Responses to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict’, APRI, 23 August 2023, <https://afripoli.org/evolving-multilateralism-brics-the-eu-and-responses-to-the-russia-ukraine-conflict>.

<sup>273</sup> Dr Aijan Sharshenova, ‘The Impact of the War in Ukraine on the BRICS: Six Takeaways from an Expert Discussion’, *The Foreign Policy Centre* (blog), 3 August 2023, <https://fpc.org.uk/the-impact-of-the-war-in-ukraine-on-the-brics-six-takeaways-from-an-expert-discussion/>.

India, which tries to “uphold neutrality”<sup>274</sup>. As many other analysts do, “India believes in Russia’s legitimate security interests in the region against the background of its long-standing opposition to NATO’s expansion prospects”<sup>275</sup>. Indeed, the behavior of Russia can be explained by International Relations theories, such as the Realist one, to the extent that Russia follows the ‘national interest’ and the ‘foreign policy continuity’, developed by Hans Morgenthau when he wrote:

“[...] that astounding continuity in foreign policy which makes American, British, or Russian foreign policy appear as an intelligible, rational continuum, by and large consistent within itself, regardless of the different motives, preferences, and intellectual and moral qualities of successive statesmen”<sup>276</sup>.

Indeed, the formal position of the BRICS countries has been to remain neutral and to call for peaceful resolutions. Still, they all have criticized the unipolar system led by the US, which conducted the expansion of NATO.

In August 2023, Saudi Arabia hosted a special international peace summit in Jeddah “to advance efforts aimed at restoring peace in Ukraine”<sup>277</sup>. While Russia did not attend this meeting, the Saudi regime and Kyiv consider it as a success in its “diplomatic ambitions beyond its traditional sphere of influence”<sup>278</sup>. Indeed, the summit can be seen as a diplomatic opportunity for Saudi Arabia to place itself as a peace guardian on the international scene, especially as Riyadh managed to include Russia’s friends and allies China and India<sup>279</sup>. In total, 40 countries were present at the meeting. Still, the behavior of Saudi Arabia is not only guided by the will to promote peace but also by the ‘national interest’, in looking for power in the world, as defined by Hans Morgenthau. Some Saudi leaders have described their position towards the war as “active neutrality”<sup>280</sup>, to the extent that the regime decided to vote in favor of the UN resolutions to condemn the use of violence and such breaching of international law. However, Saudi Arabia refused to turn against Russia by supporting and joining the “Western-led sanctions”<sup>281</sup>. In this neutrality principle, Saudi Arabia refused to provide military assistance to Ukraine. This desire to maintain neutrality is the illustration of the political ambiguity of Saudi Arabia, as

---

<sup>274</sup> Sharshenova.

<sup>275</sup> Sharshenova.

<sup>276</sup> Colin Elman and Michael Jensen, *The Realism Reader* (Routledge, 2014).

<sup>277</sup> Giorgio Cafiero, ‘What’s behind Saudi Arabia’s Peace Efforts in Ukraine?’, <https://www.newarab.com/> (The New Arab, 15 August 2023), <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/whats-behind-saudi-arabias-peace-efforts-ukraine>.

<sup>278</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis Geaghan-Breiner Aaron David Miller, Beatrix, ‘Saudi Arabia in the Emerging World Order’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed 12 February 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/11/06/saudi-arabia-in-emerging-world-order-pub-90819>.

<sup>279</sup> Cafiero, ‘What’s behind Saudi Arabia’s Peace Efforts in Ukraine?’

<sup>280</sup> Geaghan-Breiner, ‘Saudi Arabia in the Emerging World Order?’

<sup>281</sup> Geaghan-Breiner.

the government was unwilling *“to sacrifice its energy partnership with Moscow”*<sup>282</sup>. However, Russia considered this meeting as ‘anti-Russian’ as well as the presence of China at the summit was *“the worst aspect of these talks from Russia’s perspective”*<sup>283</sup>.

Thus, the war in Ukraine illustrates once again the increasing division between the Western countries and the Global South cooperation, mostly represented by the BRICS group, as well as the growing logic of the ‘two-block’ while claiming for multipolarity. However, the BRICS’ positioning towards the war in Ukraine has been ambiguous, as they largely decided to remain neutral and to claim peaceful resolutions. By doing so, they dissociate a bit with Russia’s foreign policy which somehow highlights an internal division in the BRICS. This ambiguity is also seen in Saudi Arabia’s reaction to the war in Ukraine, as the state is impeded by strategic relations with both sides, the US and Russia, even more since Saudi Arabia joined the BRICS. Thanks to the example of the war in Ukraine, we denote political disagreements between the BRICS and their incapacity to adopt a clear position which prevents the group from representing a relevant diplomatic voice in international settlements.

## **Section 2 : The disruption of US supremacy versus the rise of China**

The BRICS’ goals lay mainly in its desire to challenge the US hegemony. This growing opposition between the BRICS and the West is due to the growing of the ‘two-block logic’ as we have seen in the previous section. Accordingly, in this second section, we will first question the possibility of a ‘de-dollarization’ of the global financial system and the potential consequences for the US (2.1.1). Then, we will analyze the Chinese ambitions for the Renminbi regarding the BRICS (2.1.2). Moreover, we will look at the division of the BRICS, due to China’s hegemonic ambitions (2.2.1) and to the long-lasting conflict among Iran and Saudi Arabia (2.2.2).

### **1. The risks for the US.**

---

<sup>282</sup> Geaghan-Breiner.

<sup>283</sup> Cafiero, ‘What’s behind Saudi Arabia’s Peace Efforts in Ukraine?’

The BRICS may represent a financial risk for the US in the five countries' ambitions to develop its international financial power. In this paragraph, we will question the potential 'de-dollarization' of the financial system and how it could affect the US. Still, the dollar remains the most used currency and far ahead of any other currency, such as the Renminbi. We will also analyze the Chinese financial ambitions with its national currency. The BRICS seem in difficulties in their capacity to dethrone the USD and the US financial superiority.

### 2.1.1. The possible 'de-dollarization' politics.

We can hear and read in the media a potential "*accelerating trend towards global de-dollarization*"<sup>284</sup>. On the one hand, dollarization is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as "*the act or process of replacing a country's currency with the US*"<sup>285</sup>; under dollarization, the US dollar is the main medium of exchange. Accordingly, the US dollar (USD) is the most used currency in the world. Its special status as the "*global reserve currency*"<sup>286</sup> goes back to World War II thanks to the Bretton Woods system during which the IMF and the World Bank were created. At that time, "*a system of exchange rates was created wherein each country pegged the value of its currency to the dollar, which itself was convertible to gold at the rate of \$35 per ounce*"<sup>287</sup>. This system was established to find world stability after the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Bretton Woods system ended in 1971 after the suspension of the dollar's convertibility to gold. However, the US remains the choice for international trade up until today. Indeed, according to the Bloomberg Institute, the dollar has maintained its international value consistently<sup>288</sup>. The USD stability comes from "*its stable value, the size of the US economy, and the United States' geopolitical heft*"<sup>289</sup>. To what concerns Saudi Arabia, the state still pegs its currency to the dollar. On the other hand, de-dollarization is defined as:

*"The process of reducing the US dollar's hegemony in global trade in financial operations by shifting to alternative exchange methods, including national currencies and domestic payments systems, as well as modifying currency reserves"*<sup>290</sup>.

---

<sup>284</sup> Global Times, 'What Is Meant by De-Dollarization? - Global Times', accessed 16 February 2024, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202307/1294673.shtml>.

<sup>285</sup> 'dollarization', 14 February 2024, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/dollarization>.

<sup>286</sup> 'The Dollar: The World's Reserve Currency', Council on Foreign Relations, accessed 16 February 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/dollar-worlds-reserve-currency>.

<sup>287</sup> 'The Dollar'.

<sup>288</sup> 'The BRICS and Their Dollar Dilemma', *Bloomberg.Com*, 23 August 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2023-08-23/global-economy-latest-brics-and-dollar-alternatives>.

<sup>289</sup> 'The Dollar'.

<sup>290</sup> Times, 'What Is Meant by De-Dollarization?'

Some economic crises as the war in Ukraine and the Covid-19 pandemic have raised concerns about the dollar remaining the leading currency. The loss of such a status for the USD would have important economic and political consequences, as the US would have fewer funding possibilities and values, and the global financial system could be completely revised. In such a situation, the US would face massive inflation. It would therefore “*diminish the ability of the United States to run large federal deficits and keep interest rates on accumulated debt relatively low*”<sup>291</sup>. Some countries have been calling for a new monetary system, and the BRICS have been discussing the “*framework for a shared currency*”<sup>292</sup>. The US often uses the dollar as a weapon to impose economic sanctions on Russia and Iran, which enhances the seeking for alternatives<sup>293</sup>. Indeed, the US and European governments decided to cut off Russian banks from the global financial system, the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT)<sup>294</sup>. In 2015, the BRICS announced their intentions to develop their “*close communication in order to develop cooperation in the monetary sphere*”<sup>295</sup>. However, scholars have been pointing out that the lack of “*robust central banks and monetary policies, make it infeasible*”<sup>296</sup>. According to Peter Zeihan, another obstacle to the creation of a BRICS currency is the number of economic and political divergences preventing them from agreeing. Indeed, the BRICS countries are quite reluctant to adopt a currency of one member as a common currency<sup>297</sup>. This situation will be complexified by the enlargement of the BRICS membership, as it would be even harder for Saudi Arabia and Iran to agree upon, for instance. North Africa has also been an important advocate of the de-dollarization. Accordingly, the enlargement of the BRICS towards new countries advocating for the de-dollarization questions their commitment to global de-dollarization. According to the Global Times, about 85 countries have joined the de-dollarization trend, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as Turkey, Argentina, Iran, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia<sup>298</sup>. While the potential of a BRICS currency might meet difficulties in emerging sometime soon, some countries are trying to push their national currency, such as the Chinese renminbi (RMB). However, many authors explain that “*China does not have the intention or the capacity to*

---

<sup>291</sup> Holly Dages, ‘China’s de-Dollarization Message Finds a Receptive Audience in North Africa’, *Atlantic Council* (blog), 14 December 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/china-dedollarization-north-africa/>.

<sup>292</sup> ‘The Dollar’.

<sup>293</sup> Sumayya Ismail, ‘Can BRICS Dethrone the US Dollar? It’ll Be an Uphill Climb, Experts Say’, *Al Jazeera*, accessed 16 February 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/8/24/can-brics-dethrone-the-us-dollar-itll-be-an-uphill-climb-experts-say>.

<sup>294</sup> Robert Greene, ‘The Difficult Realities of the BRICS’ Dedollarization Efforts—and the Renminbi’s Role’, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, accessed 16 February 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/12/05/difficult-realities-of-brics-dedollarization-efforts-and-renminbi-s-role-pub-91173>.

<sup>295</sup> Times, ‘What Is Meant by De-Dollarization?’

<sup>296</sup> ‘The Dollar’.

<sup>297</sup> *Global Currency: The Dollar Ain’t Going Nowhere*, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiR54FPQiCs>.

<sup>298</sup> Times, ‘What Is Meant by De-Dollarization?’

*dethrone the dollar*<sup>299</sup> quoting Zongyuan Zoe Liu, a Council on Foreign Relations expert. Nevertheless, the other important currencies remain far behind the USD as the RMB represents only about 2% of the allocated reserves and the Euro reaches 20% while the USD maintains itself around 60%<sup>300</sup>.

Thus, the potential de-dollarization of the international economy has few chances to happen as scholars, including Peter Zeihan and many others, seem to be unanimous in saying that the USD will remain king.

### 2.1.2. The goals of the Renminbi.

While the possibility for the BRICS to develop their own currency, one alternative to the dollar could be found in the “R5”<sup>301</sup> common currency that includes the five currencies used by the founding BRICS members which are the renminbi (China), the ruble (Russia), the rupee (India), the real (Brazil), and the rand (South Africa).

Some states want to develop their national currency and push it at the international level, maybe not as a BRICS ambition but rather as a national economic power. This is the case in China. China, for instance, launched its alternative to SWIFT: the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) back in 2015<sup>302</sup>. The very creation of this Chinese payment system has as a goal “*to improve the efficiency of RMB transaction*”<sup>303</sup> as it settles all the interactions in renminbi currency. Their goals are quite different. Indeed, SWIFT was created in the 1970s as a set of “*standards for international financial messaging*”<sup>304</sup> and CIPS has for goal to boost the international attraction of the RMB as well as to prevent the Chinese currency and its transactions from being impacted by SWIFT sanctions, as Russia was targeted of. CIPS has succeeded in including 119 direct and 1,304 indirect participants<sup>305</sup> while SWIFT includes 11,000 participating institutions in 200 countries<sup>306</sup>. About one-third of the Russian banks

---

<sup>299</sup> ‘The Dollar’.

<sup>300</sup> ‘The Dollar’.

<sup>301</sup> Dagnes, ‘China’s de-Dollarization Message Finds a Receptive Audience in North Africa’, 14 December 2023.

<sup>302</sup> Holly Dagnes, ‘China’s de-Dollarization Message Finds a Receptive Audience in North Africa’, *Atlantic Council* (blog), 14 December 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/china-dedollarization-north-africa/>.

<sup>303</sup> ‘Why China’s CIPS Matters (and Not for the Reasons You Think)’, Default, accessed 17 February 2024, <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/why-chinas-cips-matters-and-not-reasons-you-think>.

<sup>304</sup> ‘Why China’s CIPS Matters (and Not for the Reasons You Think)’.

<sup>305</sup> Dagnes, ‘China’s de-Dollarization Message Finds a Receptive Audience in North Africa’, 14 December 2023.

<sup>306</sup> ‘Why China’s CIPS Matters (and Not for the Reasons You Think)’.

joined CIPS as indirect participants in May 2023<sup>307</sup>. The CIPS example is the ideal illustration of the Chinese broad ambitions in international finance. Scholars reported that the daily CIPS transactions “increased by 50 percent in 2022 after Russia invaded Ukraine”<sup>308</sup> and increased by another 25% in 2023. The People’s Bank of China (PBOC) has also concluded many “bilateral swap lines act as a line of credit”<sup>309</sup>, to allow the central banks to exchange local currency for renminbi with the PBOC to continue promoting the RMB. For instance, a Brazilian bank was authorized to clear the renminbi by the PBOC in February 2023<sup>310</sup>. Moreover, China and Saudi Arabia have concluded a bilateral swap line to facilitate “renminbi oil payments to energy suppliers in Saudi Arabia”<sup>311</sup>. China has also built a “platform that aims to facilitate the deployment of blockchain technology for companies”<sup>312</sup>, called Blockchain-based Service Network (BSN). The BSN proposes easier interoperability between banks and companies and helps companies or governments develop their blockchain products<sup>313</sup>. Furthermore, China is trying to make the RMB with the “digital RMB”<sup>314</sup>, which international use has not been very high up until now. The RMB, while remaining only the fourth currency in the shares of global central bank reserves<sup>315</sup>, becomes more and more relevant beyond the Chinese borders. For instance, in October 2023, Egypt has issued “yuan-dominated bonds”<sup>316</sup> for the first time. Also, China and the French company TotalEnergies completed their first “renminbi-settled liquified natural gas trade”<sup>317</sup> in March 2023. The importance of the renminbi has grown between 2016 and 2022 as cross-border transactions increased from 20 to 50%<sup>318</sup>.

However, one drawback of the Chinese position in the international financial system is its political-economic model that the state should change to open “its capital account and embracing financial volatility”<sup>319</sup>, which is quite unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future. Peter Zeihan also negatively referred to the RMB as a “manipulative currency”<sup>320</sup> by saying that it could not seriously challenge the dollar anytime soon. Still, if China manages to develop the RMB

---

<sup>307</sup> Greene, ‘The Difficult Realities of the BRICS’ Dedollarization Efforts—and the Renminbi’s Role’.

<sup>308</sup> Greene.

<sup>309</sup> Greene.

<sup>310</sup> Greene.

<sup>311</sup> Greene.

<sup>312</sup> Arjun Kharpal, ‘China Has Been Quietly Building a Blockchain Platform. Here’s What We Know’, CNBC, 16 May 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/05/16/china-blockchain-explainer-what-is-bsn.html>.

<sup>313</sup> Kharpal.

<sup>314</sup> Dagues, ‘China’s de-Dollarization Message Finds a Receptive Audience in North Africa’, 14 December 2023.

<sup>315</sup> Greene, ‘The Difficult Realities of the BRICS’ Dedollarization Efforts—and the Renminbi’s Role’.

<sup>316</sup> Dagues, ‘China’s de-Dollarization Message Finds a Receptive Audience in North Africa’, 14 December 2023.

<sup>317</sup> Dagues.

<sup>318</sup> Greene, ‘The Difficult Realities of the BRICS’ Dedollarization Efforts—and the Renminbi’s Role’.

<sup>319</sup> ‘Why China’s CIPS Matters (and Not for the Reasons You Think)’.

<sup>320</sup> *Global Currency*.

enough, with less social control and financial stability, then China could be in a “*position of strength to challenge leaders in the global financial order*”<sup>321</sup>. In the end, the renminbi is the most used BRICS currency, but its use remains quite low compared to the dollar. The RMB might thus not represent the monetary opportunity for the BRICS, due to its difficulties in developing itself internationally, and because China’s ambitions are not revolved around the BRICS.

## **2. The BRICS, a group neither united at 5... nor 10.**

As was already shown with the war in Ukraine, the BRICS as a group seems to face difficulties in agreeing and getting along all together. While this situation was already the case among the 5 members, it will be even harder among the 10 members. The long-lasting conflict with Iran and Saudi Arabia is one perfect example. The BRICS also faces the Chinese desire to reach international hegemony and dethrone the US. Indeed, China may use the BRICS as a springboard for its power.

### **2.2.1. China as the leader of the BRICS, seeking hegemony?**

China has many ambitions in the BRICS group to rival the G7 Western-dominated group. The enlargement of the BRICS membership appears as a “*big win for Xi*”<sup>322</sup>, as he had pushed to expand the group despite reservations from other members, such as India and Brazil. The long list of countries wanting to join the BRICS group, including Algeria, Kazakhstan, Cuba, etc., shows the political importance of such an organization<sup>323</sup>. Indeed, the BRICS represent an alternative to global Western-dominated bodies in developing finance, trade, and investment.

However, many scholars question the effectiveness of the BRICS organization after the expansion, as members are quite disparate, and it would be difficult to agree on consensus-based decisions. In the idea, we will take the example in the following paragraph of Iran and Saudi Arabia which have been rivals for many years. There are also rivalries and tensions

---

<sup>321</sup> ‘Why China’s CIPS Matters (and Not for the Reasons You Think)’.

<sup>322</sup> Nectar Gan, ‘BRICS Expansion Is a Big Win for China. But Can It Really Work as a Counterweight to the West?’, CNN, 29 August 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/28/china/china-brics-expansion-victory-intl-hnk/index.html>.

<sup>323</sup> ‘What Is BRICS, Which Countries Want to Join and Why?’, *Reuters*, 21 August 2023, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/world/what-is-brics-who-are-its-members-2023-08-21/>.



between China and India for political and economic domination in Asia due to clashes along their disputed border. The number of disagreements between the BRICS countries will prevent them from implementing important policies to raise their voices internationally and challenge the existing Western-led order. This is the theory raised by Peter Zeihan, an expert in geopolitics, and many other authors<sup>324</sup>. This is why he says for instance that “*we know that the BRICS can’t have a meaningful energy policy*”<sup>325</sup> because there are too many opposing powers with Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. He also assesses that some of the new members, like Ethiopia or even Saudi Arabia for security matters, only entered the BRICS to develop their ties with China. He explains that the Chinese only see the BRICS as a “*rhetoric*”<sup>326</sup> tool to develop China’s power.

China sees the expansion of the BRICS “*as a path to increase its influence*”<sup>327</sup> because most bilateral trades within the BRICS are concluded with China. Indeed, China uses the BRICS as a way to increase its power and to achieve hegemony, defined as “*the ability to exercise leadership, influence and perhaps even dominance over foreign relations*”<sup>328</sup>. Xi Jinping displays a “*superpower’s ambition*”<sup>329</sup> that is a challenge to the US influence in the Western Pacific. According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, there are two methods for China to reach its superpower status<sup>330</sup>. The first one focuses on the regional superiority of China to then develop its international power. The second one is more focused on competing for world hegemony and challenging the US thanks to its economic, diplomatic, and political influence at the international level. However, the American presence in Asia, from Vietnam to Taiwan and Japan, prevents China from becoming the unique great power in the region<sup>331</sup>.

In the end, China seizes the BRICS group as an opportunity to develop its geopolitical power onto the international scene. Thus, China appears as the leader of the BRICS which serves the political interests of China while the BRICS probably won’t become a relevant actor due to internal tensions.

---

<sup>324</sup> *The BRICS Summit: Significant or Hoopla?* | Peter Zeihan, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tG7hh-Vx2A>.

<sup>325</sup> *The BRICS Summit*.

<sup>326</sup> *The BRICS Summit*.

<sup>327</sup> ‘BRICS Summit—Deepening the Divide’, accessed 18 February 2024, <https://www.conference-board.org/research/ced-policy-backgrounders/ced-policy-backgrounder-BRICS-summit>.

<sup>328</sup> Brendan Taylor, ‘Towards Hegemony? Assessing China’s Asian Ambitions’, *Security Challenges* 1, no. 1 (2005): 21–25, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26459018>.

<sup>329</sup> Jake Sullivan Brands Hal, ‘China Has Two Paths To Global Domination’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed 18 February 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/05/22/china-has-two-paths-to-global-domination-pub-81908>.

<sup>330</sup> Brands.

<sup>331</sup> Brands.

## 2.2.2. Disagreements among the BRICS members: the Saudi-Iranian case.

While they have never waged a direct war, the enduring conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia is one of the long-lasting conflicts preventing the BRICS from developing and adopting relevant policies to make the BRICS a potential challenger of the G7.

Their conflict comes from the search for regional dominance in the Middle East in addition to the Sunni-Shiite conflict. Before the Iranian revolution in 1979, the two countries shared good diplomatic relations as they were supported by the West<sup>332</sup>. The new Shah of Iran positioned himself in opposition to the Sunni monarchy and the West. The Gulf Cooperation Council was created among six Middle East members, including Saudi Arabia, to form a “*security front against the perceived Iranian threat*”<sup>333</sup>. Before the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988, Saudi Arabia provided military supplies to Iraq. Clashes occurred in Mecca when Iranians organized anti-US demonstrations; at least 400 people died<sup>334</sup>. Following this confrontation, Saudi Arabia stopped its diplomatic relations with Iran for at least 3 years. In 2011 during the Arab Spring, both countries were looking for regional hegemony and supported different countries. Iran supported Tunisia, Egypt, and Bahrain. When the Syrian war broke out, Saudi Arabia supported the opposition, as the US did, while the US stood with the regime. In the case of Yemen, “*Iran supplies the Houthi rebels with weapons*”<sup>335</sup>, Saudi Arabia directly acted military in Yemen.

China announced that it had successfully “*brokered the restoration of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran*”<sup>336</sup> in March 2023 and that the two countries would open embassies in both countries. The presence of China as a “*mediator between Saudi Arabia and Iran can facilitate greater cooperation*”<sup>337</sup>, as China maintains relations with both countries. On the other hand, the links between Saudi Arabia and the US and the latter’s opposition to Iran can represent an obstacle to further agreements. One chance for Saudi Arabia and Iran to develop their relationship lies in cultural diplomacy, with “*cross-cultural exchange programs*”<sup>338</sup> for youth, for instance. China

---

<sup>332</sup> *Pourquoi l’Iran et l’Arabie Saoudite Sont-Ils Ennemis ?*, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcEiYG1Tdr0>.

<sup>333</sup> *Pourquoi l’Iran et l’Arabie Saoudite Sont-Ils Ennemis ?*

<sup>334</sup> *Pourquoi l’Iran et l’Arabie Saoudite Sont-Ils Ennemis ?*

<sup>335</sup> *Pourquoi l’Iran et l’Arabie Saoudite Sont-Ils Ennemis ?*

<sup>336</sup> ‘Saudi Arabia and Iran Restore Relations: A Victory of Necessity | Wilson Center’, accessed 18 February 2024, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/saudi-arabia-and-iran-restore-relations-victory-necessity>.

<sup>337</sup> ‘Saudi Arabia and Iran: Beyond Geopolitics’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed 18 February 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/89893>.

<sup>338</sup> ‘Saudi Arabia and Iran’.

*“hosted the first meeting of foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and Iran since they cut ties in 2016”<sup>339</sup>.* Moreover, Saudi Arabia accepted a temporary ceasefire in Yemen. The role of China is expected to continue bringing the two countries together, especially since they have now joined the BRICS.

In the end, the long-lasting conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia seems to be in good hands with China to the extent that they seem to reconnect. However, their divergences may be too important and are just one conflictual relationship among many in the BRICS, for the BRICS to agree upon strategic relevant policies.

## **Section 3 : The BRICS as the leader of a new world order?**

The last section of the thesis is dedicated to a quite more theoretical debate, to check whether the BRICS will lead to a bipolar system by referring to the different types of bipolarities (3.1.1) or rather a multipolar one, still maintaining multilateral relations between all states (3.1.2). It will also be relevant to end the development of the thesis around revolving to the reverberations in the Middle East of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS, first by referring to the potential disruptions (3.2.1) and then by assessing how much the entry of Saudi Arabia in the BRICS could represent a chance for the group in its international development and attraction (3.2.2).

### **1. The insights of a new world order because of an irreconcilable confrontation between East and West.**

The BRICS block often appears as an opposition to the existing order and the US hegemony. Indeed, we could analyze the BRICS' will and capacity to become the second pole of a bipolar system. On the other hand, the BRICS division may create more of a multipolar world rather than a bipolar one. Also, it will be relevant to assess the difference between multilateralism, which is possible in a bipolar system, and multipolarity.

---

<sup>339</sup> ‘Saudi Arabia and Iran Restore Relations’.

### 3.1.1. The three types of bipolarities: political, structural, and value.

The question of a bipolar world system derives logically from the enlargement of the BRICS, as well as the desire for more Global South weight and voice in the international system. As we have seen in the previous section, China may use the BRICS as a way to obtain more power and more credit internationally. This is why China positions itself as the ‘leader’ of the BRICS and has never hidden its goal to challenge the US’s political and economic hegemony.

According to Zhao Huasheng, an expert in Sino-Russian relations, and Andrey Kortunov, an expert in Russian-American relations, the Chinese authorities have never accepted to talk about a “*co-governance (G2)*”, neither a “*China-US bipolarity*”, nor a “*bipolar confrontation between China and the United States*”<sup>340</sup>. Still, the bipolarization of China and the United States has intensified and has become a “*hot issue in academic and political discussions of international politics*”<sup>341</sup> as well as many International Relations scholars talk about an “*irreconcilable confrontation between the West and the East*”<sup>342</sup>.

According to both authors, there are three types of bipolarities: “*political bipolarity, structural bipolarity, and value bipolarity*”<sup>343</sup>. Political bipolarity regards political cognition in its attributes, influence, and status. The structural bipolarity concerns the material cognition in the material resources leading to superiority. Thirdly, the value bipolarity is linked to the values of the state with the contrast between Western-type democracies and non-Western authoritarianism. What is relevant in this analysis is that the authors assess that China focuses more on the material aspect and Russia on the political one to define the poles. On the other hand, the West tends to emphasize the value dimension of bipolarity. We may assess that China already has the material capacity to be considered as one of the two poles. However, to gain political credit, the strategy chosen by China is to follow multilateralism, defined as “*the principle of political equality*” and “*takes into account the interests of all countries related and is based on the balance or interests of all related countries*”<sup>344</sup>. Looking at the three dimensions of bipolarity, we may affirm that China’s political power is growing as well as its material power. Nevertheless, it could be questioned whether China is relevant in spreading values.

---

<sup>340</sup> Zhao Huasheng, ‘The Coming Bipolarity and Its Implications’.

<sup>341</sup> Zhao Huasheng.

<sup>342</sup> Zhao Huasheng.

<sup>343</sup> Zhao Huasheng.

<sup>344</sup> Zhao Huasheng.

While the Cold War was the perfect illustration of bipolarity, with a world divided into two systems, *“the Western (capitalist) and the Eastern (communist) with irreconcilable (antagonistic) contradictions”*<sup>345</sup>; the current situation is quite different. Indeed, there are many new challenges, including radical regimes, terrorism, shortage of natural resources, lack of international law norms, etc. One major difference between the two periods is that, back in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Soviet Union was almost completely separated and autonomous economically from the West. Today, we must refer to it as a *“global continent”*<sup>346</sup> in the era of globalization. Moreover, many authors see the *“Sino-Russian relationship as part of a broader strategic challenge to the United States”*<sup>347</sup> explaining that the bipolarity is more a *“US-China-Russia triangle”*<sup>348</sup>.

While the idea of bipolarity can be raised, many authors explain that the still existing superiority of the US and even the Chinese and Russian visions are more revolved on a *“gradual transformation of the unipolar, UN centered international system of early XXI century to a multipolar world order”*<sup>349</sup>. The probability of a multipolar world, with China as one of the different powers, is more accurate than a bipolar situation, similar to the Cold War period.

### 3.1.2. Road to multilateralism or multipolarity and the end of the US hegemony?

Globalization, understood as the interconnected international system, will probably lead more to a multilateral and potentially multipolar world rather than a bipolar one. Indeed, different poles of power have flourished during the last few years.

Multilateralism is understood as *“the spirit of political equality”*<sup>350</sup> and *“opposes unipolarity but does not negate multipolarity”*<sup>351</sup>. It is therefore defined as *“the strategic cooperation of three or more states for the achievement of shared goals”*<sup>352</sup>. The thesis of the authors is to explain that further multilateralism in China and Russia’s foreign policy will deepen the Chinese-Russian cooperation and help them increase their international power. The multilateral policy is often

---

<sup>345</sup> Zhao Huasheng.

<sup>346</sup> Zhao Huasheng.

<sup>347</sup> Ryan Hass and Jude Blanchette, ‘Central Questions in U.S.-China Relations amid Global Turbulence’, 21 July 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/central-questions-us-china-relations-amid-global-turbulence>.

<sup>348</sup> Zhao Huasheng, ‘The Coming Bipolarity and Its Implications’.

<sup>349</sup> Zhao Huasheng.

<sup>350</sup> Zhao Huasheng.

<sup>351</sup> Zhao Huasheng.

<sup>352</sup> APRI, ‘Evolving Multilateralism’.

used by developing countries for them “*to pursue the needs and aspirations of actors*”<sup>353</sup>. Moreover, in the very definition of multilateralism, the BRICS group provides a perfect example as it has evolved to pursue the strategic interests of South-South cooperation and development. Accordingly, multilateralism is quite inevitable in a globalization context as states are necessarily connected one with another. Multilateralism is also a way to spread its economic and political influence in the world; this is why scholars tend to suggest China deepening its diplomatic relations, especially with Russia, is a strategic means for the state to softly impose its alternative voice to the Western one<sup>354</sup>. The US has increased multilateralism in its involvement in international organizations such as NATO and the World Health Organization (WHO). However, some politicians have questioned the relevance of a multilateral policy, as Donald Trump criticized NATO and announced the withdrawal of the US from the WHO and the Paris Agreement<sup>355</sup>. Nevertheless, most authors assess that multilateralism and cooperation are essential in managing global issues and increasing the state’s power and security.

Multipolarity is rather defined as the “*distribution of power between three or more countries, alliances*”<sup>356</sup>. The potential of a multipolar world is a more difficult question to answer. While multilateralism meets a consensus in its necessity to be enhanced, multipolarity is a long-term debate among International Relations specialists. Among others, Joseph Nye and Immanuel Wallerstein stood for a multipolar world. In the context of the BRICS, some authors explain how the group tries to challenge the existing US hegemony. This is done thanks to all the economic, political, financial, and military cooperation they agreed upon and that were developed in the previous sections. In a multipolar world, China and Russia would be considered as two different poles and thus would compete.

In the end, as said in the previous paragraph, the BRICS becoming the only opposing pole to the US thus creating a bipolar world is quite unlikely. On the other hand, multipolarity would entail Russia and China as two different poles among all the poles. Thus, this would lead to the BRICS being divided due to opposing interests in their objectives to maintain their position as a great power in the multipolar system. Even in this scenario, the US remains way ahead in all the domains of power and would preserve a somewhat superior status. This is why the authors say that China and Russia must cooperate and deepen their multilateral

---

<sup>353</sup> APRI.

<sup>354</sup> Hass and Blanchette, ‘Central Questions in U.S.-China Relations amid Global Turbulence’.

<sup>355</sup> ‘U.S. Foreign Policy: Multilateralism or Unilateralism? | Model Diplomacy’, 27 April 2023, <https://modeldiplomacy.cfr.org/pop-up-cases/us-foreign-policy-multilateralism-or-unilateralism>.

<sup>356</sup> ‘MULTIPOLARITY Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary’, 23 February 2024, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/multipolarity>.

foreign policies to be in a position to challenge the US hegemony. Still, as Peter Zeihan theorized, the BRICS is unlikely to provide relevant policies for the US to feel threatened by its dominant status.

## **2. The reverberations in the Middle East area of Saudi Arabia's shift in relationship from the US to the BRICS block.**

In this last subsection, we will assess how the entry of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS is both a chance for the future development and international relevance of the group as well as it will lead to important disruptions in the Middle East because of the diversity of interests and powers of influence represented by the BRICS, especially by China and Russia on the one side, and the United States on the other side.

### **3.2.1. Disruptions in the Middle East.**

The growing opposition between the West and the East, as well as the entry of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS group, may lead to major disruptions and disagreements in the Middle East. These disruptions are linked with the former US allies in the region that are becoming China's and Russia's allies. The US's most important partners were, until January 1<sup>st</sup>, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, and the UAE. However, three of them have entered the BRICS recently and two of them, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, are important economic and political powers in the region. Thus, the potential disruptions could concern disagreements between the remaining US partners, namely Turkey, Jordan, and Israel, and states that tend to develop further political relationships, economic and strategic agreements, and diplomatic discussions with BRICS countries and the alternative voice to the US, namely the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

The recent events between Israel and Palestine are a good illustration of the splitting interests in the region represented by the loss of US influence. Saudi Arabia's position towards the war in Israel has shown an increasing remoteness with the United States' interests. Saudi Arabia has explained that *"there will be no diplomatic relations with Israel unless an independent*

*Palestinian state is recognized on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital*<sup>357</sup>. This statement emphasizes the fact that Saudi Arabia does not comply with the US interests and ideals anymore rather they agree with Russia and China. On the one hand, Russia's position is quite clear as Putin *"clearly backs away from the very close relationship with Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu that he previously touted at every opportunity"*<sup>358</sup>. On the other hand, China has said that *"Israel's actions went beyond the scope of self-defense and demanded that it stop imposing group punishment on Palestinians"*<sup>359</sup>. Accordingly, diplomatic relations in the Middle East area may be worsened due to polarized positions. Israel and the US may be further isolated over time.

In the end, the Middle East area is one the most conflictual regions in the world, and the potential new disruptions due to the enlargement of the BRICS will neither improve the long-lasting conflicts, between Saudi Arabia and Iran for instance, nor it will worsen the global conflictual situation in the Middle East. Still, as we have seen with the example of the war between Israel and Palestine, the relations between the old US partners and Saudi Arabia will probably be damaged. Finally, the US will probably lose important anchor points and power of influence in the region which could lead to even more conflicts, as the US military presence in the region could be largely diminished.

### 3.2.2. Saudi Arabia integration: a chance for the development, the integration, and the sustainability of the BRICS.

Almost all countries of the Middle East are turning to the BRICS group and Russia and China. This also represents a chance for Saudi Arabia and the Middle East to develop their diplomatic power and their economic integration in the world economy. Indeed, the BRICS investments have been funded mainly by China as *"the money for these schemes has come mainly from China"*<sup>360</sup>. Brazil, Russia, and South Africa were stagnating economies. This is why

---

<sup>357</sup> 'Saudi Arabia: No Israel Ties without Recognition of Palestinian State', *Reuters*, 7 February 2024, sec. Middle East, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-says-there-will-be-no-diplomatic-relations-with-israel-without-an-2024-02-07/>.

<sup>358</sup> 'What Is Russia's Role in the Israel-Gaza Crisis?', *Brookings*, accessed 25 February 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-is-russias-role-in-the-israel-gaza-crisis/>.

<sup>359</sup> 'Why China Is Taking Sides Against Israel—and Why It Will Likely Backfire | The Washington Institute', accessed 25 February 2024, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/why-china-taking-sides-against-israel-and-why-it-will-likely-backfire>.

<sup>360</sup> yrashed, 'The BRICS Come to the Middle East and North Africa', *Atlantic Council* (blog), 25 August 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-brics-come-to-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/>.



the opportunity of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the BRICS “*could herald an influx of funds from them for BRICS development activity*”<sup>361</sup>.

Moreover, bringing together countries with very different interests and who have been enemies for decades, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, will not pacify the tensions in the Middle East either. Indeed, bringing them together should imply more cooperation and agreements for the group to grow its international relevance. However, the long-lasting conflicts and the strategic antagonist interests could rise even more over time. Saudi Arabia and Iran, almost surely, won’t be able to conclude agreements and develop good diplomatic relations as the reasons opposing them have been settled for too long.

The integration of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the BRICS can also be understood as a chance for the group and could also benefit the US and the West. Indeed, Saudi Arabia and the UAE need to maintain the US as one of their strategic partners. These countries may be a good balance as to “*at least prevent Moscow, Beijing, and Tebran from turning the BRICS into a group that is completely hostile to the West – and that is something that Western diplomacy should encourage*”<sup>362</sup>. Saudi Arabia and the UAE will not completely turn against the US and thus will be in the middle of agreements with both the US and the BRICS which will prevent the BRICS as a group from becoming a complete anti-West block.

In the end, the integration of Saudi Arabia may cause disruptions in the Middle East, especially due to the old cooperation and friendship they had with the US and its implications with the tensions among Israel. However, the integration of the US partners into the BRICS is a clear opportunity for the group to remain relevant enough and not become an extremist anti-West block. Indeed, the moderate positions of the BRICS towards the West will enable the group to develop more and to attract other countries in the future, as about 40 countries have expressed their interest in joining the BRICS and 23 states have officially proposed their membership<sup>363</sup> such as Venezuela, Nigeria, and Argentina (which was admitted in the BRICS but then withdrew).

---

<sup>361</sup> yrashed.

<sup>362</sup> yrashed.

<sup>363</sup> ‘39 pays prêts à rejoindre les BRICS en 2024’, [www.bdor.fr](http://www.bdor.fr), 23 October 2023, <https://www.bdor.fr/actualites-or/39-pays-prets-a-rejoindre-les-brics-en-2024>.

## **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, this work aimed at analyzing the extent to which the BRICS enlargement towards Saudi Arabia would have major consequences in the fields of economics, cooperation, geopolitics, military, and energy. The BRICS explicitly expressed through the enlargement of its membership towards 5 new countries, on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023, its desire to become a more relevant and significant group. After being impeded in its development, the BRICS thought enlarging its membership would represent the greatest opportunity to enhance South-South cooperation. The thesis focused on the entry of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS, as it probably represents the most ambivalent membership in the BRICS. Making Saudi Arabia become a Chinese and Russian, among others, official partner, and somehow an ally, will create opportunities for the BRICS in terms of economic agreements, especially to the extent that energy supplies and energy security from Saudi Arabia will be ideologically favored towards the BRICS.

The Vision 2030 Saudi plan pushed Saudi Arabia into the arms of the BRICS in its will to diversify its economic resources and get out of its dependence on the oil industry. Saudi Arabia is the second top oil producer right after the United States and thus represents a strategic country for the BRICS, having now Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE as both members of the BRICS and of the OPEC organization. There were already many examples of cooperation and agreements between Saudi Arabia and some members of the BRICS, especially China and India. Accordingly, the BRICS had started to grow its integration beyond the only border of a 'group' of emerging economies as Jim O'Neil stated in 2001, such as the New Development Bank in the realm of financial transactions and investment. Saudi Arabia has seemed to take a step away from its long-lasting tight links with the United States. A rather relevant example of such remoteness was seen in Saudi Arabia's position in light of the war between Israel and Palestine that broke out on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Still, Saudi Arabia won't ever completely untie its links and thus will hold the strategic partnership in the realm of military with the US. This will maintain an ambiguity in the future of the 'alliance', or the 'side' Saudi Arabia will take.

At the beginning of the thesis, we were wondering what the possible consequences of Saudi Arabia joining the BRICS were. The consequences developed along the thesis are diverse but, in the end, quite not that relevant in considering a change in the world's existing order.

In the short and medium term, the decision of the BRICS seems quite useless as the ten countries appear very divided. Enlarging its membership will even prevent them from agreeing on anything tangible as they could barely do at 5 members, like what concerns a common currency. They appear divided in their position towards the war of Russia in Ukraine. Iran has been an enemy of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, especially in the realm of oil, which means that no significant energy agreements could even be signed under the 'BRICS' flag'. Moreover, according to Peter Zeihan's statements, Ethiopia brings little to the table, neither as being a strong economy nor with Chinese investment. It only brings the presence of Africa into the BRICS. In the short and medium term, the BRICS won't be able to efficiently challenge the existing world order and won't have notable consequences in any of the cited domains, such as economy, geopolitics, and military. Still, with the importance of independent powers, such as China, India, and Russia, they could create a more multipolar world rather than the current unipolar one.

In the long term, the consequence of such an enlargement of the BRICS could represent an alternative voice to the existing world order, on the condition of defining clear objectives and being able to agree upon strategic and relevant decisions, such as the trading of oil being done in yuan or a common currency for instance. The entry of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS also calls into question its existing ties with the United States. The United States is also losing a strategic anchor point in the Middle East and appears quite left out with only Israel, while the Israeli state has grown opposed to most of the Middle East countries. The United States will also lose a strategic preference in the trading of oil and gas from Saudi Arabia. The BRICS could represent a leader in growing multilateral relations between countries and, if they manage to do so, a bipolar order. In the end, the possibility of a breakout of important consequences of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS will indeed depend on the ability of the ten states to sit at the same table and accord themselves on the one path to follow. This seems quite impossible in the current context and with such antagonistic interests.

In the end, the BRICS organization will probably represent more an ideological opposition to the West and thus an alternative to the G7 group with the South-South interests at heart rather than a challenge to NATO, as a military organization, or the NAFTA, as an economic organization, or the EU, as an economic and political organization. The Chinese president did not even show at the opening ceremony, what Peter Zeihan interpreted as the BRICS summit being only a rhetoric summit in the end. Unless a radical evolution in the lining up between the BRICS countries, this enlargement towards Saudi Arabia, among the others, will

be more rhetoric and ideological rather than a real disruption in the world geopolitics and economics.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Books.**

- Degans, Axelle. *Les Pays Émergents : De Nouveaux Acteurs : BRIC's : Brésil, Russie, Inde, Chine... Afrique Du Sud - Sciences Po Bordeaux*. Ellipses, 2011.
- Rigoulet-Roze, David. *Géopolitique de l'Arabie Saoudite - Sciences Po Bordeaux*. Armand Colin, 2005.
- Sørensen, Georg, Jørgen Møller, Robert Jackson, Georg Sørensen, Jørgen Møller, and Robert Jackson. *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*. Eighth Edition, Eighth Edition. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Taïno Kari, Alain Désiré. *Les relations américano-saoudiennes depuis la fin de la guerre froide: l'alliance stratégique à l'épreuve des cultures*. Paris (France): L'Harmattan, 2011.

### **Research papers.**

- Azhar, Muhammad. 'Economic Cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia: Performance and Prospects'. *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 2 (2008): 323–34.
- Clément, Karine. 'Russie : un autoritarisme oligarchique'. In *Manuel indocile de sciences sociales*, 613–23. Hors collection Sciences Humaines. Paris: La Découverte, 2019.
- Cynthia, Roberts, Leslie Armijo, and Saori Katada. 'Global Power Shift: The BRICS, Building Capabilities for Influence'. In *The BRICS and Collective Financial Statecraft*, edited by Cynthia Roberts, Leslie Armijo, and Saori Katada, 0. Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Eilts, Hermann Frederick. 'DAVID E. LONG, "The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies" (Book Review)'. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987): 380–83.
- Gaubatz, Kurt Taylor. 'Democratic States and Commitment in International Relations'. *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (1996): 109–39.
- Joffé, E. G. H. 'Relations between the Middle East and the West'. *Middle East Journal* 48, no. 2 (1994): 250–67.
- Llanos-Antczak, Anna. 'Perspectives of Shifting From Oil-Based Economy to Knowledge-Based Economy in Saudi Arabia'. *Journal for Perspectives of Economic, Political, and Social Integration* 28, no. 2 (2023): 7–40.
- Lowe, Peter. 'The Rise of the BRICS in the Global Economy'. *Teaching Geography* 41, no. 2 (2016): 50–53.
- Mason, Robert. 'Back to Realism for an Enduring U.S.-Saudi Relationship'. *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 4 (2014): 32–44.

- Myloie, Laurie. 'DAVID LONG, "The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies" (Book Review)'. *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 20, no. 2 (1986): 232-.
- O'Neill, Jim, Gavyn Davies, David Walton, Andrew Bevan, Erik Nielsen, Stephen Potter, Linda Britten, et al. 'Goldman Sachs Economic Research Group', no. 66 (2001).
- Prados, Alfred B., and Christopher M. Blanchard. 'Saudi Arabia: Current Issues and U.S. Relations'. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service, 2006.
- Provornaya, I. V., I. V. Filimonova, V. Yu. Nemov, A. V. Komarova, and Y. A. Dzyuba. 'Features of the Petroleum Products Pricing in Russia, in the USA, and Saudi Arabia'. *Energy Reports, Technologies and Materials for Renewable Energy, Environment and Sustainability*, 6 (1 November 2020): 514–22.
- Rapone, Joseph A. and Ii. 'The Treaty of Good Neighborly Friendship and Cooperation Between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China: Implications for America's Policy Toward China.' Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, 9 April 2002.
- Sarkar, Urvashi. 'BRICS: An Opportunity for a Transformative South?' *South Asian Survey* 21, no. 1–2 (1 March 2014): 127–37.
- Shichor, Yitzhak. Review of *Review of China-Saudi Arabia Relations, 1990-2012: Marriage of Convenience or Strategic Alliance?*, by Naser M. Al-Tamimi. *Middle East Journal* 68, no. 4 (2014): 649–51.
- Suchkov, Maxim. 'Contemporary Russia-Saudi Relations: Building a Bridge of Cooperation over the Abyss of Discrepancies'. *Iran & the Caucasus* 20, no. 2 (2016): 237–51.
- Taylor, Brendan. 'Towards Hegemony? Assessing China's Asian Ambitions'. *Security Challenges* 1, no. 1 (2005): 21–25.
- 'The Strategic Value of China for Saudi Arabia and the Limitations'. Accessed 2 February 2024.
- Wishnick, Elizabeth. 'Russia and China'. *Asian Survey* 41, no. 5 (2001): 797–821.
- Ying, Fu. 'How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow Are Close, but Not Allies'. *Foreign Affairs* 95 (2016): 96.

### **Press articles.**

- AP News. 'China Expresses Support for Serbia in Renewed Kosovo Clashes Involving NATO Troops', 30 May 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/china-serbia-kosovo-nato-45db1658df5b57bfeca8c9354a2fff6f>.
- Cafiero, Giorgio. 'What's behind Saudi Arabia's Peace Efforts in Ukraine?' <https://www.newarab.com/>. The New Arab, 15 August 2023. <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/whats-behind-saudi-arabias-peace-efforts-ukraine>.

- Chotiner, Isaac. 'Why John Mearsheimer Blames the U.S. for the Crisis in Ukraine'. *The New Yorker*, 1 March 2022. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-john-mearsheimer-blames-the-us-for-the-crisis-in-ukraine>.
- Gan, Nectar. 'BRICS Expansion Is a Big Win for China. But Can It Really Work as a Counterweight to the West?' CNN, 29 August 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/28/china/china-brics-expansion-victory-intl-hnk/index.html>.
- Iordache, Ruxandra. 'Saudi Arabia Takes Step to Join China-Led Security Bloc, as Ties with Beijing Strengthen'. CNBC, 29 March 2023. <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/03/29/saudi-arabia-takes-step-to-join-china-led-security-bloc-as-ties-with-beijing-strengthen.html>.
- Ismail, Sumayya. "'A Wall of BRICS': The Significance of Adding Six New Members to the Bloc". Al Jazeera. Accessed 5 January 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/24/analysis-wall-of-brics-the-significance-of-adding-six-new-members>.
- . 'Can BRICS Dethrone the US Dollar? It'll Be an Uphill Climb, Experts Say'. Al Jazeera. Accessed 19 January 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/8/24/can-brics-dethrone-the-us-dollar-itll-be-an-uphill-climb-experts-say>.
- . 'Can BRICS Dethrone the US Dollar? It'll Be an Uphill Climb, Experts Say'. Al Jazeera. Accessed 16 February 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/8/24/can-brics-dethrone-the-us-dollar-itll-be-an-uphill-climb-experts-say>.
- Kharpal, Arjun. 'China Has Been Quietly Building a Blockchain Platform. Here's What We Know'. CNBC, 16 May 2022. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/05/16/china-blockchain-explainer-what-is-bsn-.html>.
- Langlois, Alexander. 'Why Can't the United Nations Agree to a Ceasefire in Gaza?' <https://www.newarab.com/>. The New Arab, 1 November 2023. <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/why-cant-united-nations-agree-ceasefire-gaza>.
- Le Monde.fr*. 'Argentina Formally Rejects Invitation to Join BRICS'. 29 December 2023. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/12/29/argentina-formally-rejects-invitation-to-join-brics\\_6386345\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/12/29/argentina-formally-rejects-invitation-to-join-brics_6386345_4.html).
- Philip, Bruno. 'BRICS Decide to Welcome New Members, under Pressure from Beijing and Moscow'. *Le Monde.Fr*, 25 August 2023. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/08/25/brics-decide-to-welcome-new-members-under-pressure-from-beijing-and-moscow\\_6108157\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/08/25/brics-decide-to-welcome-new-members-under-pressure-from-beijing-and-moscow_6108157_4.html).
- Times, Global. 'What Is Meant by De-Dollarization? - Global Times'. Accessed 16 February 2024. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202307/1294673.shtml>.
- TV BRICS. 'What Is BRICS and What Are the Goals of This Alliance | TV BRICS, 25.01.23'. Accessed 14 January 2024. <https://tvbrics.com/en/news/what-is-brics-and-what-are-the-goals-of-this-alliance/>.

www.bdor.fr. '39 pays prêts à rejoindre les BRICS en 2024', 23 October 2023.  
<https://www.bdor.fr/actualites-or/39-pays-prets-a-rejoindre-les-brics-en-2024>.

## Web pages.

'A Brief History of Oil Prices'. Accessed 20 January 2024. <https://www.planete-energies.com/en/media/article/brief-history-oil-prices>.

Agência Brasil. 'Brazil Criticizes UN Security Council Impasse: "We Failed"', 31 October 2023. <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/en/internacional/noticia/2023-10/brazil-criticizes-un-security-council-impasse-we-failed>.

APRI. 'Evolving Multilateralism: BRICS, the EU and Responses to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict'. APRI, 23 August 2023. <https://afripoli.org/evolving-multilateralism-brics-the-eu-and-responses-to-the-russia-ukraine-conflict>.

'BRICS Summit—Deepening the Divide'. Accessed 18 February 2024.  
<https://www.conference-board.org/research/ced-policy-backgrounders/ced-policy-backgrounders-BRICS-summit>.

*Bloomberg.com*. 'The BRICS and Their Dollar Dilemma'. 23 August 2023.  
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2023-08-23/global-economy-latest-brics-and-dollar-alternatives>.

*Bloomberg.com*. 'Top Oil Exporter Saudi Arabia Loads Up on Russian Diesel'. 17 March 2023. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-03-17/top-oil-exporter-saudi-arabia-loads-up-on-russian-diesel>.

Brands, Jake Sullivan, Hal. 'China Has Two Paths To Global Domination'. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed 18 February 2024.  
<https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/05/22/china-has-two-paths-to-global-domination-pub-81908>.

Brookings. '1979: Iran and America'. Accessed 15 February 2024.  
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/1979-iran-and-america/>.

Brookings. 'What Is Russia's Role in the Israel-Gaza Crisis?' Accessed 25 February 2024.  
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-is-russias-role-in-the-israel-gaza-crisis/>.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 'Saudi Arabia and Iran: Beyond Geopolitics'. Accessed 18 February 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/89893>.

Council on Foreign Relations. 'The Dollar: The World's Reserve Currency'. Accessed 16 February 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/dollar-worlds-reserve-currency>.

Dagres, Holly. 'China's de-Dollarization Message Finds a Receptive Audience in North Africa'. *Atlantic Council* (blog), 14 December 2023.  
<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/china-dedollarization-north-africa/>.

———. 'China's de-Dollarization Message Finds a Receptive Audience in North Africa'. *Atlantic Council* (blog), 14 December 2023.



<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/china-dedollarization-north-africa/>.

Default. 'Why China's CIPS Matters (and Not for the Reasons You Think)'. Accessed 17 February 2024. <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/why-chinas-cips-matters-and-not-reasons-you-think>.

'Embassy of India, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia : India-Saudi Bilateral Relations'. Accessed 15 January 2024. <https://www.eoiriyadh.gov.in/page/india-saudi-bilateral-relations/>.

EPIC. 'The BRICS Are Back, but for What Purpose?' *Friends of Europe* (blog), 4 September 2023. <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/critical-thinking-the-brics-are-back-but-for-what-purpose/>.

'Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V - Office of the Historian'. Accessed 5 January 2024. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v05/ch10subch2>.

Geaghan-Breiner, Christopher S. Chivvis, Aaron David Miller, Beatrix. 'Saudi Arabia in the Emerging World Order'. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed 12 February 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/11/06/saudi-arabia-in-emerging-world-order-pub-90819>.

Greene, Robert. 'The Difficult Realities of the BRICS' Dedollarization Efforts—and the Renminbi's Role'. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed 16 February 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/12/05/difficult-realities-of-brics-dedollarization-efforts-and-renminbi-s-role-pub-91173>.

Hass, Ryan, and Jude Blanchette. 'Central Questions in U.S.-China Relations amid Global Turbulence', 21 July 2022. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/central-questions-us-china-relations-amid-global-turbulence>.

IISS. 'Fraught Relations: Saudi Ambitions and American Anger'. Accessed 8 February 2024. <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/survival-online/2022/12/fraught-relations-saudi-ambitions-and-american-anger/>.

'In 2022 Polls, Views on U.S. Relations On Par with Other World Powers in the Middle East | The Washington Institute'. Accessed 2 February 2024. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/2022-polls-views-us-relations-par-other-world-powers-middle-east>.

'Inequalities Matters: BRICS Inequalities Fact Sheet'. Accessed 18 January 2024. <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/276312/ib-inequality-matters-brics-140313-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

'Jim O'Neill: Is the Emerging World Still Emerging? – IMF F&D'. Accessed 18 January 2024. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2021/06/how-to-build-a-better-data-economy-haksar.htm>.

Kaczmarek, Marcin. 'Russia-China Relations and the West'. Research Reports or Papers. Centre for Transatlantic Relations, March 2017. <https://archive.transatlanticrelations.org/publication/russia-china-relations-west-marcin-kaczmarek/>.

- Knutson, Jacob. 'Where U.S. Troops Are Stationed in the Middle East'. Axios, 31 October 2023. <https://www.axios.com/2023/10/31/american-troops-middle-east-israel-palestine>.
- 'Largest Chinese Companies by Market Capitalization'. Accessed 12 January 2024. <https://companiesmarketcap.com/china/largest-companies-in-china-by-market-cap/>.
- Lerh, Jeslyn. 'Saudi Arabia Imports Record Russian Fuel Oil in June as Trade Grows'. Reuters, 13 July 2023, sec. Energy. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/saudi-arabia-imports-record-russian-fuel-oil-june-trade-grows-2023-07-13/>.
- Lihua, Zhang. 'Explaining China's Position on the Crimea Referendum'. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed 7 February 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/01/explaining-china-s-position-on-crimea-referendum-pub-59600>.
- Middle East Institute. 'The Quantum Politics of the Middle East'. Accessed 14 January 2024. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/quantum-politics-middle-east>.
- 'Military Size by Country 2024'. Accessed 1 February 2024. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/military-size-by-country>.
- Monastiriakos, George. 'The BRICS Is Not a Strategic Threat to the United States'. *Geopolitical Monitor* (blog), 7 September 2023. <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/the-brics-is-not-a-strategic-threat-to-the-united-states/>.
- Nakhoul, Samia, James Mackenzie, Matt Spetalnick, and Aziz El Yaakoubi. 'Exclusive: US-Saudi Defence Pact Tied to Israel Deal, Palestinian Demands Put Aside'. Reuters, 29 September 2023, sec. World. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-saudi-defence-pact-tied-israel-deal-palestinian-demands-put-aside-2023-09-29/>.
- NATO. 'NATO's Role in Kosovo'. NATO. Accessed 7 February 2024. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_48818.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48818.htm).
- 'On What Basis Was Security Council Permanent Membership Granted? - Ask DAG!' Accessed 12 January 2024. <https://ask.un.org/faq/14518>.
- OSW Centre for Eastern Studies. 'China on Russia's Intervention in Syria', 19 January 2016. <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2016-01-19/china-russias-intervention-syria>.
- Pham, Minh-Thu. 'A UN Expert on the Institution's Successes, Failures, and Continued Relevance'. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed 10 February 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/09/21/un-expert-on-institution-s-successes-failures-and-continued-relevance-pub-90610>.
- Rajagopalan, Rajeswari Pillai. 'India-Saudi Security Ties Getting Stronger'. Accessed 2 February 2024. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/india-saudi-security-ties-getting-stronger/>.

- Reuters. 'Saudi Arabia: No Israel Ties without Recognition of Palestinian State'. 7 February 2024, sec. Middle East. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-says-there-will-be-no-diplomatic-relations-with-israel-without-an-2024-02-07/>.
- Reuters. 'Saudi Arabia Reiterates No Diplomatic Relations with Israel without Independent Palestinian State'. *The Hindu*, 7 February 2024, sec. World. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/saudi-arabia-reiterates-no-diplomatic-relations-with-israel-without-independent-palestinian-state/article67820813.ece>.
- Reuters. 'Saudi-China Energy, Trade and Investment Ties'. 6 December 2022, sec. World. <https://www.reuters.com/world/saudi-china-energy-trade-investment-ties-2022-12-06/>.
- Reuters. 'What Is BRICS, Which Countries Want to Join and Why?' 21 August 2023, sec. World. <https://www.reuters.com/world/what-is-brics-who-are-its-members-2023-08-21/>.
- Saab, Bilal Y. 'After Oil-for-Security', February 2023. <https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/2023-02/Saab%20-%20After%20Oil-for-Security%20-%20A%20Blueprint%20for%20Resetting%20US-Saudi%20Security%20Relations.pdf>.
- 'Saudi Arabia and Iran Restore Relations: A Victory of Necessity | Wilson Center'. Accessed 18 February 2024. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/saudi-arabia-and-iran-restore-relations-victory-necessity>.
- 'Saudi Arabia Oil Reserves, Production and Consumption Statistics - Worldometer'. Accessed 20 January 2024. <https://www.worldometers.info/oil/saudi-arabia-oil/>.
- Service, Statesman News. 'India, Saudi Will Take Strategic Partnership to next Level: PM'. *Asia News Network* (blog), 12 September 2023. <https://asianews.network/india-saudi-will-take-strategic-partnership-to-next-level-pm/>.
- Sharshenova, Dr Aijan. 'The Impact of the War in Ukraine on the BRICS: Six Takeaways from an Expert Discussion'. *The Foreign Policy Centre* (blog), 3 August 2023. <https://fpc.org.uk/the-impact-of-the-war-in-ukraine-on-the-brics-six-takeaways-from-an-expert-discussion/>.
- 'Should the United States Provide Saudi Arabia a Security Guarantee? | Wilson Center'. Accessed 31 January 2024. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/should-united-states-provide-saudi-arabia-security-guarantee>.
- Solutions, Intratec. 'Fuel Oil Price | Saudi Arabia — Q1 2023'. *Intratec Products Blog* (blog), 18 September 2023. <https://medium.com/intratec-products-blog/fuel-oil-price-saudi-arabia-q1-2023-37d5e01157a3>.
- 'The History of World Cup in Football'. Accessed 12 January 2024. <https://www.footballhistory.org/world-cup/index.html>.
- 'The Strategy for BRICS Economic Strategy'. Accessed 15 February 2024. <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/150709-partnership-strategy-en.html>.

- ‘The US-Saudi Trade Relationship: Peace through Commerce’. Accessed 29 January 2024. <https://english.aawsat.com/node/3771681>.
- United States Department of State. ‘U.S. Relations With Saudi Arabia’. Accessed 31 January 2024. <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-saudi-arabia/>.
- ‘U.S. Foreign Policy: Multilateralism or Unilateralism? | Model Diplomacy’, 27 April 2023. <https://modeldiplomacy.cfr.org/pop-up-cases/us-foreign-policy-multilateralism-or-unilateralism>.
- ‘What Is a Developing Country | Educational Pathways International’. Accessed 15 February 2024. <https://www.educationalpathwaysinternational.org/what-is-a-developing-country/>.
- ‘Why China Is Taking Sides Against Israel—and Why It Will Likely Backfire | The Washington Institute’. Accessed 25 February 2024. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/why-china-taking-sides-against-israel-and-why-it-will-likely-backfire>.
- Crashed. ‘The BRICS Come to the Middle East and North Africa’. *Atlantic Council* (blog), 25 August 2023. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-brics-come-to-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/>.
- Zhao Huasheng. ‘The Coming Bipolarity and Its Implications: Views from China and Russia’. BRICS. Accessed 5 January 2024. <http://infobrics.org>.
- ‘الأمانة العامة لمجلس التعاون لدول الخليج العربية’. Accessed 14 January 2024. <https://www.gcc-sg.org/en-us/Pages/default.aspx>.

## SOURCES

- ‘2024 Military Strength Ranking’. Accessed 29 January 2024. <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php>.
- ‘Budget-Summary-for-CY2018.Pdf’. Accessed 12 January 2024. <https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Budget-summary-for-CY2018.pdf>.
- ‘Concepts of Inequality’. Accessed 15 February 2024. [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/wess/wess\\_dev\\_issues/dsp\\_policy\\_01.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/wess/wess_dev_issues/dsp_policy_01.pdf).
- ‘Countries Elected Members | United Nations Security Council’. Accessed 12 January 2024. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/countries-elected-members>.
- ‘Current Members | United Nations Security Council’. Accessed 10 February 2024. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/current-members>.
- ‘dollarization’, 14 February 2024. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/dollarization>.
- Economics Observatory. ‘The BRICS Countries: Where next and What Impact on the Global Economy?’ Accessed 18 January 2024. <https://www.economicsobservatory.com/the-brics-countries-where-next-and-what-impact-on-the-global-economy>.
- ‘Formula 1 Announces Calendar for 2024’. Accessed 14 January 2024. <https://www.formula1.com/en/latest/article.formula-1-announces-calendar-for-2024.XL3c5Cxi0Z0QzPrUu5izL.html>.
- Fortune. ‘Global 500’. Accessed 18 January 2024. <https://fortune.com/ranking/global500/>.
- ‘France Oil Reserves, Production and Consumption Statistics - Worldometer’. Accessed 22 January 2024. <https://www.worldometers.info/oil/france-oil/>.
- G20. ‘G20 Members’. Accessed 12 January 2024. <http://g20.org.tr/about-g20/g20-members/>.
- ‘GDP per Capita - Worldometer’. Accessed 18 January 2024. <https://www.worldometers.info/gdp/gdp-per-capita/>.
- Hasni Abidi [@hasniabidi]. ‘Les conditions d’adhésion au groupe #BRICS2023 sont ambiguës et le groupe entretient cette ambiguïté. Son expansion n’est pas acquise par tous afin de garder son efficacité et éviter son éclatement. D’où l’idée de #BRICS+, idée repoussée par les nouveaux candidats. #BRICS2023 a... <https://t.co/mgx0RXCL0a>’. Tweet. *Twitter*, 24 August 2023. <https://twitter.com/hasniabidi/status/1694679921631617512>.
- Investopedia. ‘What Is a Developed Economy? Definition, How It Works, HDI Index’. Accessed 15 February 2024. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/d/developed-economy.asp>.

- ‘List of Countries with Overseas Military Bases’. In *Wikipedia*, 11 February 2024.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List\\_of\\_countries\\_with\\_overseas\\_military\\_bases&oldid=1206177843#Russia](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_countries_with_overseas_military_bases&oldid=1206177843#Russia).
- ‘List of Members’ Date of Entry’. Accessed 12 January 2024.  
<https://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/memdir/memdate.htm>.
- ‘List of Olympic Host Cities – Architecture of the Games’. Accessed 12 January 2024.  
<https://architectureofthegames.net/olympic-host-cities/>.
- Ministry of Economy UAE. ‘Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements’. Accessed 14 January 2024. <https://www.moec.gov.ae>.
- ‘MULTIPOLARITY Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary’, 23 February 2024. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/multipolarity>.
- ‘Oil Consumption by Country - Worldometer’. Accessed 5 January 2024.  
<https://www.worldometers.info/oil/oil-consumption-by-country/>.
- ‘Oil Consumption by Country - Worldometer’. Accessed 20 January 2024.  
<https://www.worldometers.info/oil/oil-consumption-by-country/>.
- ‘Oil Production by Country - Worldometer’. Accessed 5 January 2024.  
<https://www.worldometers.info/oil/oil-production-by-country/>.
- ‘Oil Production by Country - Worldometer’. Accessed 20 January 2024.  
<https://www.worldometers.info/oil/oil-production-by-country/>.
- ‘OPEC : About Us’. Accessed 5 January 2024.  
[https://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/17.htm](https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/17.htm).
- ‘OPEC : Our Mission’. Accessed 20 January 2024.  
[https://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/about\\_us/23.htm](https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/23.htm).
- ‘OPEC\_SaudiArabia’. Accessed 5 January 2024. [https://energy-cg.com/OPEC/SaudiArabia/OPEC\\_SaudiArabia\\_EIA.html](https://energy-cg.com/OPEC/SaudiArabia/OPEC_SaudiArabia_EIA.html).
- ‘Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs’. Accessed 15 February 2024. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/OIC.en.mfa>.
- Our World in Data. ‘Democracy Index’. Accessed 13 January 2024.  
<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/democracy-index-eiu>.
- ‘Purchasing Power Parities - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) - OCDE’. Accessed 18 January 2024. <https://www.oecd.org/fr/sdd/prix-ppa/purchasingpowerparities-frequentlyaskedquestionsfaqs.htm>.
- ‘Shanghai Cooperation Organization | Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs’. Accessed 2 February 2024. <https://dppa.un.org/en/shanghai-cooperation-organization>.
- Statista. ‘Military Spending by Country Worldwide 2022’. Accessed 1 February 2024.  
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/262742/countries-with-the-highest-military-spending/>.

- Statista. 'OPEC Crude Oil Price Statistics Annually 1960-2023'. Accessed 20 January 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262858/change-in-opec-crude-oil-prices-since-1960/>.
- Statista. 'U.S. Petroleum Imports from Saudi Arabia 2022'. Accessed 22 January 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/191215/petroleum-imports-into-the-us-from-saudi-arabia-since-2000/>.
- The Observatory of Economic Complexity. 'Crude Petroleum in France'. Accessed 22 January 2024. <https://oec.world/en>.
- The Observatory of Economic Complexity. 'Crude Petroleum in Italy'. Accessed 15 February 2024. <https://oec.world/en>.
- The Observatory of Economic Complexity. 'Crude Petroleum in United States'. Accessed 22 January 2024. <https://oec.world/en>.
- The Observatory of Economic Complexity. 'India (IND) and Saudi Arabia (SAU) Trade'. Accessed 15 January 2024. <https://oec.world/en>.
- The Observatory of Economic Complexity. 'Saudi Arabia (SAU) and China (CHN) Trade'. Accessed 15 January 2024. <https://oec.world/en>.
- The Observatory of Economic Complexity. 'Saudi Arabia (SAU) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners'. Accessed 29 January 2024. <https://oec.world/en>.
- The Observatory of Economic Complexity. 'Weapons in Saudi Arabia'. Accessed 29 January 2024. <https://oec.world/en>.
- TheGlobalEconomy.com. 'Oil Revenue by Country, around the World'. Accessed 5 January 2024. [https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/oil\\_revenue/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/oil_revenue/).
- United Nations Peacekeeping. 'Principles of Peacekeeping'. Accessed 10 February 2024. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/principles-of-peacekeeping>.
- 'U.S. Field Production of Crude Oil (Thousand Barrels per Day)'. Accessed 15 February 2024. <https://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/hist/LeafHandler.ashx?n=p&s=mcrfpus2&f=m>.
- 'Vision 2030 : Le Projet Du Siècle - Politique Internationale'. Accessed 31 January 2024. <https://politiqueinternationale.com/revue/n165-larabie-tentee-par-la-reforme/dossier-special/vision-2030-le-projet-du-siecle>.
- World Bank. 'Member Countries'. Text/HTML. Accessed 12 January 2024. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/leadership/members>.
- World Bank Open Data. 'Military Expenditure (% of GDP) - United States'. Accessed 15 February 2024. <https://data.worldbank.org>.
- World Bank Open Data. 'Military Expenditure (Current USD) - United States'. Accessed 1 February 2024. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.CD?locations=US>.

World Bank Open Data. 'World Bank Open Data'. Accessed 5 January 2024.  
<https://data.worldbank.org>.

## Reports

'EU Energy Platform'. Accessed 22 January 2024.  
[https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/energy-security/eu-energy-platform\\_en](https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/energy-security/eu-energy-platform_en).

'NDB-Budget-Disclosure-2023.Pdf'. Accessed 12 January 2024. <https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/NDB-Budget-disclosure-2023.pdf>.

'What Is OPEC+ and How Is It Different from OPEC? - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)'. Accessed 15 January 2024.  
<https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=56420>.

## Videos

*Global Currency: The Dollar Ain't Going Nowhere*, 2023.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiR54FPQiCs>.

*Pourquoi l'Iran et l'Arabie Saoudite Sont-Ils Ennemis ?*, 2018.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcElyG1Tdr0>.

*The BRICS Summit: Significant or Hoopla? | Peter Zeihan*, 2023.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tG7hh-Vx2A>.



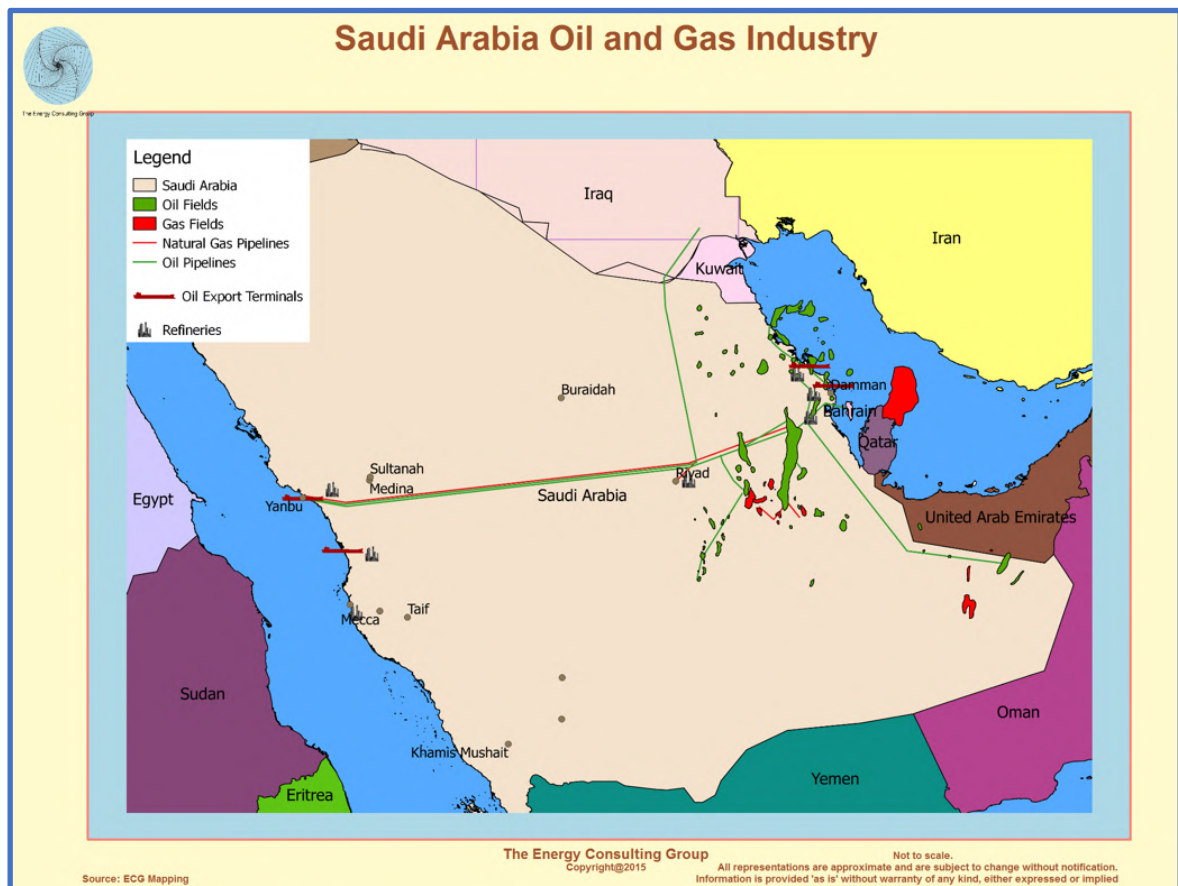
**TABLE OF ANNEXES**

Annex 1 .....	89
Annex 2 .....	90
Annex 3 .....	91
Annex 4 .....	92
Annex 5 .....	93
Annex 6 .....	94
Annex 7 .....	95
Annex 8 .....	96
Annex 9 .....	97
Annex 10 .....	98

# Annex 1

Source: 'OPEC\_SaudiArabia', accessed 5 January 2024,

[https://energy-cg.com/OPEC/SaudiArabia/OPEC\\_SaudiArabia\\_EIA.html](https://energy-cg.com/OPEC/SaudiArabia/OPEC_SaudiArabia_EIA.html).

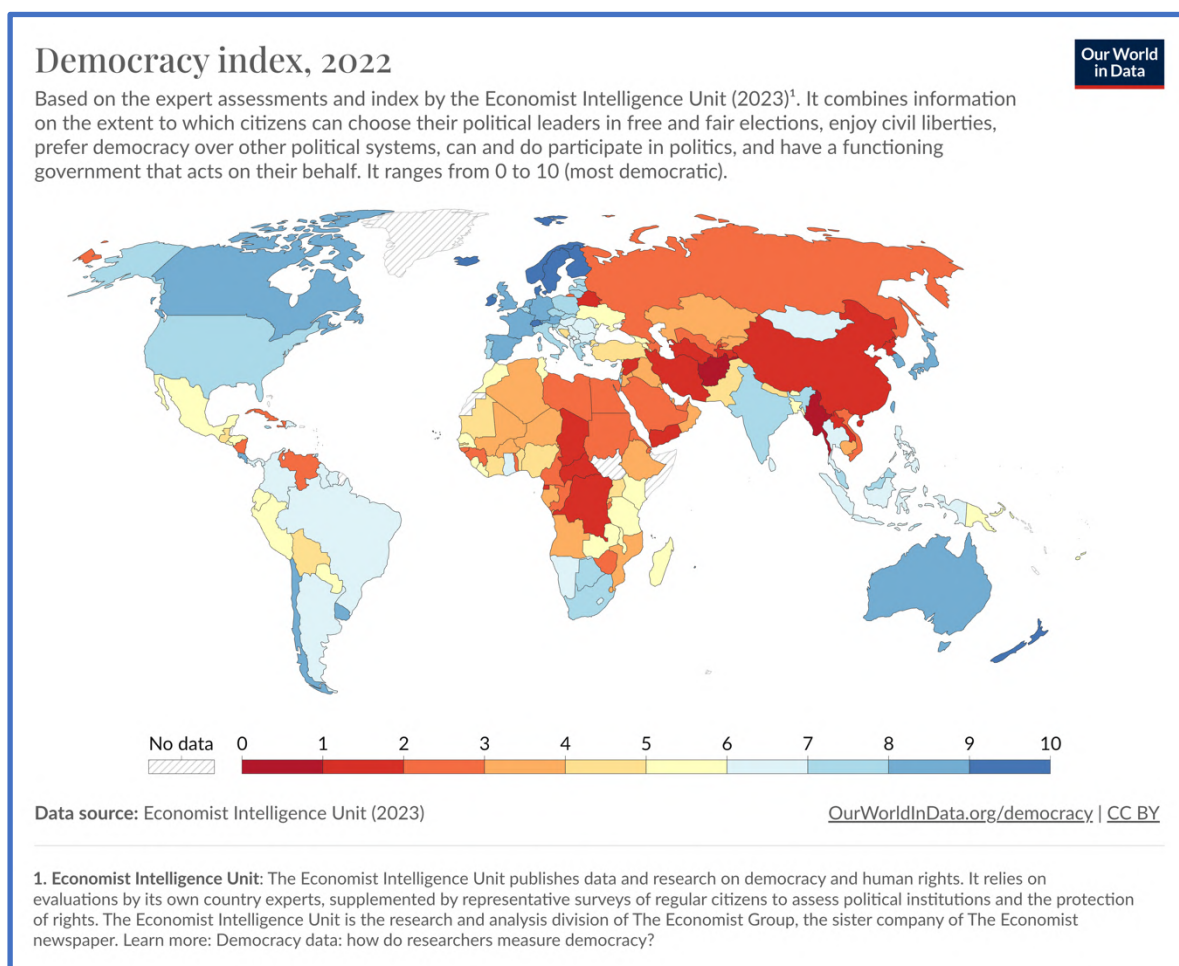


364

364 'OPEC\_SaudiArabia', accessed 5 January 2024, [https://energy-cg.com/OPEC/SaudiArabia/OPEC\\_SaudiArabia\\_EIA.html](https://energy-cg.com/OPEC/SaudiArabia/OPEC_SaudiArabia_EIA.html).

## Annex 2

Source: 'Democracy Index', Our World in Data, accessed 13 January 2024,  
<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/democracy-index-eiu>.

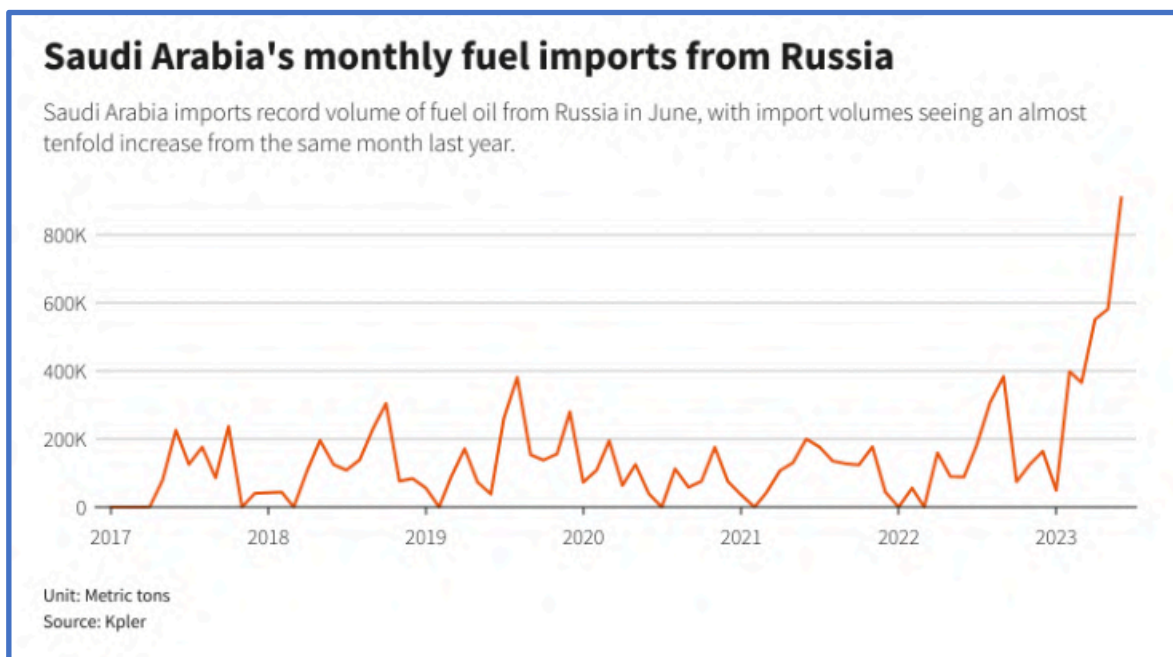


<sup>365</sup> 'Democracy Index', Our World in Data, accessed 13 January 2024,  
<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/democracy-index-eiu>.

## Annex 3

Source: Jeslyn Lerh, 'Saudi Arabia Imports Record Russian Fuel Oil in June as Trade Grows', Reuters, 13 July 2023, sec. Energy,

<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/saudi-arabia-imports-record-russian-fuel-oil-june-trade-grows-2023-07-13/>.

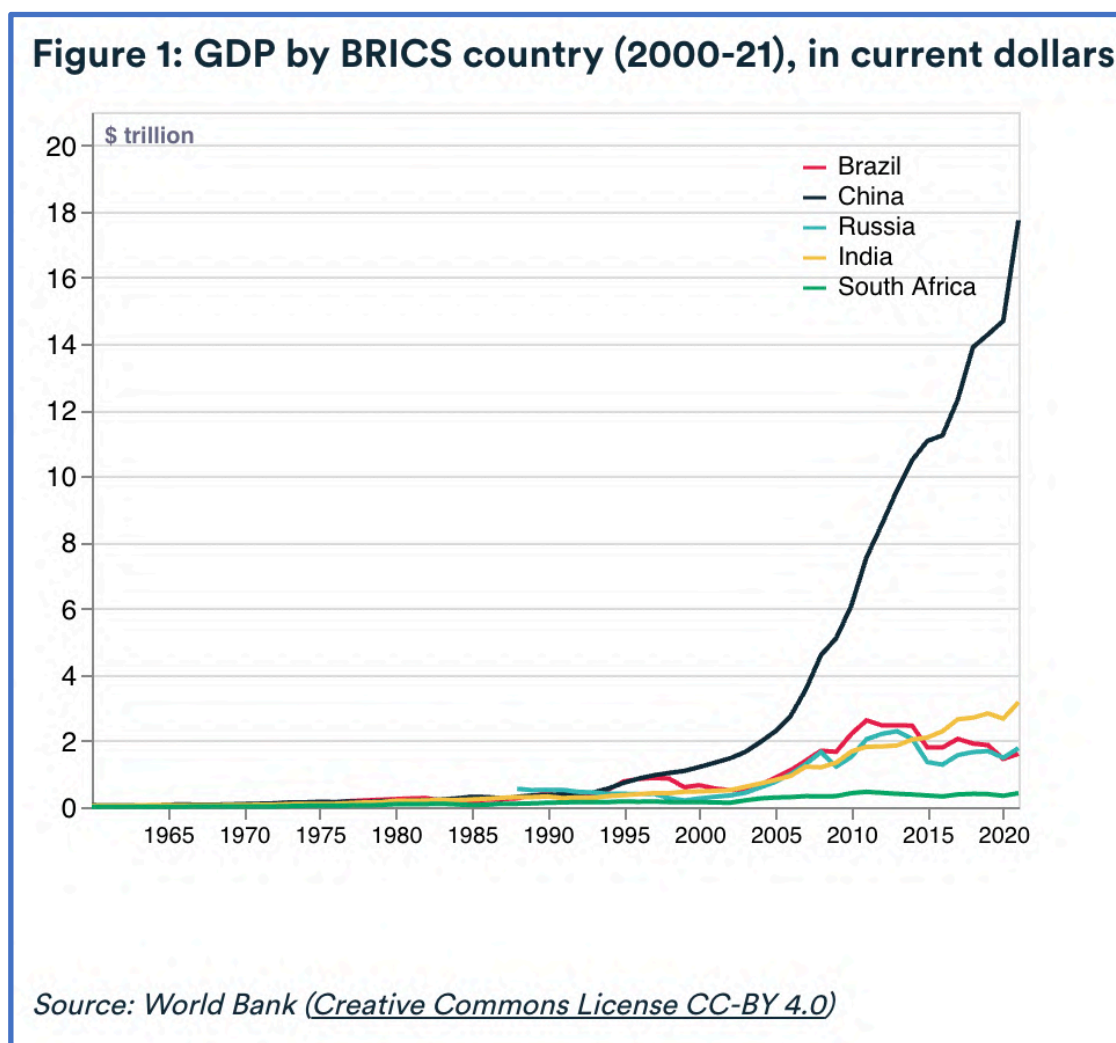


366

<sup>366</sup> Lerh, 'Saudi Arabia Imports Record Russian Fuel Oil in June as Trade Grows'.

## Annex 4

Source: The BRICS Countries: Where next and What Impact on the Global Economy?', *Economics Observatory* (blog), accessed 18 January 2024, <https://www.economicsobservatory.com/the-brics-countries-where-next-and-what-impact-on-the-global-economy>.

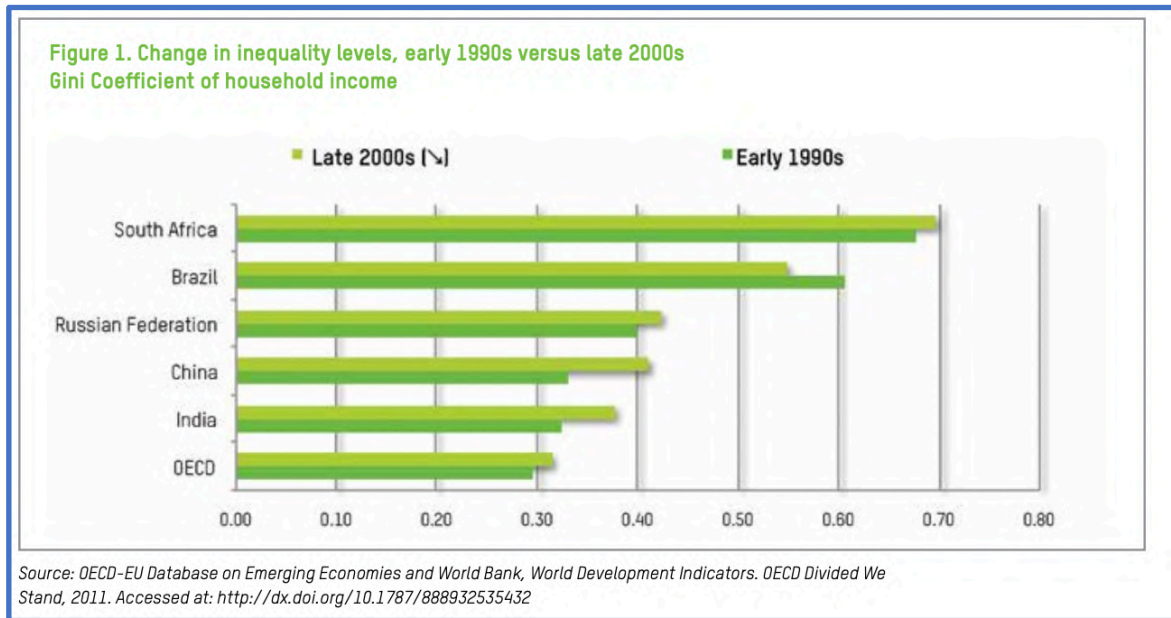


367

<sup>367</sup> 'The BRICS Countries'.

## Annex 5

Source: ‘Inequalities Matters: BRICS Inequalities Fact Sheet’, accessed 18 January 2024, <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/276312/ib-inequality-matters-brics-140313-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

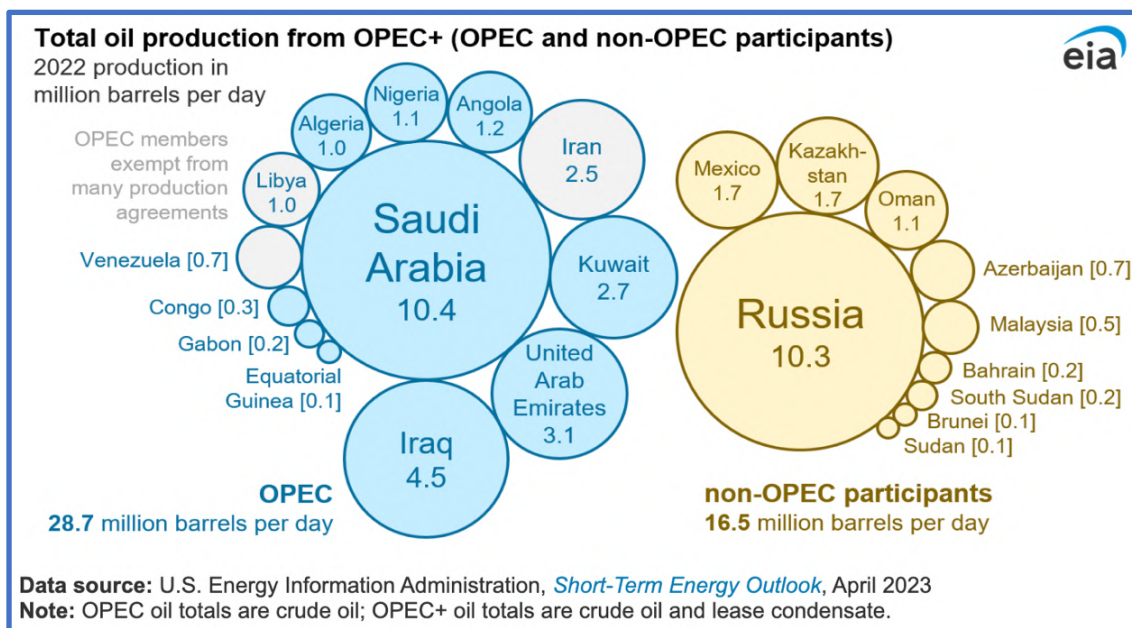


368

<sup>368</sup> ‘Inequalities Matters: BRICS Inequalities Fact Sheet’.

## Annex 6

Source: What Is OPEC+ and How Is It Different from OPEC? - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)', accessed 15 January 2024, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=56420>.

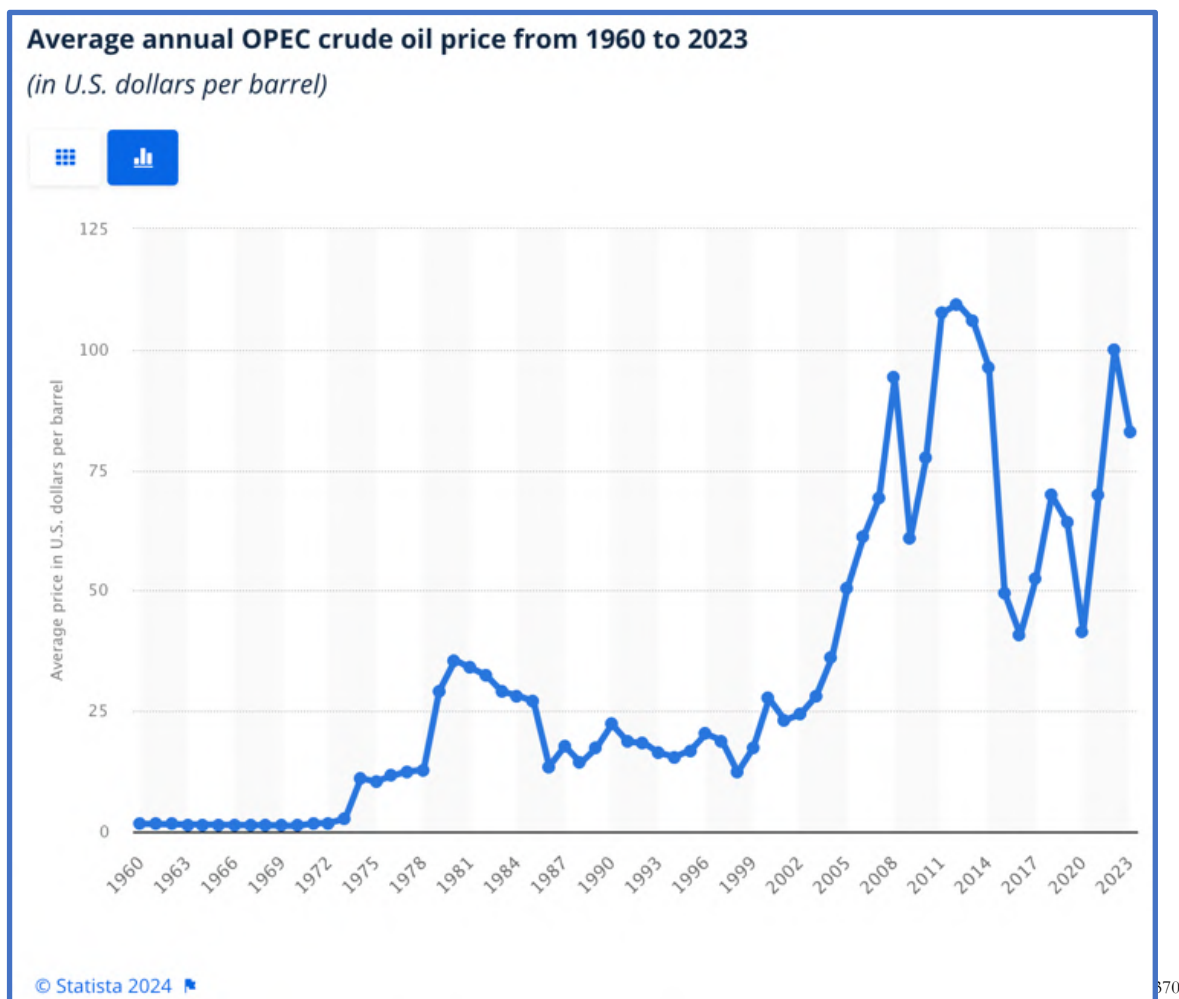


369

<sup>369</sup> 'What Is OPEC+ and How Is It Different from OPEC?'

## Annex 7

Source: 'OPEC Crude Oil Price Statistics Annually 1960-2023', Statista, accessed 20 January 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262858/change-in-opec-crude-oil-prices-since-1960/>.



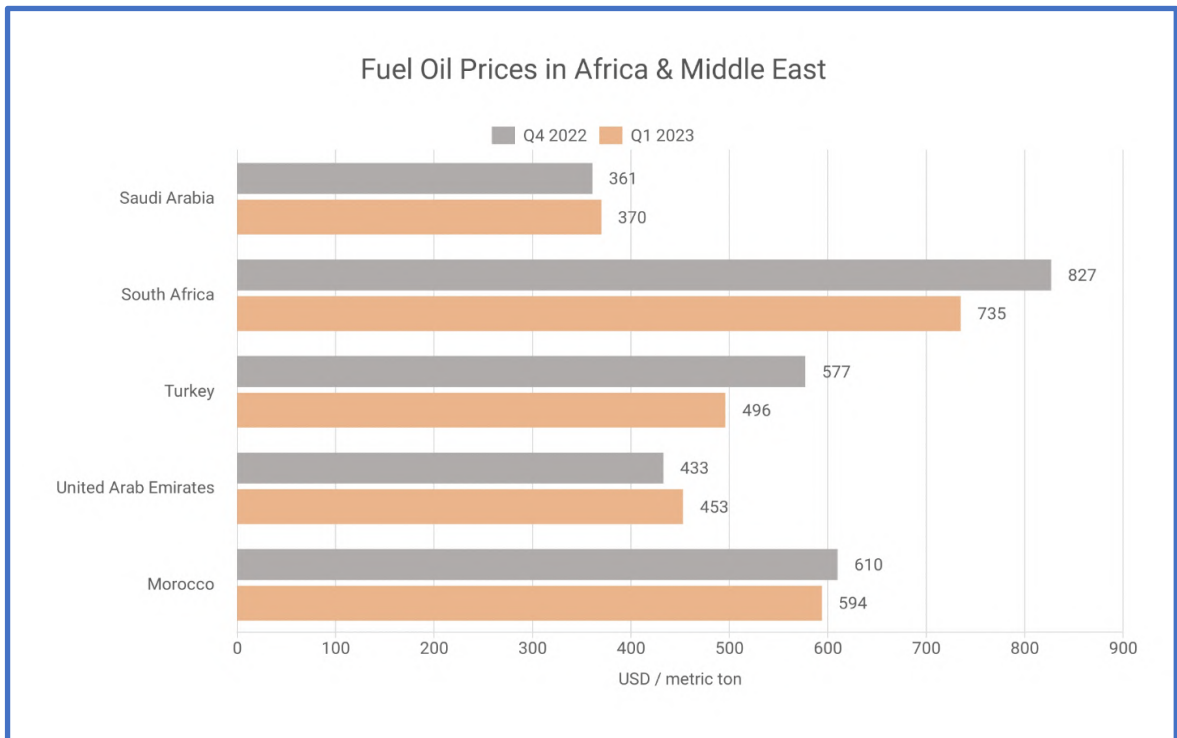
<sup>370</sup> 'OPEC Crude Oil Price Statistics Annually 1960-2023'.



## Annex 8

Source: Intratec Solutions, 'Fuel Oil Price | Saudi Arabia — Q1 2023', *Intratec Products Blog* (blog), 18 September 2023,

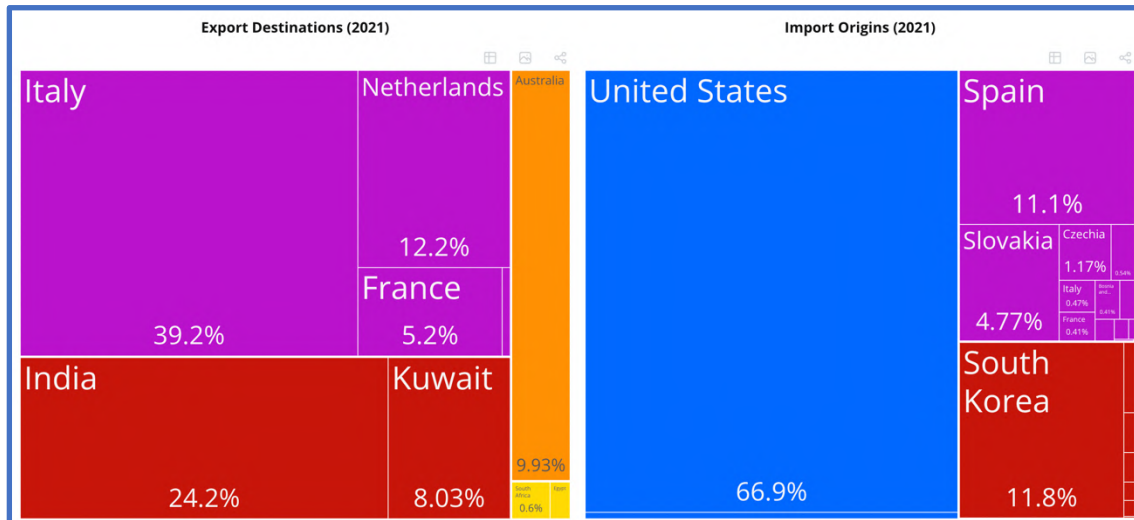
<https://medium.com/intratec-products-blog/fuel-oil-price-saudi-arabia-q1-2023-37d5e01157a3>.



<sup>371</sup> Solutions, 'Fuel Oil Price | Saudi Arabia — Q1 2023'.

## Annex 9

Source: 'Weapons in Saudi Arabia', The Observatory of Economic Complexity, accessed 29 January 2024, <https://oec.world/en>.



372

<sup>372</sup> 'Weapons in Saudi Arabia'.

## Annex 10

Source: Roberts Cynthia, Leslie Armijo, and Saori Katada, ‘Global Power Shift: The BRICS, Building Capabilities for Influence’, in *The BRICS and Collective Financial Statecraft*, ed. Cynthia Roberts, Leslie Armijo, and Saori Katada (Oxford University Press, 2017), 0, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190697518.003.0002>.

**Table 2.1** Global Defense Rankings and Trends, 1993–2016

Global Rank							
2016	1993 <sup>b</sup>	Country	Spending 2016 (\$ bn, MER)	Change 2007–2016 (%)	World Share 2016 (%)	2016	2007
1	1	United States	611	–4.8	36	3.3	3.8
2	3	China	215a	118	13a	1.9a	1.9a
3	2	Russia	69.2	87	4.1	5.3	3.4
4	9	Saudi Arabia	63.7a	20	3.8a	10a	8.5
5	13	India	55.9	54	3.3	2.5	2.3
6	4	France	55.7	2.8	3.3	2.3	2.3
7	7	UK	48.3	–12	2.9	1.9	2.2
8	5	Japan	46.1	2.5	2.7	1.0	0.9
9	6	Germany	41.1	6.8	2.4	1.2	1.2
10	10	South Korea	36.8	35	2.2	2.7	2.5
11	8	Italy	27.9	–16	1.7	1.5	1.6
12	15	Australia	24.6	29	1.5	2.0	1.8
13	19	Brazil	23.7	18	1.4	1.3	1.5

Sources: Trends in World Military Expenditure, SIPRI (2016); World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers (WMEAT) 1993–1994, U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (1995); C. Roberts calculations.

<sup>a</sup> SIPRI estimates. Dollar figures are current prices and exchange rates, while figures for percentage changes over time are in constant (2015) US dollars.

<sup>b</sup> WMEAT rankings are based on current prices and exchange rates.

373

<sup>373</sup> Cynthia, Armijo, and Katada, ‘Global Power Shift’.