



**TARIFFS, TRADE SECURITIZATION,
AND TOOTHLESS INSTITUTIONS:
MAPPING A STRATEGIC TROIKA FOR
BRICS+**

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Donald Trump's election as the 47th president of the United States in January 2025 has heralded a departure from multilateral norms. In just a few months, the world has witnessed an intensification of [trade securitization](#), [escalating tariff wars](#), the [erosion](#) of the WTO system, and coercive pressure on countries such as [India](#) and [Brazil](#) to forgo trade interests tied to their national and energy security.

Of note in these sobering times is the rise in strategic influence of BRICS+, a grouping of 11 emerging and developing economies (EDEs), collectively representing [55% of the world's population](#), and generating [46% of global GDP](#) (greater than the GDPs of G7 and the EU). BRICS+ is being increasingly seen as a promising forum that can rebalance the hegemonic global order, evidenced by over 30 countries [expressing interest](#) in joining the coalition, either as members or partners.

This growing influence of BRICS+ among postcolonial states, and the increasing possibility of a multipolar world order, has irked the status quo powers. As a result, the grouping has been labelled “anti-West” and “[anti-American](#),” and its member states have been [called](#) “vampires sucking the US blood dry with unfair trade practices.” These reductionist and undiplomatic comments by official representatives perpetuate and strengthen the

historical Anglocentric bias against [pluralist interpretations of world order\(s\)](#).

In this context, it's pertinent to ask: what's next for international governance and the rules-based global order? Can BRICS+ as a coalition decenter the [hegemonic](#) world order? We have an unlikely exemplar from whom BRICS+ can draw a lesson or two—Odysseus, the Greek hero.

Relevance of Odysseus in the current global order

Odysseus, the protagonist in Homer's *Odyssey*, while disguised as a beggar, shrewdly [strategizes](#) his way into the famed archery contest, and wins it by doing something hitherto deemed impossible—shooting through 12 axe heads. This enabled him to reclaim his household.

Here, Odysseus emerges as a master strategist and a sharp executor. He not only recognized, waited for, and used his *Kairos*—an opportune moment to take decisive action, but also astutely exercised *Metis*—practical, situational, agile intelligence combining foresight, cunning, adaptability, and timing, to achieve his *Telos*—goal, purpose, or end-state, all while minimizing risk.

This strategic troika (represented in Figure 1 below) is apt for BRICS+ to draw some lessons from and strategically balance the current (un)global world order.

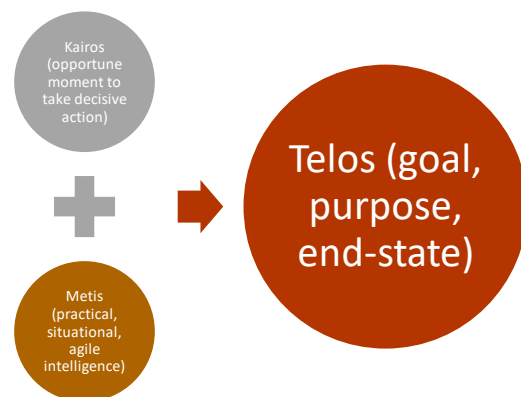


Figure 1 The Kairos-Metis-Telos Strategic Troika (Source: Author)

BRICS+ and the strategic troika: What is its *Kairos-Metis-Telos*?

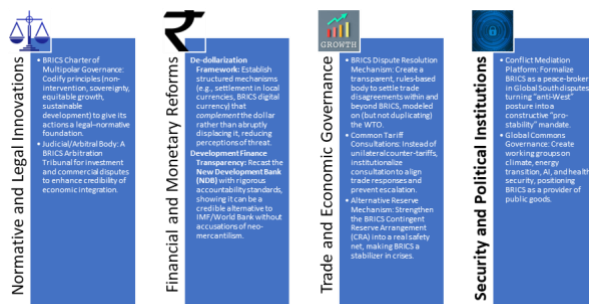
At the recently convened BRICS meeting, several member states implicitly condemned US trade policies as [protectionist](#), [unjust](#), and [“tariff blackmail,”](#) as they pushed back against what they saw as [reckless](#) unilateral measures impinging upon their national sovereignty. External Affairs Minister of India S. Jaishankar [urged](#) international economic and trade practices to be “fair, transparent, and to everyone’s benefit.” S. Jaishankar also [reiterated](#) that the “international trading system is based on the foundational principles of open, fair, transparent, non-discriminatory, inclusive, equitable and a rules-based approach with special and differential treatment for developing countries.”

These words are a powerful and timely reminder of the shared values and norms underlying [global governance](#), and signal the institutionalisation of [international trade justice](#) as a policy imperative for groupings like BRICS+. International trade justice, as articulated by S. Jaishankar, may well come to represent the *Telos* of BRICS+—the goal, purpose, or end-state that BRICS+ would like to achieve, for the [economic well-being of its peoples](#).

Synergistically working towards realizing this shared *Telos* of institutionalising a rules-based trading system that accommodates [SDT](#) (special and differential treatment) for developing economies, is also very well-aligned with the shifting geoeconomic calculus of building resilient, localized, and reliable [supply chains](#), and more recently, shifting trade dependencies by engaging [alternative](#) growth markets. Hence, especially given that [Brazil](#), like India, is also slapped with 50% tariffs by the US—a dominant trading partner for both the countries, it is an opportune moment for an international grouping like BRICS+—despite a multitude of [differences and incompatibilities](#) among the members themselves—to decisively act on defining a *Metis* to achieve the shared *Telos*.

A 4-pronged BRICS+ reform agenda: Chalking out the *Metis*

To achieve international trade justice as the *Telos*, what would be the practical, situational, and agile intelligence that combines foresight, adaptability, and timing for the BRICS+ grouping? Building on the [justice-oriented](#) deliberations in the recent BRICS summit, I propose the grouping should pursue the following 4-pronged reform agenda, that aim to institutionalize procedural and distributive justice mechanisms in its organizational design.



As can be seen from the above, I am proposing BRICS+ to proactively become a [norm-setter](#), from being a passive norm-taker that it mostly has been relegated to in the larger scheme of global politics. Even though, for example, India is running [trade deficits](#) with most of the grouping’s members, taking coordinated action to reform BRICS as an organization would necessarily be required, if we want to salvage the “global” aspects of the “global trading regime.”

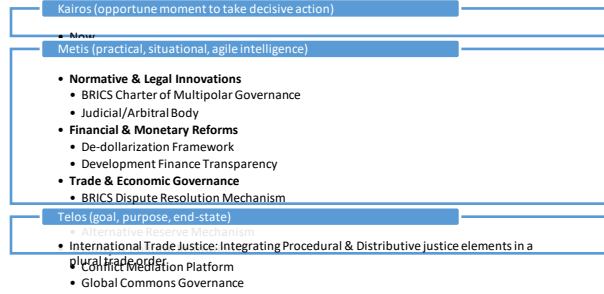
What got us here won’t get us there: The way forward

[Marshall Goldsmith](#) was right when he reminded us this—the strategies, institutions, and practices that enabled past success may not be sufficient to meet new global challenges. This is even more so in international relations, where our societies, technologies, and geopolitics are standing on shifting sands.

All policy is political, and foreign policy is even more so. Even though trade economics calls for objective analyses of nations’ comparative advantage to let

markets adjust for the supply-demand equation, it has long been [acknowledged](#) that assessing the international political economy of trade becomes pertinent when historical trade imbalances are overtly aggravated by unjust and inefficient measures like [nationalistic industrial policies](#), and increased [securitization of international trade](#).

The following figure integrates my proposal for BRICS+:



Just as Odysseus combined his presence of mind, strategy, and skill to encounter his rightful reckoning, the BRICS+ grouping can pave way for resetting the [skewed global trade](#), and the opportune time is *now*. India’s external affairs minister has set the stage by articulating exactly the kind of normative moorings this systemic change needs. It is to be seen if this discourse gets the momentum it deserves.

PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.