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BUILDING A COHESIVE GLOBAL ORDER: INTERREGIONALISM, THE G20 AND BRICS, AND THE SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA



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Building a Cohesive Global Order: Interregionalism, the G20 and BRICS, and the Shared Responsibilities of the United States and China

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The global policy challenge of our era is institutional fragmentation: multilateral forums are overloaded, regional blocs operate in silos, and great-power rivalry risks splitting global governance into rival spheres. The principal threat is a contested order in which parallel institutions compete rather than coordinate, slowing collective action on climate, debt, food security, and financial stability. The opportunity lies in interregionalism: promoting relations among the G20, the European Union, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), BRICS, and other regional frameworks. This argument stems from Peter Katzenstein's foundational observation that "we live in a world composed of regions."[1] Interregionalism is no longer merely an isolated experiment; it has evolved into a layered, cross-continental politics that shapes whether global multilateralism survives.

The Emergence of Interregionalism

Since the 1960s, regional organizations have moved from peripheral diplomatic arrangements to legitimate actors within the international system.[2] Cold War bipolarity limited their autonomy, but after 1991 regional cooperation became the default response to globalization's shared risks.[3] Regionalism's first wave centered on European integration, while Latin American integration projects of the same era stumbled.[4] The second wave of regionalism, flowering in the 1990s, produced the triad of East Asia, North America, and Western Europe that structured the global economy for decades.[5] Interregionalism is now widely understood as the third generation of regionalism,[6] visible in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Asia-Europe Meeting, and transatlantic dialogue frameworks that link the world's major economic zones.[7] World Trade Organization data confirm that hundreds of interregional forums now operate worldwide.[8]

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[1] Peter J. Katzenstein, "A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium" (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 1.
[2] Björn Hettne, "Regionalism, Security and Development: A Social Constructivist Perspective," Global Governance 9, no. 1 (2003): 7–12.
[3] Luk van Langenhove and Ana-Costea, "Interregionalism: A Third Wave of Regionalism?" Journal of European Integration 29, no. 1 (2007): 79–96.
[4] Andrea Olivet, "Interregionalism in the Global Political Economy," Review of International Political Economy 12, no. 2 (2005): 22–41.
[5] Matthew Doidge, Regionalism and Interregionalism: Europe and the World (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 16.
[6] Hettne, "Regionalism, Security and Development," 8.
[7] Olivet, "Interregionalism in the Global Political Economy," 24.
[8] Cruz G. M, "Mapping Interregional Dialogue Mechanisms in the Global System," Journal of Interregional Relations 3, no.1 (2016): 5.

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Interregionalism in Practice: The G20's Engagement with Regional Organizations

The G20 has established a solid track record of advancing interregionalism through structured engagement with regional bodies. Four relationship types capture its diversity. First is formal membership, an institutionalized identity held by the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU). The EU has been a G20 member since the forum's inception; the AU became a permanent member at the 2023 New Delhi Summit. Second is the regular invited dialogue partnership. ASEAN, APEC, the Arab League, the Caribbean Community, and Mercosur are not members, but the rotating presidency invites them to nearly every summit and to accompanying ministerial meetings. Third is the parallel mechanism and issue-coordination relationship, exemplified by BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). These are intergovernmental forums in their own right, independent of and not subordinate to the G20; their interaction proceeds chiefly through overlapping memberships, position coordination, and mutual recognition of outcomes. Fourth is the project partnership, which is issue-specific, temporary, and agenda-driven rather than organizational. The G20 Compact with Africa and the G20's support for African industrialization, as well as cooperation on food security, debt, and infrastructure with ASEAN and regional development banks, exemplify this form.

The G20 and BRICS: Cooperation, Competition, and Deepening Interregionalism

The G20–BRICS relationship illustrates both tension and promise. China emphasizes the G20's pivotal role as the premier global forum for international economic cooperation. At the same time, BRICS creates parallel instruments such as the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), which some Western actors interpret as institutional competition.[9] Measured by purchasing power parity (PPP), the combined GDP of BRICS economies has surpassed that of the G7.

The two frameworks lack a formal binding agreement, so their coordination works mainly through overlapping memberships.[10] BRICS sherpa and finance-track meetings pre-negotiate common positions on sovereign debt restructuring, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank quota reform, and climate finance, then carry those demands into G20 deliberations.[11]

This dynamic is not inherently destructive; managed carefully, parallel institutions can complement rather than undermine the Bretton Woods system by expanding financing for infrastructure and climate projects where traditional institutions fall short.[12]

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[9] Zhao Ming, "China's Role in BRICS Institutional Building," Contemporary International Relations 24, no. 3 (2014): 46–62.
[10] Wang Yi and Miao Hui, "BRICS Consensus Diplomacy and the Reform of Global Economic Governance," Global Governance Review 6, no. 3 (2022): 12–30.
[11] Wang Liming, "BRICS and Its Partnership with Regional Organizations," International Review 2, no. 1 (2019): 19–22.
[12] Liu Ying, "China's BRICS Initiatives and South-South Cooperation," Journal of South-South Development 1, no. 1 (2019): 4–12.

The Shared Responsibilities of the United States and China

This is where the United States and China each have an indispensable role. The United States retains deep institutional influence in the Bretton Woods architecture, NATO, and transatlantic networks; it can unlock reform within the IMF and World Bank, mobilize climate finance, and build trust between Western regional blocs and Global South partners. China, by contrast, has become the central architect of BRICS, the NDB, and a wider network of South–South cooperation, and it maintains robust diplomatic ties with ASEAN, the African Union, and Eurasian organizations. Rather than forcing a binary choice between U.S.-led and China-led governance, interregionalism creates a collaborative division of labor: Washington can defend the integrity of existing multilateral rules while accepting greater voice from emerging economies; Beijing can advance alternative development-finance mechanisms while committing to interoperability, transparency, and non-confrontational agenda-setting. Neither power can supply legitimacy or capacity alone; the credibility of a cohesive order rests on their willingness to share both.

Risks and Confidence-Building

The risks are real. Currency divergence, especially debates over de-dollarization, exposes competing preferences: some states seek diversified settlement systems to reduce vulnerability, while others fear uncoordinated fragmentation of the global financial system. Trade disputes, technology controls, and security tensions can spill into economic governance and paralyze interregional dialogue. But these risks are not reasons to abandon interregionalism; they are reasons to embed confidence-building measures into G20–BRICS workflows.

Deepening Interregional Cooperation: A Policy Agenda for Dialogue, Trade, and Shared Challenges

First, strengthening political dialogue constitutes a cornerstone for deepening ties between the G20 and BRICS. Both the United States and China can help facilitate structured dialogues to advance diplomatic and economic engagement, including ministerial gatherings and summit consultations that support joint project design, initiative planning, and regular information sharing. Such platforms allow participants to reaffirm their commitment to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, laying a solid foundation for mutually beneficial cooperation and regional stability.

Second, states that are members of both frameworks play a special role in this process. Given their strategic positioning and established ties with both groupings, dual-member states can serve as bridging actors, reducing divergences and enabling smoother communication and coordination not only between the G20 and BRICS frameworks, but also between advanced economies and the Global South. For instance, India’s G20 presidency in 2023 brought about the historic admission of the African Union to the G20, while Brazil’s and South Africa’s G20 presidencies created room for sustained engagement of the NDB in G20 finance discussions.

Third, strengthening trade and investment cooperation stands as a pragmatic priority for interregional engagement between the G20 and BRICS. Intra-BRICS merchandise exports hit around $1.2 trillion in 2025.[13] Against this backdrop, the United States and China can translate political consensus from G20 and BRICS forums into tangible commercial integration that deepens mutual interdependence. Concrete measures include advancing free trade agreements, harmonizing regulatory and customs rules, and aligning G20 infrastructure frameworks with regional development plans. In finance, set up a voluntary G20-BRICS financial coordination group to align stances on IMF reform and capital risks; establish cooperation between CRA and the G20 financial safety net; update the G20 debt framework for equal creditor burden-sharing and broader eligibility; establish a standing invitation for the NDB to join G20 sustainable finance discussions; and start an inclusive dialogue on voluntary payment diversification while keeping the G20 and IMF central.

Fourth, addressing global challenges such as climate change stands as a crucial imperative. Green transition financing, clean-energy cooperation, and adaptation programs offer natural venues for the G20 and BRICS to act together.

Conclusion

A cohesive global order, therefore, does not require a single universal hierarchy. It may be realized as a networked order grounded in interregionalism. Regional organizations maintain their autonomy and unique identities, while sustained interregional engagement provides recurring avenues for the G20, EU, AU, ASEAN, BRICS, and other bodies to compare priorities, align standards, and co-develop global policy responses. The United States and China are not the only actors within this system, yet they remain its most consequential. If both sides regard interregionalism as a shared public good rather than a zero-sum contest, they can reframe the current crisis of fragmentation into an opportunity: a world of regions that communicate and collaborate, rather than speak past one another.

[13] UNCTAD, BRICS Trade and Investment Report 2025, Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2025, 34.