

Prospects for Further Development of the mBridge Project: Rebalancing Political Leadership

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Abstract

Until recently, due to the liquidity and stability of the US dollar, most international settlements were conducted in this currency, thereby strengthening the US economy and its political weight. However, the advent of digital technologies has begun to delineate the contours of a novel architecture for the global financial system. Various options for employing digital currencies in cross-border

settlements are currently being tested around the world. A significant undertaking in the realm of central bank currency exchange is the mBridge project (stakeholder: PRC), which attained the minimum viable product (MVP) stage in 2023. In Russia, even at the stage when there was a threat of the Russian Federation being disconnected from SWIFT, the creation of an alternative payment system based on a new technological platform was discussed at a high political level. This article analyzes the potential for Russia to develop its own initiative, with a particular emphasis on technological and digital sovereignty. It also assesses the viability of options for the advancement of the Chinese mBridge initiative. Furthermore, an expert assessment is provided of the potential conceptual impact of the integration of such projects on the existing global financial infrastructure. This includes an analysis of attempts to abandon the established international monetary system and significantly rebalance the political influence associated with it.

1. Introduction

Digital technologies have *become decisive in shaping the emergence of a new financial infrastructure for the global economic system* and international relations. Gradually, based on the development of central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) and blockchain technology, new models of cross-border payments are emerging, significantly changing the landscape of the international currency market and cross-border payment systems before our very eyes. Just like the new business model generated by technological innovations, digital currency can pose problems for traditional financial systems and financial security. Chinese experts believe that the transition of digital currency supervision from national to global regulation is an inevitable trend [Wang Junsheng 2025]. This assertion is debatable, including from the perspective of national security and state control in this area by central banks. However, certain trends toward hybrid distribution of functions at different levels can be observed and may depend, among other things, on the economic power and political independence of a particular state.

Currently, more than 130 countries, representing 98% of the global economy, are exploring the use of digital currencies to adapt to technological changes.¹ According to the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), there are currently four retail CBDCs in operation—in the Bahamas, the Eastern Caribbean, Nigeria, and Jamaica. These countries are primarily focused on developing domestic instant retail payments, which can be compared to the fast payment system project in Russia. Retail CBDC pilot projects are currently being implemented in 24 jurisdictions, and 23 jurisdictions have wholesale CBDC pilot projects.² Since 2016, major central banks around the world have begun

¹ Rejection of the “digital dollar” gives the EU and China a chance to introduce their own CBDC standards. *Frank Media*. 2025. Jan. 28. Available at: <https://frankmedia.ru/191067> (in Russian) (accessed 6 March 2025).

² Rise of the central bank digital currencies: drivers, approaches and technologies. BIS. 2020. Aug. 24 (Update – March 2024). Available at: <https://www.bis.org/publ/work880.htm> (accessed 6 March 2025).

to explore projects involving the interconnection of several legal digital currencies, and CBDCs have become an important topic of research. Currently, the world's largest projects in the field of CBDC use are Japer-Ubin, mBridge, Dunbar, Nexus [Wang Junsheng 2025], and others. In March 2025, European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde announced plans for the European Union to launch its own digital euro by October of this year.³

In 2023, the mBridge project became one of the most important projects of central banks to explore the use of digital currencies for cross-border settlements, despite the fact that none of its key participants (Thailand, the UAE, China, Hong Kong, and Saudi Arabia) had fully launched their own CBDCs.

When the project was mentioned at the 16th BRICS summit in Kazan in 2024, search results for “mBridge” widely covered the BIS discussion on closing the project. Experts note that mBridge has already reached the minimum viable product stage, and participants can choose directions for its continuation without support from the BIS.⁴ The implementation of the mBridge project could have a profound impact on global economic integration and the international monetary system [Danilova, Maslov 2024 (1)], so it is interesting to take a closer look at the project. China itself notes that the project aims to achieve the key objectives of the G20, namely to enable faster, cheaper, and safer cross-border payments and settlements through the use of new technologies [People's Bank of China 2022]. According to mBridge product owners, the project is highly scalable and efficient, involving developing countries in international trade that have been poorly integrated into global settlements since the 2008 crisis and are experiencing difficulties with them.

Until recently, due to the liquidity and stability of the US dollar, most international settlements were conducted in this currency, which strengthened the US economy and political influence. However, there are now noticeable signs of a shift in the balance of currencies in international settlements and the growing role of the Chinese yuan, which is strengthening China's status in the global financial arena. mBridge is causing concern in the West. Previously, this conclusion was based on indirect evidence, but Bloomberg now directly points to Russia and China seeking alternatives to the US dollar.⁵

The purpose of this article is to provide an expert assessment of the potential impact of the mBridge project on the redistribution of global influence among individual centers of power. In the next section, we describe the history and current status of the mBridge project, demonstrate China's role in the project, and identify the key differences between mBridge and SWIFT and CIPS. In the third section, we

³ ICYMI: ECB President Lagarde said that EU is looking to launch the digital Euro CBDC by October this year. 2025. March 9. Available at: <https://x.com/Cointelegraph/status/1898958241645629664> (accessed 10 March 2025).

⁴ BIS considers ending Mbridge project due to links with BRICS, but is it too late? *Bitcoin.comNews*. 2024. Oct. 30. Available at: <https://news.bitcoin.com/ru/bis-rassmatrivaet-vozmozhnost-prekrashcheniya-proekta-mbridge-iz-za-svyazey-s-briks-no-ne-slishkom-li-pozdno/> (in Russian) (accessed 30 October 2024).

⁵ BIS Debates Ending Project Eyed by Putin to Undermine Dollar. *Bloomberg*. 2024. Oct. 28. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-10-28/bis-debates-ending-project-eyed-by-putin-to-undermine-dollar> (accessed 30 October 2024).

analyze the prospects and scenarios for Russia's involvement in projects using CBDCs (connection to an existing project, interconnection). In the fourth section, we identify the potential impact of the mBridge project on the redistribution of global influence among individual centers of power. The main conclusions are summarized in the conclusion.

2. About the mBridge project and China's participation

China was among the first countries to initiate the development and testing of a national digital currency, the digital yuan. Concurrently, in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Thailand, it launched the pilot phase of the mBridge cross-border project, which utilizes national digital currencies in international settlements. The acronym "mBridge" signifies "Multilateral Central Bank Digital Currency Bridge." In 2023, the mBridge project emerged as a pivotal undertaking for central banks, aiming to investigate the potential of national digital currencies for facilitating cross-border financial transactions [Danilova, Maslov 2024 (2)]. The creators of the project have asserted that the implementation of mBridge addresses the existing gap in the international payment system by providing a high-quality platform based on the CSDB [International Monetary Institute IMI 2024].

The Digital Currency Bridge project was originally a bilateral pilot project that was jointly implemented in 2017 by the Bank of Thailand and the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (first phase). In the subsequent phase of the project (at this phase the project was designated as Inthanon-LionRock) in 2019, the focus shifted to the examination of issues pertaining to cross-border trade and the potential applications of business initiatives for the purpose of simplifying settlements and enhancing capital market operations. In the third phase of the project, which occurred in 2020, the Central Bank of China and the Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates participated. The Hong Kong Centre at the BIS Innovation Hub also provided support. The nomenclature was officially modified to "Multilateral Cross-Border Digital Currency Bridge" (m-CBDC Bridge), and was subsequently shortened to mBridge. In 2021, the parties published a phased report on the multilateral project and presented 15 potential scenarios for its application, testing its use in international trade settlements, cross-border e-commerce, supply chain finance, and other areas [RUC FinTech Institute 2022]. Prior to the initiation of the pilot project, the project team engaged in active collaboration with representatives of the private sector. This collaboration was undertaken with the objective of identifying potential business applications for the platform.⁶

mBridge implements payments and clearing settlements through decentralized point-to-point transactions, i.e., through direct interaction without intermediaries. This happens in real time—quickly and efficiently—and the project's reliance on blockchain technology protects transactions from being altered, ensuring greater transparency and security. The absence of intermediaries gives the technology a unique advantage over

⁶ Maslov, A.V., 2022. mBridge. A new step in the use of CBDC for international settlements. *PLUS Journal*, No 10 (296). Available at: <https://plusworld.ru/journal/2022/plus-10-2022/mbridge-novyy-shag-v-ispolzovaniis-tsvtsb-dlya-mezhdunarodnykh-raschetov/> (in Russian) (accessed 5 October 2023).

traditional systems and increases the efficiency of payments [International Monetary Institute IMI 2024]. The project takes into account the regulatory requirements of each jurisdiction.

mBridge is fundamentally different from SWIFT and CIPS. SWIFT is a financial messaging system that only transmits information and currently connects the largest number of users worldwide. CIPS is the main channel for cross-border remittances in yuan. If successful, mBridge could offer a new payment channel. According to Guan Shuxuan, director of the Digital Currency Department of the Bank of China, CIPS and mBridge have different characteristics and can jointly improve the efficiency of cross-border payments, as well as clearing and settlement in renminbi in various directions. Compared to SWIFT and CIPS, mBridge has several significant differences: first, it uses central bank digital currency for clearing and does not require an agent bank clearing account; second, mBridge emphasizes full equality for all participating countries/regions in terms of governance; third, the currencies and banks covered by mBridge correspond to the countries/regions participating in the currency bridge project, i.e., for each additional country/region, a new currency and local participating banks will be added [International Monetary Institute IMI 2024].

The mBridge project does not have its own website. The most comprehensive official information about the mBridge project is available on the Bank for International Settlements website at.⁷ After the BIS suggested in October 2024 that participants choose the direction of the project's continuation without support from the BIS, it became much more difficult to work with new and verified information.

The authors reviewed

- the website of the People's Bank of China (PBC – the central bank of the People's Republic of China) and found no publications regarding mBridge after June 2024;⁸
- the website of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) and found no publications regarding mBridge after June 2024;⁹
- the website of the Bank of Thailand (BOT) and, with the exception of press releases, found only one main document describing the mBridge project, authored by the Bank for International Settlements in 2022;¹⁰
- the website of the Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates (The Central Bank of the UAE) and found a section dedicated to mBridge, which was last updated in 2022;¹¹

⁷ Project mBridge reached minimum viable product stage. BIS. (Updated 11November 2024). Available at: https://www.bis.org/about/bisih/topics/cbdc/mcbdc_bridge.htm (accessed 6 March 2025).

⁸ Project mBridge Reaches MVP Stage. *The People's Bank of China*. 2024. Jun. 6. Available at: <http://www.pbc.gov.cn/en/3688241/3688636/3688642/5374885/index.html> (accessed 6 March 2025).

⁹ Project mBridge reaches MVP stage. *The Hong Kong Monetary Authority*. 2024. June 5. Available at: <https://www.hkma.gov.hk/eng/news-and-media/press-releases/2024/06/20240605-4/> (accessed 6 March 2025).

¹⁰ Findings from the Multiple Central Bank Digital Currency Bridge (mBridge) Pilot and Next Steps. *The Bank of Thailand*. 2022. Oct. 26. Available at: <https://www.bot.or.th/en/news-and-media/news/news-20221026.html> (accessed 6 March 2025).

¹¹ M-bridge. *The Central Bank of the UAE*. 2022. Oct. 28. Available at: <https://www.centralbank.ae/en/our-operations/fintech-digital-transformation/mbridge/> (accessed 6 March 2025).

- the website of the Saudi Central Bank (SAMA) and found only joint press releases from June 2024.¹²

The Bank for International Settlements was the project office and methodological center for the mBridge project. It was the participation and support of the Bank for International Settlements that gave the project its supranational status. We can only wait for official statements from the participating countries on the form and timing of the mBridge project's development without BIS support: will it be a private project of several countries, and will one of the countries, for example China, take the lead in promoting the project?

At the same time, discourse regarding mBridge continues to develop within China. The 2025 financial report of Tsinghua University contains information that, "in developing the mBridge project strategy, the Project Steering Committee envisages the gradual transformation of mBridge into an influential international cross-border payment infrastructure, whose most striking features are universality and inclusiveness, which, in the Committee's view, will lead to the inevitable expansion of mBridge [Wang Junsheng 2025]. China's International Monetary Institute (IMI) is looking at how SWIFT, CIPS, and mBridge can coexist to help traditional clearing systems and mBridge develop in a coordinated way across different technologies and currencies to make cross-border payments, clearing, and settlement in renminbi more efficient [International Monetary Institute IMI 2024]. The Tsinghua Financial Review is devoted to the study of financial infrastructure and the construction of a digital currency management system based on a multilateral central bank digital currency bridge [Wang Junsheng 2025]. To summarize various Chinese sources on the project, Chinese representatives are speculatively testing various scenarios: integration into existing financial technologies or interfacing with them; the possibility of independently implementing the mBridge project in a separate inter-country region and gradually and naturally increasing its production capacity while identifying additional areas for improvement in the process, with a view to facilitating trade procedures in the region.

3. Russia and international settlements in CBDCs

Let us consider separately the prospects for Russia's participation in international settlements in CBDCs. Our country does not yet have its own cross-border project related to CBDCs and is currently piloting a national digital currency. Ensuring the direct exchange of digital currencies of Russian and foreign central banks and the execution of cross-border payments in these currencies can be achieved by creating our own project or by joining an existing one. Let us consider both options.

¹² SAMA Joins mBridge Project. *The Saudi Central Bank*. 2024. Jun. 5. Available at: <https://spa.gov.sa/en/N2117066> (accessed on 6 March 2025).

Scenario 1: Creating Russia's own project for using the CBDC for international settlements

Back in the fall of 2019, due to threats of Russia being cut off from the SWIFT international payment system, information emerged that Russia, China, and India were working on creating an alternative to SWIFT to simplify trade with countries subject to US sanctions. In early 2021, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Pankin did not rule out the creation of an alternative payment system in Russia based on new technology [Kochetkov 2022].

At present, there are no public statements about the development of projects to use the digital ruble for international settlements. A pilot project on the digital ruble is ongoing. The first stage of the project is primarily aimed at ensuring the circulation of the digital ruble in the domestic market, and its full implementation, according to the Financial Market Development Strategy, should take place by 2030. As for the domestic circulation of the digital ruble, the exact date is still uncertain: the initial forecast assumed widespread use of the digital ruble for domestic settlements no earlier than 2025.¹³ As of the beginning of the year, many banks participating in the pilot project indicated the need to postpone the widespread launch of the digital ruble until after 2026, while others said they were ready to launch in July 2025, as planned by the Bank of Russia. Fifteen banks and about 30 companies are participating in the pilot project. In February 2025, the Bank of Russia confirmed that the mass introduction of the digital ruble would take place later, noting that the regulator was receiving questions from the industry about the scope of necessary improvements and requests to postpone the widespread introduction of the digital ruble.^{14, 15}

Assuming that the development of a project involving the use of the digital ruble for international settlements is initiated in the near future, it will only be possible to implement it in a few years, according to global experience. In particular, according to estimates by the consulting agency KPMG, it will take at least 10 years of preparation and development of the platform to achieve success, which is also related to the different levels of development of CBDCs in each country [RUC FinTech Institute 2022]. We believe that as such technologies spread around the world, the time required to develop new initiatives will be significantly reduced compared to current estimates by consultants. Nevertheless, such a solution is relevant in the medium term, but does not solve current problems.

When developing your own project, it is important to pay attention to the following political and political-economic aspects.

¹³ The Russian Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Russia presented the Financial Market Development Strategy until 2030 for public discussion. *Central Bank of the Russian Federation* (official website). 2021. Sept. 13. Available at: <https://www.cbr.ru/press/event/?id=12197> (in Russian) (accessed 19 November 2023).

¹⁴ The Central Bank has postponed the mass introduction of the digital ruble. RBC. 2025. Feb. 27. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/finances/27/02/2025/67c016ec9a7947d63247bd9f> (in Russian) (accessed 09 March 2025).

¹⁵ Banks assess readiness for launch of digital ruble in 2025. RBC. 2025. Jan. 8. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/finances/08/01/2025/676c0d0b9a79470966c2baf6> (in Russian) (accessed 09 March 2025).

The development and integration of such a project into the global system requires implementation in partnership with other countries due to the high volatility of the ruble. The composition of the states will largely determine the scale of the project. For example, it seems possible to create such a project for the EAEU member states due to the existing mechanism of economic cooperation: the Customs Union and the practice of developing the “four freedoms” (free movement of goods, services, capital, and human resources). For the EAEU, this project could be a breakthrough for the development of an independent payment system in the region. However, none of the EAEU member states, except Russia, is a global power and has the political weight to promote the spread of such a pro-Russian project in the world. This must be taken into account when assessing the economic and political profitability of the project in this configuration.

The project could be made more profitable by the participation of countries that would link it to a basket of low-volatility currencies, such as the dirham or the yuan. It is possible to develop such a project with China within the framework of the Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation between the EAEU and its member states, on the one hand, and the People's Republic of China, on the other hand, of May 17, 2018,¹⁶ with the aim of deepening comprehensive cooperation and an ad hoc project to align the development plans of the EAEU and the Belt and Road Initiative (the “point of alignment” [Danilova 2024]). The agreement is non-preferential and allows for the initiation of ad hoc projects.

The external economic environment is favorable for the development of such initiatives in view of the restructuring of China's trade: as China's trade with the US declines, its trade with the EAEU member states increases: currently, trade in this direction exceeds half of China's trade with the US. The geographical proximity of our countries increases the profitability of such projects.

Table 1. Trade turnover of selected countries in 2021 and 2024, billion US dollars¹⁷

| Countries | 2021 | 2024 |
|------------------------|-------|---|
| Russia — China | 146.8 | 245 Russian exports 115.5 Russian imports 129 |
| China — Belarus | 5 | 8 |
| China — Kazakhstan | 1 | 4 |
| China — Kyrgyzstan | 1 | 2 |
| China — Armenia | 1 | 2 |
| China — United States | 620 | 564 |
| Russia — United States | 3 | 3 |

¹⁶ Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Union and its Member States, on the one hand, and the People's Republic of China, on the other hand. *Eurasian Economic Commission: official website*. 2018. May 17. Available at: https://eec.eaeunion.org/upload/media/library/21b/Tekst-russkiy_EAEU-alternate_final.pdf (in Russian) (accessed on 19 February 2024).

¹⁷ Compiled by the authors based on an analysis of news reports: initial data found in Google searches using queries such as “20... year trade turnover ‘country 1’ ‘country 2’.”

Another way to increase stability and solve the problem of high volatility of the ruble is to create a synthetic ruble. A synthetic ruble is a ruble with a stable exchange rate relative to a number of leading currencies, detached from the ruble exchange rate used for domestic settlements. A similar example in global practice is China's creation of the so-called offshore yuan (CNH), jointly developed by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority and the People's Bank of China [Aliev, Yu Xiao, Ryazanova 2024].

The BRICS countries have the necessary political weight. According to the Financial Times (FT), BRICS Bridge was one of the main items on the agenda of the summit in Kazan, which took place on October 22–24, 2024. This system is positioned as an alternative to SWIFT, independent of the “dollar system,” the publication wrote. However, the Russian president noted at the summit that the BRICS countries are not creating an “alternative to SWIFT” within the alliance, as the existing tools are sufficient. At the same time, the Russian president notes that the issue of alternatives is very important today.¹⁸

The development, testing, and integration of the project require cooperation and expert support from global financial institutions such as the Bank for International Settlements, based in Switzerland. The competencies of individual countries and the expertise at their disposal are insufficient to implement such a project. The possibility of attracting expertise from international institutions also has a political dimension: despite the international status of the Bank for International Settlements, the organization is in fact pro-Western, and in the current political configuration, it is difficult to engage its expertise. However, the situation should be kept under review and, if circumstances change, this option should be revisited. Alternatively, targeted diplomatic efforts could be made to push events in this direction.

Scenario 2: Connect to an existing CBDC project: mBridge, BIS Project Mariana

China emphasizes ensuring the confidentiality of each country when connecting to and using the mBridge platform. This issue has not been studied in Russia, and the authors believe that it would be useful for practitioners to study the technical side of the issue in detail, thereby providing relevant conclusions for more comprehensive political conclusions. Currently, there is no information on how to connect to the project: is it supposed to be a peer-to-peer connection or a multi-level integration, i.e., new participants can use the project infrastructure for international settlements but may have limited access to setting the rules of interaction?

At the same time, even without a domestic technical assessment of the project, the issues of technological and digital sovereignty cannot be ignored. The main content of the first concept is the development of digital technologies and the creation of digital infrastructure using freely distributed software, server devices, and encryption technologies, both collectively and individually; digital sovereignty implies the right of nation states to independently manage their digital resources, supervise and control the activities of their own digital platforms, as well as the ability of the state to block

¹⁸ Putin denies creation of SWIFT alternative in BRICS. RBC. 2024. Oct. 24. Available at: <https://www.rbc.ru/finances/24/10/2024/671a68a79a794736c04b1b8c> (in Russian) (accessed 30 October 2024).

information posted on them by relevant authorities and organizations if it does not meet the national interests of the country [Kochetkov, Maslov 2022].

The 2021 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation notes that “the rapid development of information and communication technologies is accompanied by an increased likelihood of threats to the security of citizens, society, and the state.” Consequently, the scenario of connecting to a project under foreign control cannot be assessed unequivocally. The implementation of digital sovereignty directly depends on the level of development of information technologies and the availability of a sufficient number of highly qualified IT personnel. The sphere of any international rights is regulated primarily by the goodwill of external actors and the potential of domestic ones.

The BIS Project Mariana [BIS 2023] deserves special mention. The project was carried out as part of a joint effort between the BIS Innovation Hub and banks in France, Singapore, and Switzerland. The aim of the project was to test the concept of using various CBDCs for cross-border payments and exchange transactions. The project started in November 2022 and ended on September 23, 2023. The results of the project demonstrated the fundamental feasibility of the proposed approach. In the context of the project, a number of countries with hypothetical CBDCs (wholesale CBDCs)—representing various currencies such as the euro, the Singapore dollar, and the Swiss franc—have engaged in transactions by leveraging special bridges. These bridges facilitate the transfer of tokens between platforms and automated market makers through the utilization of a public blockchain, thereby enabling transactions to occur without the involvement of intermediaries.

On the one hand, the pilot was successful and showed that direct exchange of CBDCs can speed up and reduce the cost of international settlements. On the other hand, the project clearly highlighted serious cyber risks and privacy issues that cannot be resolved automatically and require significant research and investment in operating mechanisms and infrastructure. In addition, it is obviously very difficult to ensure cooperation between countries, develop standards, and secure the necessary investments, including significant liquidity pools for the operation of automatic market makers.

4. International settlements in CBDCs and the balance of political forces

Another important aspect of the transition to international settlements using CBDCs relates to the *balance of power* and the restructuring of the world. The implementation of a project in this area, which could become in demand worldwide, will influence the geopolitical situation: the political weight of the state that launches its platform on a global scale will increase due to the greater integration of national technologies and financial instruments into the economies of other states. Scientists note that trends such as the widespread introduction of digital cryptocurrencies and the abolition of cash; the robotization of labor; and the widespread introduction of 5G systems for tracking information flows, primarily related to the movement of cryptocurrencies, imply a rejection of the current Bretton Woods system of institutions. According to globalists, a networked power structure may emerge in the digital society of the future. In the medium

term, the transnational digital elite is unlikely to establish global dominance, as nation states such as the US, China, and Russia will remain leading actors on the world stage for some time to come [Kochetkov 2024; Kochetkov 2022]. Thanks to the mBridge project, China is claiming the role of digital elite. China, which is historically characterized by implicit actions, a lack of concrete form, and “millennial” thinking (long strategic horizons), has managed to transform a unified digital space in the financial sector into a minimum viable product (MVP), which could be part of the program for the restructuring of Central Asia and Europe, as well as the modern world as a whole.

Of course, unexpected alternative scenarios cannot be ruled out. For example, US President Donald Trump has essentially announced the suspension of activities to introduce CBDCs in the US.¹⁹ At the same time, he signed an executive order on the creation of a US cryptocurrency reserve.²⁰ To a certain extent, these two consecutive steps do not rule out potential strategic intentions to use cryptocurrencies to solve international settlement problems in the future. This assumption raises many doubts and questions but does not seem completely unrealistic in several scenarios. For example, the US could create state-backed stablecoins that could potentially be used for international settlements. Alternatively, the US could enter into agreements with certain countries to conduct trade settlements using cryptocurrency assets, which could potentially reduce payment costs and pilot an alternative cross-border settlement mechanism. The political aspect is also important here, as such an approach would strengthen the US's role in shaping global standards and help it become a key rule-maker. Of course, this path is extremely difficult, if only because it will require the US to ensure compliance with sanctions, AML (anti-money laundering) and KYC (customer identification) requirements in the use of cryptocurrencies, which has so far been met with limited success.

5. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of digitalization, we are seeing conceptual changes in the principles of interaction within human societies, and digital financial infrastructure is coming to the fore in terms of the integration of states into the system of international relations. The basket of cryptocurrencies, previously represented only by independent (decentralized) digital assets, is being replenished with national (sovereign) digital currencies. A number of countries and intergovernmental associations have already offered the world technologies for the direct exchange of CBDCs.

Russia is currently testing its own digital ruble, the prospects for which are currently limited to the domestic market. The question of using the digital ruble in international settlements remains open.

¹⁹ Strengthening American Leadership in Digital Financial Technology Executive Order. *The White House*. 2025. Jan. 23. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/strengthening-american-leadership-in-digital-financial-technology/> (accessed 7 March 2025).

²⁰ Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Establishes the Strategic Bitcoin Reserve and US Digital Asset Stockpile. *The White House*. 2025. March 6. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/03/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-establishes-the-strategic-bitcoin-reserve-and-u-s-digital-asset-stockpile/> (accessed 07 March 2025).

The mBridge project is an important step in the development of international settlements without the use of the US dollar and could lead to a restructuring of the international financial system. The creation of a similar project in Russia could protect it from sanctions pressure in the future. Consequently, there is a clear case for developing such a project and, at the same time, for the Russian diplomatic service to be closely involved in promoting it. This would be a response to global demand for the introduction and use of more convenient, secure, and privacy-friendly digital currencies [Wang Junsheng 2025].

An important political signal indicating the project's prospects is the question raised by the BIS about withdrawing from it.²¹ A project with no prospects for development would not have sparked debate in the authoritative US media. Given the political tensions between China and the US, as well as the ban on the CBDC signed by Trump, the BIS's withdrawal may be aimed at eliminating the potential for restructuring the existing global financial infrastructure inherent in the mBridge project. The open and vocal opposition to the project underscores that it poses a threat to the existing international payment architecture.

Given the conservatism of banks in using payment systems and the US-backed dominance of SWIFT and the US dollar in settlements, it is to be expected that the existing CIPS infrastructure will grow rapidly in terms of yuan settlements. This will be met with resistance from the US, leading to the separation and isolation of a number of banks that will only operate through CIPS, but not through SWIFT. Only large countries will be able to afford this, as smaller countries will fear sanctions due to the fact that these flows are not transparent to the US and undermine the role of the US dollar as a reserve currency. The FATF (Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering), as an intergovernmental body, can apply a wide range of administrative measures against such countries.

Contradictory conclusions can be drawn about the changing role of SWIFT in the international architecture of cross-border payments. On the one hand, SWIFT technologies are not used in the mBridge project. On the other hand, the mBridge project is based on the ISO 20022 standard developed by SWIFT, which incorporates many years of experience in international financial transactions. Thus, SWIFT continues to serve as the foundation of the global financial market.

The most important open issue in the integration of CBDC exchange platforms remains the capacious political sphere—ensuring data confidentiality, national information security, and guarantees of compliance with the agreements reached. The resolution of these technical issues is closely linked to national sovereignty, and the integration of viable products may be artificially slowed down by government administrators in order to control the associated risks.

²¹ Rejection of the “digital dollar” gives the EU and China a chance to introduce their own CBDC standards. *Frank Media*. 2025. Jan. 28. Available at: <https://frankmedia.ru/191067> (in Russian) (accessed on 6 March 2025).

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