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- 23 RISING POWERS AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY PROMOTION: THE CASE OF BRAZIL AND INDIA  
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### Portuguese Journal of International Affairs

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**Chapters in books:** Manuel Ennes Ferreira, "China in Angola: Just a Passion for Oil?", in Christopher Alden, Daniel Large and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira (eds.), *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 295-317.

**Articles in journals:** Paulo Gorjão, "Japan's Foreign Policy and East Timor, 1975-2002" (*Asian Survey*, Vol. 42, No. 5, September/October 2002), pp. 754-771.

**Articles in newspapers:** Paulo Gorjão, "UN needs coherent strategy to exit from East Timor" (*Jakarta Post*, 19 May 2004), p. 25.

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# Rising powers and the future of democracy promotion: the case of Brazil and India

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The decline of Western dominance, symbolized by the financial crisis in 2008 and the rise of emerging actors such as China, India and Brazil, will fundamentally change the way decisions are made at the international level. Power, and the responsibilities that come with it, will be more evenly spread across a larger number of stakeholders, potentially creating a more equitable world order. Power not only allows rising actors to participate in international negotiations but also increasingly allows countries such as China, India and Brazil to frame the debate and decide which issues should be discussed in the first place. In other words, rising powers will increasingly turn into global agenda setters. Apart from changing the way decisions are made, the rise of non-established powers such as India and Brazil on the one hand and China on the other, will also have an impact on the international discourse on political values and systems of governance.

## **Emerging agenda-setters**

This coordinating role between competing views and discourses has traditionally been reserved for Western powers. Whether in the UN, the World Bank, or the G8, the West has generally been able to frame the global debate and decide which challenges the world should pay attention to. Then British Prime Minister Tony Blair's decision to focus on poverty reduction during the G8 Summit in Gleneagles in 2005, and the reaction it created on a global scale, is an example of how a relatively small country was able to push the global debate in a certain direction. US President Barack Obama successfully reframed and refocused the debate about nuclear proliferation when he called for a world free of nuclear weapons during a speech in Prague in 2008. While Western powers will continue to participate in the shaping of the global political discourse, they will however have to share the stage with a number of increasingly assertive rising powers – China, India, Brazil, Turkey and South Africa, among others. This is both a natural and a necessary development.

A growing awareness that international institutions need to reflect the current distribution of power more accurately to maintain their legitimacy is the direct result of a concerted effort by emerging powers to press their case for better representation. The UN Security Council will be seen as illegitimate or bypassed if its number of veto-wielding members does not grow to include countries such as India, Brazil or a leading nation from the African continent. Successfully tackling climate change would be entirely impossible without Chinese and Indian input. The same is true for solving the global trade impasse, nuclear proliferation and issues such as organized crime. At the same time, the tension caused after Brazil's and Turkey's effort to negotiate a solution on the Iranian nuclear issue shows that it will also be more difficult to coordinate decision-making processes once a larger number of stakeholders has entered the fray.

Thus, aside from the number of participants in the global discussion and more complex decision-making processes, the topics of discussion themselves are changing, and the issues on the agenda will be evermore influenced by Brazilian, Indian and Chinese policymakers. The Brazilian or Indian host of a future G20 summit will be able to set the agenda just as Tony Blair did at the G8 summit in 2005. However, how important will the issue of democracy be on the agenda of emerging powers?

### **Democracy promotion: a Western concept?**

Democracy promotion, sometimes called democracy assistance (a term with a less intrusive connotation), generally refers to the strategies of governments or international organizations to promote the spread of democracy in countries around the world. Democracy promotion can take many different forms, ranging from financing opposition groups, electoral monitoring, supporting the news media, and imposing sanctions on non-democratic regimes, to offering development aid if the recipient takes steps towards democratization. Democratic regimes can also engage in indirect democracy promotion by seeking closer ties to other democratic countries, which may create incentives to change, for non-democratic regimes, or simply by engaging in pro-democracy rhetoric. Thomas Carothers makes the distinction between the political approach (that focuses on procedures such as elections) and the developmental approach (that takes a broader societal perspective), but argues that often countries – most notably the United States – engage in both strategies.<sup>1</sup>

While Western democratic governments and organizations continue to spend billions of dollars every year on democracy-related projects,<sup>2</sup> there is a notable shift of power towards countries that are either reluctant when it comes to democracy promotion or reject the idea altogether. The rise of apparently viable alternative political models such as those of China, makes the future look increasingly uncertain for the supporters of democracy. One overarching topic all emerging powers seem to espouse dearly is the defense of sovereignty. Foreign intervention of any kind, even well intentioned advice, is considered an inappropriate

intrusion into another's domestic affairs. As a consequence, the issue of democracy promotion, prominent in Western foreign policy, is, with a few exceptions, largely absent from the discourse of emerging powers. Carothers' survey of different types of democracy promotion in 2009 includes only North American and European strategies as there are virtually no formal programs of overt democracy promotion outside of the West.

Democracy promotion is, for obvious reasons, not an issue in Russia and China. The case is however, more surprising with respect to Brazil and India, two vibrant democracies whose leaders have often been personally involved in the fight for democratic rights. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the key figures in the fight for independence from the British and a leading proponent of decolonization in Asia and Africa. Brazilian Presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002), Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva (2003-2010) and Dilma Rousseff (since 2011) have all endured some form of repression during Brazil's military dictatorship. Rousseff, the first woman to assume the presidency in Brazil, was even tortured. Nevertheless, propagating values cherished at home or criticizing foreign leaders who do not embrace these values has traditionally been frowned upon in both Brazil and India.

There is in fact, little discernible difference between Brazilian and Indian ties to democratic countries such as South Africa and to non-democratic ones such as Russia, with which both Brasília and New Delhi have cordial relations. Brazil is on good terms with leaders such as Cuba's Raúl Castro, Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, and it has been notoriously reluctant to endorse measures to prevent genocides in Rwanda, Sudan and former Yugoslavia. Similarly, India has for over a decade followed a so-called 'constructive engagement' policy with Myanmar's military junta in which it has not criticized the regime's human rights abuses even as it hosts large numbers of Burmese refugees and political exiles on its soil. Nor did New Delhi take much of a position one way or the other on the elections held there last year, disappointing pro-democracy activists everywhere.

Some may point to IBSA, a trilateral outfit involving India, Brazil and South Africa, and argue that democratic values are the underlying principle of the club. This may be true, yet none of the members, least of all South Africa, has actively promoted democracy in the region, and it is not an issue discussed at the yearly IBSA summits. In some instances, Brazil has adopted a pro-democracy stance abroad. Brazil helped Paraguay avoid a military coup in 1996, and it did not recognize the Honduran government which assumed power after a coup d'état against Manuel Zelaya, arguing that it lacked democratic legitimacy. Similarly, India too helped prevent a coup in the Maldives in 1988, but as part of an arguably more difficult neighborhood than Brazil's, New Delhi has been more wary of promoting democracy abroad. India's open support for the Burmese democratic movement until the mid-1990s was an exception and it has since been more worried about Chinese inroads into Myanmar.

Even rhetoric about being "concerned" about violently suppressed protests or a rigged election, commonly made by European and North American governments, is difficult to elicit from either Brazil or India. Brazilian and Indian pro-democracy rhetoric does exist,

but only when dealing with other democratic countries. For instance, when India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh traveled to Japan in 2006, he declared that "we are two major Asian countries who share the universally respected values of freedom, democracy, respect for fundamental human rights, and commitment to the rule of law", and argued that values-based cooperation within the new Indo-Japanese strategic partnership "will be a major factor in building an open and inclusive Asia and in enhancing peace and stability in the Asian region and beyond".<sup>3</sup> Just as Japan and India recognize each other's identities as liberal democracies, Brazilian rhetoric is very similar when dealing with other liberal democracies such as India.

However, Daniel Twining points out that "Indian officials recognize that the widespread appeal of their country's democratic values is a strategic asset for Indian diplomacy",<sup>4</sup> and both Brazil and India continuously point to their democratic credentials as they seek a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Similarly, the India-Japan partnership actually appears to be less a case of commitment to democracy per se or the result of any great desire to set themselves apart from an authoritarian China. Rather, it would seem that it is their desire to confront the strategic, including military, challenge posed by their common neighbor, that has forced India and Japan into what to all intents is a rather limited political relationship. Also, Brazil may have defended democracy in Paraguay and Honduras, but has kept quiet about the lack of democracy in Venezuela and Cuba. It is thus apparent that for the emerging powers, it is their strategic interests that are prioritized over democracy promotion. In the same way, while India might seek partnerships to balance China, it also recognizes that taking a position on China's for its democratic deficits would be unwise given its strategic importance. Siddharth Varadarajan in fact argues that Western attempts to woo India into a democratic alliance are meant to drive a wedge between India and China, two countries that, according to him, should collaborate despite their different political regimes.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, there are no Brazilian or Indian NGOs that work for democracy promotion abroad. In addition, the George W. Bush administration's close identification of democracy promotion with the war in Iraq has largely discredited the concept on the international stage. The sharp contradictions between the rhetoric of Bush's "freedom agenda" and the phenomena of torture of detainees at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo and of warrantless surveillance caused consternation even among US allies. Apart from provoking a global debate over the legitimacy and limits of Western democracy promotion, these issues may have contributed still further to Brazil's and India's aversion to democracy promotion.<sup>6</sup>

### **Emerging donors: economic development, not democracy promotion**

Brazilian and Indian strategies as so-called "emerging donors" are particularly instructive for the way they prioritize respect for sovereignty over democracy promotion in their foreign policies. As S.L.J. Sousa points out, emerging donors' conception of economic cooperation differs from the standards established by the major Western donor countries.<sup>7</sup> For example,

rather than reproducing traditional donor-recipient hierarchies, they emphasize partnership and South-South cooperation, stressing mutual benefits. Democracy promotion, as a consequence, plays virtually no role in their efforts. In this respect, the activities of Brazil, India and China are more or less indistinguishable from each other. In Africa, for example, commercial interests dominate for all three countries, even if these commercial entities might be differentiated as largely private or largely state-owned depending on the emerging power in question.<sup>8</sup>

This has a lot to do with the experience of these emerging powers as developing countries. First, these countries are still fighting poverty at home, which sets them apart from traditional donor countries. They therefore have less leeway to openly finance development projects abroad as they have to consider domestic conditions first, including a possible domestic backlash. Second, these countries have a strong traditional allegiance to the developing world, and Brazil and India in particular, are understandably unwilling to appear to leave their former allies in the G77 and Non-Aligned Movement to represent the rich world, which has engaged in democracy promotion for decades. Also as India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations pointed out in 2009, "while integrating human rights in the work of the UN, we should ensure that the development agenda pursued by the UN should not be undermined by way of introducing new conditionalities in provision of development assistance".<sup>9</sup>

Is democracy promotion thus likely to grow less important as rising powers assume more prominent positions? As African countries prefer to pick a no-strings-attached loan from China or India over a traditional Western loan burdened by prescriptions regarding governance and democratization, will a weakened West still be able to make a convincing case for democracy promotion? There is already evidence that suggests that in the face of China's rise, Western governments and agencies use the "d-word" less frequently. Indeed, following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, democracy promotion seems to have taken on such a negative connotation that fewer Western leaders openly identify it as a key foreign policy goal. Former French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, a leading proponent of pro-democracy "liberal interventionism", was dismissed in 2010, for example, because President Nicolas Sarkozy believed his rhetoric was beginning to endanger French interests.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the objective of establishing a liberal democracy in Afghanistan has been quietly substituted with simply leaving behind a stable central government that can defend itself against the Taliban.

## **The death of democracy promotion?**

While India and Brazil believe liberal and human rights abiding democracies are the best regime type, they have almost no missionary zeal to promote democracy abroad, in contrast to the United States, whose national security strategy prominently features democracy promotion.<sup>11</sup> As Venezuela's Hugo Chávez turns his country into an autocracy, Brazil has at no point voiced any concerns about the problems in that country, including jailed opposition

figures, lack of freedom of the press, large-scale arms purchases or ties to the FARC guerrilla that seeks to undermine the Colombian state. Similarly, India has been very measured in its response to events in Sri Lanka following the defeat of the LTTE in which President Mahinda Rajapaksa has made use of his overwhelming electoral victory to hound the opposition. And the Indian government was divided on whether to extend support to the people's movement of a few years ago in Nepal that finally led to the monarchy being overthrown.

For both democratic Brazil and India and authoritarian China, respecting sovereignty is a logical and inherently convenient position to defend as weak states that fear intervention by other, more powerful actors. Brazil traditionally criticized American interference in South America, just as India saw the International Monetary Fund as a tool of Western imperialist powers. Brazil has also been traditionally worried about foreign intervention in its Amazon forest, and several policymakers continue to regard the activities of foreign NGOs in the Amazon as potentially subversive. In a similar manner, India is reluctant to accept foreign advice on how to handle the Kashmir issue, and China is profoundly averse to external meddling in Tibet. All three countries have some experience with foreign occupation or have been colonies of Western powers, so they are particularly sensitive about foreign intervention.

History also shows that dictatorships are generally seen as the more reliable partners even by democratic countries. As China supports Omar al-Bashir's faltering Sudanese regime, India remains quiet about Myanmar's human rights abuses, and Brazil is careful not to antagonize Venezuela's Hugo Chávez – all due to their respective strategic economic interests. Brazilian and Indian diplomats rightly point out that the United States and Europe follow or have followed a very similar strategy. The United States supported several dictatorships during the Cold War, judging them as more reliable than unpredictable democracies<sup>12</sup> and continues to maintain close ties to autocratic regimes such as Saudi Arabia, a crucial oil supplier. In the same way, the United States has significantly toned down its criticism of autocrats deemed helpful in American efforts to combat international terrorism<sup>13</sup> and is even today reluctant to push Egypt's Hosni Mubarak completely or too suddenly off his seat of power. Similarly, as the hunger of rising powers for raw materials – which often come from non-democratic regimes – increases, they too have few incentives for destabilizing a reliable partner by funding pro-democracy outfits.

Experience also suggests that the West's efforts to strengthen democracies has had limited success.<sup>14</sup> For decades, the United States has worked to strengthen civil society capacity-building and political party development in the Arab World, but Tunisia's struggle after ousting Zine El Abidine Ben Ali shows how little effect US efforts have had.<sup>15</sup> In many instances, being associated with Western donors is a burden for opposition groups; in June 2009, for example, the Iranian opposition explicitly distanced itself from the United States to prevent a loss of credibility.<sup>16</sup>

That said, as emerging powers expand their global presence, the nature of their national interests is bound to change. With their economies growing and the necessity to import raw materials surging, they often take an active interest in the political stability of their suppliers.



China, for example, is seeking energy supplies to sustain its growth, which has led it to actively intervene in Sudan's internal politics, supporting Omar al-Bashir to avoid a political meltdown which could endanger Sudan's oil shipments to China. Similarly, India has identified Angola as an important future oil supplier, so its political stakes in the region are set to rise as well. Even Brazil, blessed with abundant resources, has seen its economic sphere of interest grow, which will undoubtedly alter its foreign policy strategies. It is therefore possible that as their spheres of interest expand, emerging powers could become less reluctant to promote stable political regimes abroad.

## Conclusion

The question is what form this desire to promote stability abroad will take. And will the form that this desire takes be different from country to country? The emerging powers will discover that in order to protect their economic interests, not only is a strong political regime required, but its persuasion matters too. Respect for the letter of the contract is an essential component of any economic relationship and this is also inevitably tied to respect for the rule of law. It is this latter facet that is often missing in authoritarian regimes such as China. Add to the fact that emerging powers are themselves in the process of developing their economies and at various stages of social and political churning, emerging powers like Brazil and India could decide in one of two ways – to continue in the current vein of non-interference in another country's affairs, deciding that their economic interests are not as important as their respect for the principle of sovereignty, or to take a stand in order to defend their interests. And if they have to take an active political stance, in the absence of military muscle or a veto on the UN Security Council, like the United States enjoys, they will have less leeway to act in contradiction to their own political values. Thus, if they are democratic at home, they cannot be seen to be hypocritical and supporting authoritarian regimes, for the costs would be high both domestically and externally. Indeed, as Manoj Joshi has argued, "India's regional grand strategy must be based on our belief that what is good for us is also good for our neighbors; in other words, pluralistic political systems, the rule of law, the rights of the individual".<sup>17</sup> Therefore, will Brazil and India seek to promote regimes that are modeled on themselves? Will China encourage regimes to attain stability without recourse to democracy or free and fair elections?

In the short-run, it does seem likely that the rise of emerging powers will contribute to the decreasing importance of democracy promotion in the international political discourse. African dictators will show little inclination to accept loans laden with conditions if they can opt for Chinese, Indian or Brazilian loans without any strings attached, and Central Asian despots will seek to take advantage of instability in their neighborhood or the fear of possible chaos in their own country to play one power against the other. But in the long-run, as they grow and become more confident of their positions in the world order, at least some emerging powers

might see that they have little to gain from kowtowing to dictators. They might also seek increasingly to distinguish themselves not so much from the West as from each other. And at least Brazil and India could well find that their democratic nature is an important marker also of their global identity, and that democracy promotion is a useful tool for furthering their national interests worldwide.

#### (Endnotes)

- 1 Thomas Carothers, "Democracy Assistance: Political vs. Developmental?" (*Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 20, No. 1, January 2009), pp. 5-19.
- 2 Thomas Carothers, *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy Promotion* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004).
- 3 "Prime Minister's speech to the Diet" (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 14 December 2006).
- 4 Daniel Twining, "India's Relations with Iran and Myanmar: "Rogue State" or Responsible Democratic Stakeholder?" (*India Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1, April 2008), 31.
- 5 Siddharth Varadarajan, "Eastern promise, western fears" (*The Hindu*, 25 January 2011).
- 6 Thomas Carothers, *Critical Mission*.
- 7 S.L.J. de Sousa, "Brazil as an emerging actor in development cooperation: a good partner for European donors?" (German Development Institute (GDI), Briefing Paper, May 2010).
- 8 Dane Rowlands, "Emerging donors in international development assistance: a synthesis report" (International Development Research Centre (IDRC), January 2008).
- 9 H. S. Puri, "Statement by the Permanent Representative of India on Agenda Item 107" (United Nations, General Assembly, 6 October 2009). This, however, does not mean that Southern assistance mostly goes to countries with poor human rights records. Except for Myanmar, the largest beneficiaries of Southern development assistance also feature among the top-ten recipients of aid from OECD/DAC countries. See "Background Study for the Development Cooperation Forum – Trends in South-South and triangular development cooperation" (ECOSOC, April 2008).
- 10 Doug Saunders, "Democracy promotion? Poof, it's vanished" (*The Globe and Mail*, 20 November 2010).
- 11 Paula J. Dobriansky, "Democracy Promotion: Explaining the Bush Administration's Position – The Core of U.S. Foreign Policy" (*Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 3, May/June 2003), pp. 141-144.
- 12 Noam Chomsky, "The Responsibility of Intellectuals" (*The New York Review of Books*, 23 February 1967).
- 13 Thomas Carothers, "Promoting Democracy and Fighting Terror" (*Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 1, January/February 2003), pp. 84-97.
- 14 Thomas Carothers, "U.S. Democracy Promotion During and After Bush" (*Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2007).
- 15 Steven Heydemann, "Tunisia and the future of democracy promotion in the Arab World" (*Foreign Policy*, The Middle East Channel, 24 January 2011).
- 16 Thomas Carothers admits that one of the principal problems of democracy promotion is that "most people on the receiving end have an instinctive and wholly understandable suspicion about anyone who comes to their country claiming to be sincerely dedicated to helping build democracy there". See Thomas Carothers, *Critical Mission*, p. 4.
- 17 Manoj Joshi, "Neighbors Like These", quoted by Daniel Twining, "India's Relations with Iran and Myanmar", p. 32.



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