



# Portuguese Journal of International Affairs

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- 3 BRICS, SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION AND THE DURBAN SUMMIT:  
WHAT'S IN IT FOR SOUTH AFRICA?  
*Chris Landsberg and Candice Moore*



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## Portuguese Journal of International Affairs

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# BRICS, South-South Cooperation and the Durban Summit: What's in it for South Africa?

## CHRIS LANDSBERG AND CANDICE MOORE

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### Introduction

The emergence of the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) forum has been attended by much scrutiny, and in places, trepidation. BRICS have been heralded as the successor to a longstanding Southern activism in international affairs, and even as a potential alternative to a West-centric world order, especially in the economic sphere. But it is debatable if these labels are accurate. After much negotiation within BRIC, South Africa joined the group at the end of 2010, with its formal accession being announced at the third BRIC Summit in Sanya, China, in 2011. This represented a key moment for BRICS, at a time when the formation was increasing its level of interaction, through various meetings between key national departments and ministries, and also because of a major decision that had just been taken at the United Nations (UN) Security Council, on which all were for the first time represented. This decision was the passing of UN Resolution 1973 that authorized “all measures” to protect civilians in Libya and gave the UN’s assent to a no-fly zone implemented by NATO. Brazil, India, China and Russia abstained from voting, while South Africa, by that time one of three African non-permanent members on the Security Council, as well as a newly minted member of BRICS, voted in favor. So soon after South Africa’s inclusion in BRICS, this hinted at how far the BRICS could go in forming a coherent international platform.

This article will begin by situating BRICS as an actor on the international political stage, examining both economic and diplomatic initiatives. We then outline some of the challenges BRICS face, and the prospects for a measure of collective action being achieved in the years to come. This is followed by a closer examination of the ‘South-South’ label as applied to BRICS. Finally, an analysis is conducted of the potential contribution South Africa can make in light of these challenges, along with the dilemmas the country faces as a member of BRICS.

### BRICS and the World

Various lenses have been deployed to examine the real and potential impact of BRICS on international politics.<sup>1</sup> Realists see BRICS as a potential counterweight to the West in in-

ternational relations, and this view depends on the economic performance of the BRICS, as well as the military potential of individual BRICS states such as Russia, a historic foe of the United States. This is a zero-sum view that sees any accumulation of material power by the BRICS as a potential threat to the interests of the established powers of the advanced industrialized world.

If we limit ourselves to calculations of the BRICS economic and military importance,, we are constrained within a realist view of international relations, looking for BRICs to threaten or challenge Western hegemony. Each of the BRICS has a military expenditure, as a percentage of GDP, well below that of the United States (4,71%), and only Russia (3,87%) exceeds the spending of Europe (2,99%). China's armed forces number nearly 3 million; India's 2,6 million, compared to the US's 1,5 million. However, these figures are complicated by force structures and technological capabilities. For example, the US has 11 aircraft carriers and 57 nuclear powered submarines, compared to China's single aircraft carrier and 6 nuclear powered submarines. The US and Russia still far outstrip China in nuclear capability, with approximately 20000 nuclear warheads between them; China has less than 1000.<sup>2</sup> Regional animosities and rivalries also make the global power distribution or polarity far murkier than a BRICS versus US narrative would suggest. In any case, the goal of military dominance or rivalry is absent in the BRICS' early statements.

Instead, the BRICS have focused chiefly on the economic and diplomatic spheres. With the global financial crisis as a backdrop in June 2009, BRICS leaders focused on the global economic situation, urging the resistance of protectionism and greater diversification of the international monetary system. But they also made calls for greater voice and representation in the international financial institutions for emerging and developing economies. The Joint Statement of BRICS Leaders at the 2009 Yekaterinburg Summit called for "a more democratic and just multi-polar world order based on the rule of law, equality, mutual respect, cooperation, coordinated action and collective decision-making of all states".<sup>3</sup> Underlining this was the commitment to multilateral diplomacy and the reform of the UN, with support for the 'aspirations' of India and Brazil to 'play a greater role in the United Nations', without explicitly supporting their contention for permanent membership of the Security Council.<sup>4</sup> These calls are hallmarks of the liberal institutionalist approach to BRICS, which sees each country's upward trajectory as the product of a robust engagement with the process of globalization, including reforms and the opening of economies. Another dimension of this approach is multilateralism, and the active role that BRICS play in global institutions. Russia and China are veto-holding permanent members of the UN Security Council; India, Brazil and South Africa would like a seat, too. Multilateralism at the regional and global levels, and the growing interdependence of BRICS states, may prove instructive of the potential future roles the BRICS can play. A third, underexplored, lens for the interpretation of BRICS' impact on international affairs is in the area of ideas and particularly the emerging powers' measured call for redistributive justice and their potentially profound impact on development debates.<sup>5</sup> Ac-

ording to the Sanya Declaration, "BRICS aims at contributing significantly to the development of humanity and establishing a more equitable and fair world".<sup>6</sup> Further, growing BRICS engagement might bring a new dimension to the debate on aid effectiveness in developing countries. BRICS' philosophies for development financing differ from those of the 'traditional' OECD-DAC donors in three key ways: they are founded on a model of mutual benefits; the provision of noncash financing without conditionalities; and, a different approach to debt sustainability.<sup>7</sup>

Absent a central coordinating office, BRICS' agency on the contemporary international scene can still be gauged in terms of economic performance since the formation of the grouping, and the efficacy of its diplomatic initiatives. The most notable steps taken include the decision to meet at annual summits, and the first decision on expanding the grouping to include South Africa. In fact, to date it appears the BRICS' greatest impact has been the result of uncoordinated effects on the global economy, and not in any concerted diplomatic or political capacity, fit-for-purpose partnerships – those that address immediate issues and address particular interests – in global trade (G20) and environment (BASIC) negotiations notwithstanding.<sup>8</sup>

According to figures released by the Chinese government, the country's trade with fellow BRIC nations grew much faster than its trade with other partners. Up to January 2012, compared with the previous year, trade with Brazil rose by about 35%, with Russia by about 43%, and with South Africa by 77%.<sup>9</sup> In 2013, emerging nations are projected to produce more than half of global output, measured at purchasing power parity (PPP).<sup>10</sup> This is in light of continuing financial crisis in Europe and slow growth in America. Also, in the second quarter of 2011, the emerging world held US\$ 6.5 trillion of the world's official foreign exchange reserves, double the rich world's US\$3.2 trillion. BRICS' share amounts to about 40% of this.<sup>11</sup> BRICS are planning to parlay this into a BRICS Development Bank, one of the major outcomes expected from the Durban Summit. The Bank is projected to fund infrastructure projects and act as an alternative to traditional lenders such as the World Bank.<sup>12</sup>

Yet the BRICS have had difficulty acting in unison. For example, UN Security Council vote on Resolution 1973, authorizing a no-fly zone over Libya at the height of rebellion against the rule of Muammar Gaddafi, brought differences to the surface. The grouping issued a statement at the Sanya Summit, denouncing the use of force in Libya, but only after South Africa had given its assent to the campaign by voting for the Resolution. This was in spite of all five BRICS members being on the Security Council at the same time, an unprecedented occurrence. The main preoccupations now are global financial architecture issues, with BRICS seeking to establish a Development Bank, and seeking alternatives to the US dollar as the international currency of reserve.

There are major differences between the members of BRICS, and as such BRICS demand different responses from their trading partners, as noted in a recent report by the European Commission. Furthermore, BRICS were not able to achieve the longstanding

goal of South-South cooperation of 'de-linking' or 'de-coupling' from advanced industrialized economies, as the aftermath of the 2008-2009 financial crisis revealed. Like smaller economies, the BRICS were hit by downturns in FDI and the contraction of export markets in Europe and the United States. As noted by the European Commission, "during the first three months of 2009, BRICS' exports and imports shrank by double digit rates (especially in Russia, but in China as well)".<sup>13</sup>

### **The Evolving Concept of 'South-South Cooperation'**

The concept of South-South cooperation is often used in contemporary analyses and government policies. In order for an analysis of BRICS and South-South cooperation to be conducted in ways that can strengthen and enhance the formation, these terms must be distanced from each other to an extent, so that each can be examined independently. There is a need, with the growth of new, large and influential economies in the Global South, to craft an understanding of South-South cooperation not just in relation to the Global North, but also by way of defining or establishing an ideal, of relations between countries of the Global South: true South-South cooperation. When these concepts – 'BRICS' and 'South-South Cooperation' – are separated the deeper lines of distinction between the BRICS states become apparent and, paradoxically, the areas for enhanced cooperation may be identified, without the misleading veil of 'South-South cooperation'. Ascribing 'South-South' credentials to the BRICS formation stretches the concept beyond its original intent. The so-called 'rise of the rest' has brought to the fore once again the questions of global inequality, global responsibility, and other issues associated with the North-South divide that reached its apex in the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> A few large developing countries have presented themselves as representatives of the interests of the developing world in order to meet this challenge in new and inventive ways. The approaches by these states to issues such as climate change, humanitarian intervention and technology transfer, have been tinged by historical 'anti-imperialism', acting in tandem with expanded global economic reach and reliance on multilateral institutions to broaden their diplomatic scope. At the same time, the internationalism and global leadership of the Western democracies has come under increasing pressure in recent years, which have witnessed these states presiding over questionable military interventions and crippling financial crises. The primary elements of South-South cooperation began to crystallize at Bandung in 1955, at the Asian-African Conference. The realization of their common concerns in international affairs led African and Asian leaders to start meeting in the late 1950s, and to begin to constitute a common identity distinct from the world of imperial powers. This position gave rise to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961. The movement was based on the principles of peace and disarmament, independence and self-determination, economic equality, cultural equality, and universalism and multilateralism.<sup>15</sup> The concepts of 'neutrality', 'non-alignment', 'Southern solidarity' and 'South-South cooperation' have all been used with reference to the international actions of the 'Third

World'. But how do they differ? To begin with, 'neutrality' was never a feature of the positions adopted by developing countries in collective forums such as the Asian-African Conference of 1955, or the Non-Aligned Movement. Neutrality is the "legal status that arises from the abstention of a state from any participation in a war between other states".<sup>16</sup> Non-alignment referred primarily to the right reserved by newly independent states not to declare their support *in advance* for either the Eastern or Western blocs.<sup>17</sup> Non-aligned states remained vigorously charged with international questions, however, and did not simply seek to avoid affiliation with the East or West.

'Southern' or 'Third World' solidarity is an amorphous concept related to the support (mainly political and economic) offered to countries lacking in industrial development, with a shared colonial experience and a perspective of marginalization in international affairs, by countries sharing these qualities. Finally, from the 1960s on, 'South-South co-operation' gained momentum from the analytical lens known as Dependency Theory, advanced in large part by a number of South American economists, namely Raul Prebisch, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Falleto. It was evident in the desire of developing countries, recognizing a subservient role in relation to the advanced industrialized economies, to de-link from these economies and forge stronger economic ties among themselves, which they assumed would be less exploitative and more relevant to their development. South-South co-operation has taken the form of capital flows and trade contacts, though these are only now beginning to eclipse the established contacts with traditional Northern economic partners. While trade partners like China leave no doubt that they can surpass traditional trade partners from the developed world, it is certainly still an open question whether this latest incarnation of South-South cooperation will be less exploitative and more relevant to development needs.

This political imperative is at the centre of BRICS' existence. There are few other lines of commonality as defined as the anti-imperial, anti-Western hegemony sensibility running through the foreign policies of all of the BRICS countries, although this varies in intensity from country to country. This posture, though longstanding in each individual BRICS state's foreign policy, has been buttressed by rapid and resilient economic growth over the last decade. The question should be posed, however, whether South-South solidarity may not have migrated from these primarily altruistic foundations. As Kornegay argues, "gone is the era of 'third world' tricontinental solidarity as the growing emphasis on South-South cooperation and trade accents 'economic diplomacy' and geoeconomic positioning".<sup>18</sup> The question of whether economics or politics serves as BRICS' *raison d'être* is a false one, however, because BRICS, like OPEC before it,<sup>19</sup> encompass a political response to growing economic challenges on a global scale. This political response entails a re-assertion of the national imperative to run domestic economies in a manner that accords with the developmental goals of each of the BRICS. It is also a real and growing political challenge to Western value-solidarist (as opposed to value-pluralist) approaches to managing international conflict.



### **A Shift in the Global Balance of Power?**

An accelerated shift in global power structures is being witnessed, with the long-established dominance of the West in structures of power, trade and economy being challenged by the South and East. The US is experiencing an unprecedented decline in its economic power and the Eurozone is facing a debt crisis. The emergence of the BRICS bears this out. The G8 no longer calls the shots economically, but will not easily let go of their political preponderance. The big emerging markets are challenging established Western powers, and could in the near future do so in terms of politics as well. But to which extent does the G20 represent an alternative? To date the G20 has shown itself unable to effect a real shift in global economics, to a more equitable dispensation as is hoped for by BRICS, and has instead found itself preoccupied with a Western induced global financial crisis and Eurozone economic meltdown. Instead of replacing the G8 as the premier global economic forum, the G20 appears to have made it easier for the G8 to evade its international responsibilities and development obligations toward Africa and the South<sup>20</sup>. During 2000-2008 for example, Africa and the G8 negotiated no fewer than 120 partnership agreements, which focused on agreements in the areas of aid, trade, market access and debt relief, coupled with expectations that the G8 members would meet commitments in this regard. Africa in turn was expected to meet agreements in the areas of fighting corruption, creating conducive environments for investment, putting in place good governance measures, and taking the lead in conflict resolution and peace keeping. But since 2008, there has been a gradual waning of taking responsibility for these issues, and the responsibility was gradually shifted away from the G8 to the G20 and other forums<sup>21</sup>. While there has been much expectation that the BRICS countries will eventually supplant the G8, the reality is that the BRICS countries are struggling to find their political and economic *raison d'être* in world affairs, while the G20 has yet to show that it is the real epicenter of global economic decision-making. In April 2012, BRICS at the core of the G20 declined to link greater International Monetary Fund (IMF) voting rights – traditionally a key demand of the developing world – to their contributions to the IMF crisis fund. BRICS were also powerless to raise a united front against the appointment of another European, Christine Lagarde, as head of the IMF in 2011.

Indeed, there have been some significant shifts related to BRICS, as each member of the group becomes more strategic in its foreign policy calculations toward Western countries. The fanfare around BRICS is not just academic. World economics are moving eastwards in a decisive manner, and world politics could do so in the years to come. The global relevance of the G8 has been challenged, and the G20 is now seen as the most important multilateral economic body, and countries from the South are seeking more voice and representation. This shift signals a new trajectory for globalization that the rest of the world can no longer ignore.

Power shifts from the West to the East have already been met with renewed political and military assertiveness on the part of the West. Emerging economies do not always respond

to such developments with the necessary strategic co-ordination. Unless the emerging political groups organize in a more cohesive fashion, they will not assume the global power and influence that their new status warrants. Indeed, the emergence of BRICS presents both opportunities and risks in global politics. These need to be carefully evaluated and considered in various strategic planning contexts to achieve selected prioritized objectives. Beyond BRICS, other emerging powers are also asserting themselves, challenging the dominance of the West. These include Turkey, Indonesia, and Mexico, as well as Nigeria and Egypt. Indeed, the seven largest developing countries already have, collectively, a purchasing power of about 75% of that of the G7 industrialized nations (on a purchasing power parity basis). Many of the G8 countries are ambivalent about Russia's role in their midst, just as Russia is uncomfortable with its association with them. But Russia has in recent times earned its status as one of the world's biggest economies, and by 2012 was ranked the tenth largest economy in the world.

### **Ambiguous Strategies or Strategic Ambiguities?**

There are a number of uncertainties about emerging powers. The first is the level of responsibility they are prepared to assume to sustain global interdependence and an open world economy. Doing so will require a commitment to dealing with the crucial challenges of climate change and sustainability while pursuing growth and development strategies at the domestic level.

Second, the global political agenda of BRICS is not yet clear. It should be remembered that BRICS started off as an economic, not a political bloc. Here, there are important opportunities for South Africa to help craft a political agenda. For example, it needs to infuse within BRICS a strong multi-lateral governance purpose, that should focus on transforming the UN and its various agencies, especially the Security Council, as well as the World Bank, the IMF, the International Criminal Court, and of course the World Trade Organization (WTO). Indeed, there is urgent need to challenge the dominance of Western powers within multilateral institutions. The international institutional architecture as dominated by the West needs to be overhauled. BRICS should push for a revision of the global rules-based order.

Another uncertainty about BRICS is in relation to the extent to which they are willing and able to expand the possibilities for redressing economic imbalances between the more developed and less developed members of the global community. And, will the BRICS member countries adopt strategies to ensure that they lessen the imbalances amongst each other, thus avoiding accusations of acting as a new form of self-interested bloc?

A final issue is the extent to which BRICS will cohere, as Landsberg has noted elsewhere, "BRICS is not as cohesive a force as many make it out to be... The extent to which they would co-ordinate and harmonize policies and strategies closely is unclear".<sup>22</sup> BRICS share more differences than similarities and this represents a real challenge for the agency of the group.

### **South Africa, the Region and BRICS**

All BRICS enjoy some measure of pre-eminent status within their respective regions. However, they also face challenges within their regions. Just as there is a certain level of mistrust between some of the BRICS countries, within the component regions many states harbor skepticism and mistrust about the BRICS states. Indeed, the BRICS themselves compete for regional and global influence. And Western powers also want to exploit their relations with South Africa, Brazil and India to create counter-weights to Russia and China in particular. The membership of South Africa in particular, in light of its entry to BRICS as an African representative, needs to be examined in view of its position within its region, and the continent.

In Africa, several countries have questioned South Africa's claim to fairly represent the interests of African states within BRICS and the G20. Many African countries like Nigeria and Senegal also take umbrage at the fact that external powers look to South Africa as Africa's global representative. South Africa, however, has made no secret of its intentions to use the BRICS relationship to further the African agenda. Yet, the assumption that this will be possible is a large one.

South Africa, for now, is the largest economy in Africa. According to the World Bank, in 2011 South Africa's GDP stood at US\$ 408 billion. This was followed by Nigeria (US\$ 235 billion) and Egypt (US\$ 229 billion). South Africa's growth rate in 2011 was only 3,1%, however, compared to Nigeria's 6,6%. For its continuously imposing economic power, and for its progressive foreign policy statements and the country's key role in articulating an 'African Agenda' in the first decade of the twenty-first century, South Africa is often perceived as a leader on the continent. Arguably, this weighed heavily in favor of the country's inclusion in the BRIC, more so than any absolute indicators of strength or influence the country possesses. Yet, in contrast to the high profile that its inclusion brought South Africa, its membership has highlighted a number of tensions and incongruities that pose a dilemma for the country's foreign policymakers.

Not least is the danger that BRICS membership could harm South Africa's other foreign policy initiatives of longer standing. Observers have wondered aloud, for example, about the continuing necessity of India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) given South Africa's admission to BRICS. Appearing to confound this skepticism, however, IBSA seems to be finding new relevance in the context of BRICS including South Africa. While the likemindedness of India, Brazil and South Africa appears muted within BRICS, these large democracies of the developing world can be more candid about key issues, such as representative government and human rights on the IBSA platform.

In addition to the potential for friction in some key foreign policy areas, South Africa is the last to arrive in BRICS, and may therefore be seen as a 'rule-taker'. This, along with its questionable criteria for entry, appears to limit the space that South Africa has for initiative and leadership in BRICS. South Africa cannot compete with BRICS as originally formulated-- the top four emerging economies in the world--nor can it compete on the

basis of other hard power measures. However, South Africa can use the partnership to further its own foreign policy goals.

In South Africa's view, South-South cooperation is conceptualized through multilateralism and committed membership of structures such as the Non-Aligned Movement, the G77 plus China, and more recent groupings such as the IBSA Trilateral Dialogue Forum, the New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership (NAASP), the BASIC climate change coalition, consisting of Brazil, South Africa, India and China, and the G20 negotiating bloc in the WTO's Doha Round of talks.<sup>23</sup> More specifically, as noted recently in a statement by the Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, "South Africa's South-South cooperation strategy is anchored on the BRICS partnership mechanism with China, India, Brazil and Russia".<sup>24</sup> It is often ignored that South Africa's BRICS strategy is informed by explicit domestic calculations. According to an influential member of the Zuma foreign policy executive, "[South Africa's] membership of BRICS has three objectives: to boost job creation and the domestic economy; to support African infrastructure development and industrialization; and to partner with key players of the South on issues related to global governance and its reform".<sup>25</sup>

A key consequence of the addition of South Africa to the BRICS was the distinction between the democratic credentials of India and Brazil on one hand, and more centralized political systems in Russia and China on the other. This is a key dividing line within BRICS. However, the identity crisis holds a silver lining, as it presents an opportunity for BRICS to focus on an important dimension of their cooperation, namely, their outward posture and nature of their agency in international politics. The much-documented shifts in global economic power have not seen commensurate shifts in political power. This is an area of potential action for BRICS. And there is further potential to go beyond undermining Western hegemony, but also to fine-tune intra-BRICS relations.

A second dimension of South Africa's BRICS membership will be played out on the African continent. The centrality of Africa to the resource demands of BRICS creates a dilemma for South African foreign policy. South Africa is presented as the gateway to Africa including the idea of the continent being viewed as the 'new frontier' in world affairs. Yet, at the same time, South Africa's foreign policy principles predispose it toward working toward an African position in the face of growing foreign engagement. Before South Africa can assist in crafting a common African position, two questions need answering: Is there a common African position? And how common would South Africa's position be to that of its neighbors? In this context, then, South Africa holds a potential key within BRICS. South Africa has positioned itself, rhetorically at least, as a gateway to Africa. According to a government spokesperson, President Zuma departed for the 4<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit in New Delhi in March 2012 intending "to position South Africa as a global force representing emerging African economies in international platforms". The President was accompanied by a business delegation comprising representatives of more than 50 South African companies.<sup>26</sup> Complicating this stance is South Africa's uncertainty over

the conduct of its own private commercial interests in the continent. South Africa's role as a gateway should also be questioned in the light of what this role entails: facilitating economic engagement of external actors with the African continent. This could be problematic in two senses. First, by presenting itself as a gateway to Africa, South Africa potentially ushers in more intense competition over African resources, which may harm the interests of African countries, including South Africa. Second, South Africa's capabilities and resources, especially in the areas of technology, bureaucracy and skills, could seriously limit the country's ability to act as a gateway.

A significant problem linked to the idea of South Africa as a gateway is presented by the evermore well-defined limits of South Africa's influence in Africa: to which extent can the country act as a gateway when its leadership is uneasily accepted on the continent? The selection process of a Chair for the African Union Commission, for example, brought to the surface underlying tensions between South Africa and its African neighbors, leading to questions whether the securing of the post by former Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma was a 'pyrrhic victory'.<sup>27</sup> Nigeria's lack of support in particular, followed by some unfortunate consular incidents involving nationals of the two countries in March 2012, tested South Africa's regional diplomacy. This, along with the country's failure to present a strong showing in the UN debates over Resolution 1973 authorizing a no-fly zone over Libya, sowed questions over South Africa's ability to lead in Africa.

So how have the other BRICS partners responded to this? They are responding slowly. While there appears to be limited appreciation of South Africa's finite influence in Africa, and of its own future trajectory, this is balanced by an apparent conviction on the part of BRICs that South Africa possesses the infrastructure to be an ideal commercial launch pad into Africa. According to Games, South Africa's past advantages are rapidly being "outweighed by considerations of geography, language, culture – and the location of sought-after resources",<sup>28</sup> that are directing the new BRICs multinationals directly to their target countries, without the intermediary role of South Africa.

Historically, South Africa's ambitions of playing a leadership role on the African continent have stumbled at the hurdle of political will and institutional capacity. Owing to sensitivities within the governing party about South Africa exercising any hint of hegemony in Southern Africa, and after the Abacha debacle in the early 1990s, South African foreign policymakers have resisted the temptation to play a more assertive role in African politics. This makes the recent successful campaign to secure the Chairmanship of the African Union (AU) Commission for Dlamini Zuma, and not another suitable candidate from the region, all the more surprising.

## Conclusion

As we approach the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of BRICS, and the next BRICS summit to be hosted by South Africa, it is instructive to attempt to make sense of BRICS as an actor in the international system. The grouping has stated clear intentions to tie up the ends of growing

non-Western economic power with its power deficit in the international financial institutions and multilateral organizations such as the UN.

BRICS face an identity crisis. The divergent – at times clashing – national priorities of the member states possess the potential to hamstring the grouping in its international agency. Admittedly, it is a loose association with very low levels of institutionalization, and only the annual summit meetings to provide direction. Mainly, this has tended to take the form of stances on selected contentious issues in international affairs, such as the NATO intervention in Libya and the Iran nuclear issue and, more frequently and with greater effect, the global financial architecture.

Whether perceived as a countervailing economic grouping, or a powerful political alternative, there are enormous expectations that BRICS will play an important international role to help bring about greater equity among states, and a rules-based global order. Western states are not easily going to surrender power and influence to BRICS within the world order they have dominated for so long. BRICS will continue to assert themselves.

As South Africa approaches the rotating chairmanship of BRICS, it can make a meaningful contribution to expanding the influence of BRICS on world development, economic globalization, transformation of the UN and its agencies, the World Bank, the IMF and other multi-lateral institutions and promoting the path of peaceful development. As the sole African country in BRICS, as well as the G20, South Africa must utilize its position to strengthen the campaign for aid without encumbering strings, proper and unhindered access for African exports, investment in value-added manufacturing and a more just global trade regime. It is in the common interest of the BRICS countries to help craft and work for a developmental agenda aimed at improving the lives of people across the continent. Recent events in the Ivory Coast and Libya demonstrate that major powers in NATO are still determined to impose their own solutions, which amount to neo-colonial hegemony, on the African continent. Working in concert with the other BRICs, South Africa should endeavour to strengthen multilateral institutions to limit this.

By co-operating closely and coordinating their efforts effectively, BRICS member states can make substantial inroads into seriously challenging Western economic and political hegemony. It is therefore important that within BRICS they promote heightened exchange of information, sharing of knowledge and people to people contacts.

South Africa's addition to BRICS has complicated the grouping's identity even further. As another democracy, South Africa has the opportunity, with Brazil and India, to make a contribution to the crafting of a rules-based multilateralism, and beyond this, a more pro-development BRICS agenda. However, this will require South Africa to refine its own Africa-centered foreign policy. This would mean seeking African consensus on its multilateral positions, or factoring AU positions into the positions it holds in global committees. To capitalize on its BRICS membership, South Africa needs to adapt its own domestic and regional policies such that it *acts* as a gateway to Southern Africa, and is not merely assumed or reputed to be one.

## (Endnotes)

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