

OVERCOMING THE GLOBAL INTERREGNUM: CONSIDERATIONS FROM BRICS

KLAUS KOTZÉ

Ph.D. in Rhetoric Studies, University of Cape Town



GLOBAL RELATIONS FORUM YOUNG ACADEMICS PROGRAM POLICY PAPER SERIES No.13

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GLOBAL RELATIONS FORUM

Yapı Kredi Plaza D Blok Levent 34330

Istanbul, Turkey

T: +90 212 339 71 51 F: +90 212 339 61 04

www.gif.org.tr | info@gif.org.tr

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This paper, entitled “*Overcoming the Global Interregnum: Considerations from BRICS*” is authored by Klaus Kotzé as part of the GRF Young Academics Program Policy Paper Series.

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Ertuğrul Apakan

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Former President of GRF; Founding MD of İTÜ-ARI Science Park

Ziya Öniş

Professor of International Relations, Koç University

Selim Yenel

President of GRF; Ambassador (R)

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GLOBAL RELATIONS FORUM

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Klaus Kotzé is the A.W. Mellon-UCT Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Rhetoric at the Centre for Rhetoric Studies, Law Faculty, University of Cape Town. In 2019, he completed his Doctorate (BRICS: Strategies of Persuasion), where he employed rhetorical analysis to explore the official strategic communications of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) intergovernmental regime.

Klaus' research interests include global power relations; national and international strategy (strategies of persuasion); and emerging and extra-Western forms of international power and order. He regularly writes for South African newspapers and is featured on international political and strategic platforms, including Geopolitical Monitor, Global Risk Insights, and Modern Diplomacy.

Klaus holds a BA (Social Dynamics) from Stellenbosch University and a BSocSci Honours (Political Communication) from the University of Cape Town. In 2014 Klaus completed his MA (Global Studies), cum laude, at the Global and European Studies Institute, Leipzig University. For his MA, which explored China's charm offensive into the African mediasphere, he was awarded a European Commission (Erasmus Mundus) scholarship. Before commencing his Doctorate, Klaus was the Operations Officer at the FW de Klerk Foundation, a public advocacy advancing South Africa's Constitutional democracy and national accord.

Overcoming The Global Interregnum: Considerations From BRICS

Klaus Kotzé

Pb.D. in Rhetoric Studies, University of Cape Town

klaus.rsa@gmail.com

Abstract

The global order is caught in an interregnum. It remains unclear when this interval will end and what will succeed it. At a time when many international regimes are in disarray, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) international grouping is consolidating a strategic narrative; it presents a programmatic argument for understanding and emerging from the global crossroads. By rhetorically embodying select values and principles of the prevailing international order, BRICS advances a distinct case for reformed multilateralism; advocating for representative power for emerging states. This paper probes how BRICS members, as increasingly powerful developing states, affect global political realities through their projected perceptions and argumentation. It brings together these states' approaches to BRICS, revealing the messages with which they feed and consolidate the system. It introduces and describes BRICS as a rhetorical intergovernmental regime; a new method towards substantiating international relations. The findings of this paper identify BRICS' strategic positions, while listing a number of its limitations. These insights provide crucial understanding not only of the ongoing international situation, but also of possible future scenarios in international affairs.

“There is no reason to doubt that the economic potential of the new centres of global economic growth will inevitably be converted into political influence and will strengthen multipolarity... we would like to interact with responsible and independent partners with whom we could work together in constructing a fair and democratic world order that would ensure security and prosperity not only for a select few, but for all.” —Vladimir Putin¹

“These irreversible changes in the relationship of forces in the world necessitate the active, full and equal participation of the developing countries...” —United Nations²

1. Introduction

Interstate relations and global governance in the 21st century hold great significance for the entire world. Shifts in global power and concomitant changes in international strategy,³ as well as in the global strategic environment,⁴ ensure that the contemporary global condition can be perceived as an interregnum, an interval period between the concluding system of global relations (American hegemony) and that which is to come.⁵ In Gramsci's famous words, “the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born.”⁶ This global fluidity provides opportunities for powers to shape the emerging system to their liking; the interregnum returns the world to a precarious imbalance between forces. The increasing competition to shape the 21st-century global order sees the previously dominant West, anchored around the United States, seeking to maintain and expand its uneasy inertial grip over global governance, power and structure. On Gramsci's *new* side of the interregnum reside several increasingly powerful states seeking to claim corresponding influence of global decision making. These extra-Western states, for the purposes of this paper, are symbolized by the states constituting the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) informal, intergovernmental grouping.

BRICS, more than other constellations such as CIVETS (Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa) or MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey), present a compelling move for power. Its leaders meet yearly, it increasingly expands its activities and it has defined a coherent narrative via its yearly declarations. Furthermore, BRICS is a compelling case to perceive the global interregnum. BRICS states have benefited

¹ Putin, Vladimir. “Putin's Prepared Remarks at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy”. 2007. Accessed May 5, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html>

² United Nations. “Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order”. 1974. Accessed May 5, 2019. <http://www.un-documents.net/s6r3201.htm>

³ Strategy is understood as how (or the ways) power is applied (via means or resources) to achieve desired objectives (or ends). Values and norms underpin these ways, means and ends. Strategy is not reaction or management; it is the application of power towards controlling a space or environment. Yarger, Harry. “Toward a Theory of Strategy” in Bartholomees, Boone. *Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy*. Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College. 2006

⁴ The strategic “environment is the domain in which states and other leaderships interact, where interests are advanced; strategy is subordinate to the nature of the strategic environment”. Yarger, Harry. “Strategic Theory for the 21st Century: The Little Book on Big Strategy”. *Title 17, United States Code, Section 105*. 2006

⁵ Gramsci used the term “interregnum” to describe “the extraordinary situations in which the extant legal frame of social order loses its grip and can hold no longer, whereas a new frame, made to the measure of newly emerged conditions responsible for making the old frame useless, is still at the designing stage, has not yet been fully assembled, or is not strong enough to be put in its place.” Bauman, Zygmunt. “Times of interregnum”. *Ethics & Global Politics*, 5(1): 49-56 (2012)

⁶ Gramsci, Antonio. “Selections from the Prison Notebooks”, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 276

greatly⁷ from the present multilateral order. They have acted in an intergovernmental format to introduce new thinking and institutions, primarily the establishment of the New Development Bank,⁸ to maintain the current open system through reform. This goal of reform counteracts the breakdown of the system.⁹ While BRICS is no definitive or allied formation, its reality as a cohort of dissimilar states that are willing to cooperate is what lends it significance. Its engagements are a powerful demonstration of how non-Western states can work together to advance fair reform in the United Nations (UN) on ideological and legal grounds. BRICS' existential basis is to bridge the interregnum. It wants to move the international order away from Western dominance, along what it considers a just transition; to emerge into a new order that affords representative power to emerging states.

Emergence from the interregnum into a stable and peaceful order is not a given. One order does not simply follow another. Without effort and consensus, a global order is unlikely. Disorder or interregnum may well continue for a length of time. Furthermore, a direct exhibition of power and a commitment to global public costs are required. In the uncertainty that the interregnum brings, and given that BRICS states are not strategic allies, it is unlikely that these expenditures will be forthcoming from BRICS. While states achieve their interests through relative power, as exemplified by China's *Belt and Road Initiative*, it is unlikely that BRICS will take on global costs. Instead, BRICS performs indirectly, as a global lobby group. Given that it does not want to and cannot build a different international order, its efforts are to maintain and reform the current post-War system. It seeks to grow its influence while undermining the influence of others. BRICS' approach to overcoming the interregnum is to exemplify best practices, amicably cooperating among sovereign states. Through its actions, it seeks to persuade others to follow suit and claim their national wills and interests. In doing so, it engages in multilateralism among state entities, in a network. This model transcends hierarchy and subordination to a global hegemon. To BRICS, the emergence from the interregnum does not translate into a new version of hierarchical order. Instead, BRICS aspires to a global network where states are compelled to claim their sovereign interests among others while following a coherent set of principles and purposes.

The complexities of the interregnum ensure that little is known about what is to come. It is, therefore, significant to assess BRICS' strategic composition. It allows insight into the tactics that major developing states employ to secure their international interests. While BRICS is unlikely to represent a new order, its actions are significant, signalling possible outcomes. Its behaviour manifests a path from the present international order to that which is to come.

BRICS is a persuasive and, therefore, a rhetorical body. By bringing together the complex international interests of five divergent states,¹⁰ BRICS performs a singular voice. In cohering

⁷ BRICS' productivity has risen rapidly as its states have increasingly become enmeshed in the global economic landscape. The group's states have doubled their contribution to global GDP from 16% in the 1990s to 30% in the 2000s. If this rate continues, the combined GDP of BRICS will exceed that of the G7 in the foreseeable future. Mostafa, Golam and Mahmood, Monowar. "The rise of the BRICS and the challenge to the G7", *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, 10(1): 156-170 (2015)

⁸ The New Development Bank is BRICS' flagship catalyser of power. Launched in 2015, the Bank mobilizes resources for development projects in BRICS states and emerging economies

⁹ Kotzé, Klaus. "BRICS: Strategies of Persuasion". *Doctoral dissertation*, Centre for Rhetoric Studies, Private Law, University of Cape Town, 2018

¹⁰ BRICS is a thoroughly divergent grouping of states, as detailed by Laidi. Laidi, Zaki. "BRICS: Sovereignty, Power and Weakness." *International Politics*, 49(5): 532-614 (2012)

this narrative, it seeks to shape the international system and transcend the pervading interregnum; to advance global organizational reform, while averting revolution.¹¹ This goal lends to its form as an intergovernmental regime.¹²

The increasing power of extra-Western states will lead to the pursuit of broader interests, including greater representative authority in the international system. To achieve these ends, powerful states such as China and Russia may cooperate ad hoc. These actions should not be seen as fixed alliances, but as axes of convenience, set up to counter-balance Western hegemony. The ad hoc nature of strategic friendliness between BRICS states ensures that persuasion is its central tactic. To effectively influence the system, states must be perceived as powerful.

Despite their considerable presence and capacity, the perceptions and principles whereby BRICS states influence and shape global governance remain under-examined. Very little analysis has focused on what BRICS is, per se, and what it seeks to strategically achieve. It is centrally important that the strategies and tactics of extra-Western states be perceived and engaged with, as they will alter the command and practice of 21st-century international relations. The effect they have and the practical steps needed to accommodate them without creating tensions on the one hand and new hegemonies on the other are critically illustrative.

This paper probes how BRICS members, as increasingly powerful developing states, affect global political realities through their projected perceptions and argumentation. It brings together the approaches of these states in relation to BRICS, bringing to light which messages they feed and consolidate the system with. It introduces and describes BRICS as a rhetorical intergovernmental regime, a new method for substantiating international relations. Drawing primarily from my recently completed Doctoral dissertation,¹³ BRICS is examined for its perceptions and its strategic intent. A short account is presented of how BRICS articulates international multilateralism and thereby embodies and defines the international order. The paper then analytically compares the BRICS-related international presentations of member states vis-à-vis the strategic claims that BRICS makes in its yearly Summit Declarations. It assesses in this regard how member states conceive of contemporary issues pertaining to international relations and global order: multilateralism, global governance and norms. The paper explores how BRICS states territorialize the global strategic environment and investigates how established global governance may be actualized by alternative configurations of power.

To conclude, three conceptual policy considerations are drawn from BRICS. These considerations elaborate a condensed expression of BRICS' global strategy and its approach to realizing its preferred system of 21st-century global governance.

¹¹ Kotzé, 2018

¹² A regime vis-à-vis an alliance for collaboration in pursuit of shared interests

¹³ Ibid.

2. Analytical Approach

This paper compares the rhetorical claims of individual BRICS states to those made in BRICS' yearly Summit Declarations.¹⁴ It does so by analyzing member states' representations to the yearly United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The time scope is the time in which BRICS has existed in its current format, 2011 to the present.

The central function of states' submissions to the UNGA is to present support for normative order. State representatives take their turn to pledge their states' commitment to the UN's primacy as the legitimate global governance platform. In so doing, they epideictically¹⁵ praise the norms and values of the UN, thereby re-incorporating it rhetorically. Committing support is a persuasive device in a fluid international system. Articulating a version of affairs motivates meaning and persuades others of one's perception.

A rhetorical analysis, as the observation of the available means of persuasion,¹⁶ is grounded in argumentation. By exploring intentions and manifold effects, rhetorical analyses extend beyond the purview of discourse analyses, which assess language itself and not the agent behind the message. In rhetorical analyses the agent is significant and is shown to pursue certain effects. As BRICS functions to affect the structure and function of global order, this paper will examine how it and its member states form a coherent argument, and show how these arguments are mutually constructive and reinforcing. This paper will not, therefore, assess member states beyond their relation to and expression of BRICS.

3. BRICS: A Background

BRIC, which became BRICS with South Africa's inclusion in 2011, was formed in 2009 at its first formal Summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia. BRIC emerged from the shared perception among the four states that the configuration of global governance in the early 21st century does not match its actual power balance. BRIC was never simply the creation of Goldman Sachs.¹⁷ In fact its establishment was a formative step away from Western influence. In its first Summit Declaration, BRIC states that "emerging and developing economies must have greater voice and representation in international financial institutions."^{18,19} BRIC/BRICS emerged in part due to the failed attempt to incorporate the *Outreach Five* dialogue group (China, India, Mexico, Brazil and South Africa)²⁰ into an expanded G13. This expanded

¹⁴ As discovered and detailed in my Doctoral dissertation. *Ibid.*

¹⁵ The epideictic, according to Aristotle, is declamatory and demonstrative speech designed for rhetorical effect, such as condemning or eulogizing a cause, occasion or person. Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Epideictic Rhetoric". Accessed August 15, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/art/epideictic-oratory>

¹⁶ Aristotle (Kennedy, George). *On Rhetoric: A theory of Civil Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2007

¹⁷ While the acronym BRIC was coined in the Goldman Sachs 2001 paper "Build Better Global Economic BRICs", the formation, thinking and approach of BRIC runs directly against Goldman Sachs. The investment bank in its paper appealed to Western states to incorporate BRIC states into the Western-led international order. BRIC was in turn formed by member states who felt they were denied adequate international influence.

¹⁸ BRIC. "Joint Statement of the BRIC Countries' Leaders. Yekaterinburg". June 16, 2009. Accessed May 13, 2019. <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/090616-leaders.html>

¹⁹ As a basic and rudimentary indicator of relative change, the best-available comparative data from the World Bank shows each country's percentage of global GDP in 1980 (in parentheses) compared to 2017: Brazil (2,2%) 2,58%, Russia (no data) 1,98%; India (1,74%) 3,33%; China (1,79%) 15,38%; South Africa (0,78%) 0,44%. The Global Economy. "Percent of world GDP". 2019. Accessed August 15, 2019. https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/gdp_share

²⁰ The Outreach Five were invited by the G8 between 2007 and 2009, under the Heiligendamm Process, to take part in certain aspects of the G8's summit discussions.

grouping constituted an effective reform of the G8²¹ as the core of global power, to be more inclusive and representative of modern global power realities. Instead of a formative expansion, the G8 decided to broaden the mandate of the G20 in 2009, previously only an economic bloc. The decision to maintain an exclusive G8 formation confirmed the perception that the global elite opposes the reform of the existing power architecture. The bifurcation of the G8 and G20 opened space to broader articulations of power. It is into this space that BRICS was born. BRICS' formation presents a counter-balance to established power. Apart from the G20 incorporating all BRICS states, there is little sign of other entities or states challenging or balancing BRICS. This may be due to others seeing BRICS for what it is: a rhetorical body that aims to persuade. The more attention it is given, the more potential it has to persuade others.

While BRICS presents a new form, the ends of greater proportional power via international reform are not new. Platforms such as the G77 and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) also pursued effective and representative multilateralism. NAM's establishment to oppose the centripetal pull into the Cold War's spheres of influence gave form to the pro-independence *Declaration on the Promotion of World Peace and Cooperation*, adopted in the Final Communiqué of the 1955 Asian-African (Bandung) Conference. The Declaration advanced post-colonial interstate cooperation, where "all States should co-operate... (and)...all nations should have the right freely to choose their own political and economic systems and their own way of life, in conformity with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations."²² The Declaration concludes by listing ten enabling principles which advance independent and multilateral cooperation. These principles are taken from the UN Treaty 4307 between China and India, as well as the core norms of the UN Charter.

The goals of NAM and BRICS correspond. Their strategic means and ways, however, differ. NAM insisted upon an executive UN. It exacted action from the UN, but by incorporating its principles together with that of the UN, it weakened the UN's absolute authority. Through proposals such as the New International Economic Order (NIEO) and New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), it advocated for the UN to empower under-developed and under-represented states. NAM thereby sought for the UN, an essentially hands-off body, to be more hands on and to execute upon its wills.

BRICS is a state-centric body. For it states, not international organizations, are the central agents of international power.²³ BRICS declares the UN to be a diplomatic body and not an executive one. It sees the UN as functioning through its members' willingness to enact the principles and values espoused in the foundational treaty of global governance, the UN Charter. It sees the Charter as a global guiding mechanism. It is strategically subsumed under the purposes (article one) and principles (article two) of the Charter.²⁴ The purposes and principles of the UN Charter are the elemental and driving motivations through which the divergent group of BRICS states tactically and strategically operate.

²¹ Between 1997 and 2014, when it was suspended, Russia was included into the G7+1, or G8.

²² Bandung Conference. "Final Communiqué of the African-Asian Conference of Bandung". April 24, 1955. Accessed May 15, 2019. http://franke.uchicago.edu/Final_Communique_Bandung_1955.pdf

²³ Kotzé, 2018

²⁴ The UN is mandated by its member states to be a hub (Article 1.4) which "collectively maintains peace and security, preventing threats and suppressing aggressors (Article 1.1); to cooperate respectfully (Article 1.2); and jointly address international concerns (Article 1.3). Its structure is founded in the sovereign independence and equality of all members (Article 2.1); its engagements takes place openly, in good faith (Article 2.2); members deliberately share and cooperate, thereby opposing threat and force (Article 2.4)." Ibid., 46

BRICS' rhetoric (its declarations, media reports, political agreements, etc.) lobby for the multilateral system between states and for the observance of the norms and objectives stated in the UN Charter. The Charter requires members to enact, thereby legitimating, its norms. BRICS states' engagements incarnate the normative, legal order, which does not follow statements of fact, but the embodiments of valid norms.²⁵ BRICS rhetorically motions these claims to achieve its end of activating reform in the global strategic environment. This approach is tactically indirect. It is strategically imperative to be central, first in the production and then in the leadership of the strategic environment, performing and thereby qualifying the values and norms which underpin and guide this realm. Simply put, BRICS' claims both exhibit and shape contemporary multilateralism.

BRICS employs a form and operation similar to those of the G7: an informal forum, with no headquarters and no secretariat. It operates on a rotational presidency which displays and enforces equality. Equality is central to BRICS' argument.

The rotating presidency, or chairship, circumscribes power within each member state. It is not deployed to a supplementary body, such as a secretariat. This expression of equality where each state creates its own scenario on a yearly basis functionally displays its core persuasive appeal: cooperation among equal sovereigns. Leadership is shared through a rotating chairship. It allows for power to be differentiated, not pooled.

BRICS performs rhetorically as a summit institution. It is shaped by its summit diplomacy. This modality allows it to present its argument for cooperation among sovereign states. BRICS' summits are presented as shows of gravitas, exploiting the attention they receive to display the group's core principles and values. The national leaders bestow legitimacy and credibility to summits. The optics are carefully managed to showcase grandeur and decorum, trust and reciprocity. Each year's summit produces a 'family photo' of the leaders; usually they are presented holding hands, smiling for the world to see their friendship and unity. The function of the summit is to draw attention, to present BRICS as a formidable player in international affairs.

The commencement of the BRICS summits is in line with summitry as a core component of international relations in the mediatized era. The summit declaration is the central instrument of BRICS. It is compiled by the designated national representatives (or Sherpas) of the host nation roughly 8 weeks prior to the summit. The national leader hosts the summit. Meetings are steered by ministers and executed upon by working groups formulated at official gatherings. These working groups are administered by national functionaries from the various ministries. Their duty is to the state and not to BRICS. As such, BRICS is administered not by an external mechanism but by the various states themselves. Its exchanges are therefore exemplary, presenting and performing an equal, cooperative framework.

4. The BRICS Narrative

Through its documents, BRICS presents a singular, collective narrative. It rhetorically displays the territory upon which it executes its interests; the same territory which affords member states their authority. The following forms BRICS' argument for the composition and effect of a legitimate, democratic global order.

²⁵ Kelsen, Hans. *Pure Theory of Law*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1967

1) BRICS claims that global governance is a fluid, multilateral engagement between independent states. States execute their relevant capacities, establishing a balance of powers. In this way, there is no central global hegemony. According to BRICS the multilateral system allows for a system of multipolarity to emerge. Herein states must actively claim independence and respective power. More powerful states will pull others into their spheres of influence, performing a centralizing role in their region. States must, however, refrain from direct interference. The interdependence of multilateralism provides for multipolarity: “We share the view that the world is undergoing far-reaching, complex and profound changes, marked by the strengthening of multipolarity, economic globalization and increasing interdependence... The international community should join hands to strengthen cooperation for common development.”²⁶ To BRICS an open, interdependent order wherein states can compete to achieve their goals is in the interest of all parties.

Inversely, while BRICS states oppose hegemony, their balancing of power aims to produce regional hegemons capable of imposing its wills on smaller states.

2) The normative order under the UN, as laid out by its principles and purposes, takes precedence. It enjoys “universal membership and is at the center of global governance and multilateralism.”²⁷ Each BRICS summit declaration offers “strong commitment” to the UN to play a “central role” in multilateral diplomacy, international peace, and security. BRICS’ strategy is to embody and uphold the principles and purposes of the UN Charter, so to legitimize and maintain it.

While BRICS functions through its declarations and rhetoric in general, its contradicting actions prevent it from achieving greater effect. BRICS commitments to UN resolutions are often in word alone. For instance, BRICS declarations often advance the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It presents itself as a champion of the SDGs. Yet, BRICS states are poor implementers of the SDGs. All members fall outside the top 50 implementers of the SDGs.²⁸

3) BRICS argues that the structures of power in international governance should be reformed to be more democratic and representative of the power of developing states: “universally recognized norms of international law...should be strengthened, democracy in international relations should be promoted, and the voice of emerging and developing countries in international affairs should be enhanced.”²⁹ “Reforming these institutions’ governance structures requires first and foremost a substantial shift in voting power in favor of emerging market economies and developing countries to bring their participation in decision making in line with their relative weight in the world economy.”³⁰ Each declaration states (often verbatim): “We underline our support for a more democratic and just multi-polar world order based on the rule

²⁶ BRICS. “Sanya Declaration”. *BRICS Information Centre*. 2011. Accessed May 13, 2019. <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/110414-leaders.html>

²⁷ BRICS. “eThekweni Declaration”. *BRICS Information Centre*. 2013. Accessed May 13, 2019. <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/130327-Statement.html>

²⁸ Sachs, Jeffrey et al. “SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2017: Global Responsibilities”. Accessed on August 15, 2019. <http://www.sdgindex.org/assets/files/2017/2017-SDG-Index-and-Dashboards-Report--regions.pdf>

²⁹ BRICS. 2011

³⁰ BRICS. “2nd BRIC Summit of Heads of State and Government: Joint Statement”. *BRICS Information Centre*. Accessed May 13, 2019. <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/100415-leaders.html>

of international law, equality, mutual respect, cooperation, coordinated action and collective decision-making of all states.”³¹

While BRICS declarations regularly reiterate China and Russia’s support for India, Brazil and South Africa to play a greater role in the UN, China and Russia remain the only United Nations Security Council (UNSC) permanent members not to have endorsed the bid of either India or Brazil to be included into an expanded, permanent Council. These inconsistencies show BRICS’ reform agenda to be overwhelmingly rhetorical. There can be no real reform of the UN system without reform to the UNSC.

4) International cooperation is central to achieving mutually beneficial relations, stability and therefore effective global governance. Cooperation between sovereign states, vis-à-vis coercion or alliances, lies at the heart of BRICS’ persuasive, indirect challenge to hegemony. Cooperation is by far the most used word throughout BRICS’ documentation. In so doing, BRICS challenges the function and ambit of existing global governance without altering its structures.

5) BRICS advances intergovernmental cooperation to encourage independence and self-actualization. Sovereignty is emphasized as the capacity to network vis-à-vis the right for states to be left alone. Cooperation among states entails active, independent multilateralism while advancing the principles of common but differentiated responsibility. Herein states and their sovereigns are the legitimate centers of global power. BRICS counters the transference of power to external international organizations. Instead, it suggests an alternative modality by willing interaction in informal and flexible state-centric compacts which do not require much institutionalization to ensure independent interests and sovereignty.

6) BRICS advances global governance to attain influence for itself and its member states. Leadership is an active pursuit; it embodies a unified accord and therefore redefines legitimate organizational function from the inside. These actions do not advance national or BRICS goals. Instead they are presented as being in the interest of all peoples. BRICS’ assumption of leadership is often presented from a negative standpoint, illustrating a certain failure.³² By stressing the failures of other institutions and centers of leadership, BRICS simultaneously advances its own strategic message.

BRICS Declarations are rhetorical. They persuasively address and perform cooperative multilateralism. Its concentration on the UN makes the Assembly of states a targeted audience. BRICS Declarations, therefore, fulfil a similar function to that of UNGA proceedings delivered yearly by member states. It is standard for states to use this opportunity to commit to the principles and purposes of the UN, to take account of global governance and to charge it accordingly. These meetings imbue the Assembly with meaning and purpose. The following section assesses BRICS states’ UNGA statements vis-à-vis the points and issues that emanate from BRICS’ Declarations.

³¹ BRICS, 2009

³² Nearly every BRICS Declaration berates the International Monetary Fund’s unfulfilled reform. “We remain disappointed and seriously concerned with the current non-implementation of the 2010 International Monetary Fund (IMF) reforms, which negatively impacts on the IMF’s legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness”. BRICS. “Fortaleza Declaration”. BRICS Information Centre. Accessed 13 May, 2019. <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/140715-leaders.html>

5. BRICS States at the UNGA

5.1 Brazil

Brazil, as is the case with Russia and China, frequently presents BRICS' core issues in its UNGA statements; South Africa and India do so regularly, but comparatively less. Brazil commonly promotes the developing world, opposes protectionism, advances the implementation of international accords and furthers greater international cooperation.

It has a universalist and reform-driven approach to international relations, suggesting that at present a small group of countries bear too much power. As President Rousseff stated in her 2011 UNGA statement, "A new kind of cooperation, between emerging and developed countries, is a historical opportunity to redefine, with solidarity and responsibility, the commitments that govern international relations... The reform of multilateral financial institutions must proceed, with an increase in the participation of the emerging countries, who are chiefly responsible for growth in the global economy."³³ Among the institutions targeted for reform, a central feature of BRICS documents, are the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. To Brazil, "the delay in expansion of voting rights of developing countries was unacceptable."³⁴

Brazil's commitment to the UN is largely in addressing issues of representivity, effectiveness and legitimacy at the UNSC. To ameliorate this situation, it takes up a leading and active international position. It puts its name forward as a contender to take a permanent seat at an expanded UNSC. Through global governance and structural reform, Brazil actively seeks increased international agency for itself.

Brazil promotes multilateralism. Throughout its UNGA statements, it assumes a firm and commanding position on the necessity to advance multilateralism. It supports open markets and fair global conditions. In stressing the need for reform in multilateral institutions, it "appeal(s) in favor of a wide and vigorous convergence of political wills to sustain and reinvigorate the multilateral system, which has in the United Nations its main pillar."³⁵ In calling upon states to claim their independent interests, it claims its own. It drives forward new arenas of governance such as internet governance, thereby shaping new international structures. In so doing it seeks influence within a UN that is fluid and procedural; a system where power moves between various configurations and hubs.

In advancing multilateralism, Brazil also counters unilateralism and opposes isolationist forces,³⁶ hegemony and alliances of states that act beyond the UNSC, suggesting this is a breach of international law.³⁷ In rejection of protectionism, Brazil underscores the

³³ Rousseff, Dilma. "Statement by H.E. Dilma Rousseff, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil". September 21 2011. Accessed May 16, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/66/BR_en_0.pdf

³⁴ Rousseff, Dilma. "Statement by H.E. Dilma Rousseff, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil". September 24 2014. Accessed May 16, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/69/69_BR_EN.pdf

³⁵ Rousseff, Dilma. "Statement by H.E. Dilma Rousseff, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil". September 24 2013. Accessed May 16, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/68/BR_en.pdf

³⁶ "It is with openness and integration that we approach a better future for all. Isolation may provide a false sense of security. Protectionism may sound seductive. But it is with openness and integration that we achieve harmony, growth and progress". Temer, Michel. "Statement by H.E. Mr. Michel Temer, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil". September 25, 2018. Accessed August 15, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/73/br_en.pdf

³⁷ "We cannot allow this Council to be replaced – as has been happening – by coalitions that are formed without its consent, beyond its control and without due regard for international law". Rousseff, Dilma. "Statement by H.E. Dilma Rousseff, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil". September 25, 2012. Accessed May 16, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/67/BR_en.pdf

centrality of sovereignty as the only way in which international relations can proceed. It expresses its independent power and steers others towards doing the same. One way in which Brazil asserts its own position is seeking permanent UNSC membership.³⁸

5.2 Russia

Russia's message in its UNGA statements has been a commanding one. It presents the international community as being on the back foot. In need of a "combination of efforts to respond to the common challenges, and clear guidelines to strengthen the mechanisms of global governance."³⁹ Russia asserts that the UN, defined by its principles and purposes, should remain the foundation of international relations. The workings and dynamics regarding state relations should change so to accord with the international situation of the day; states should determine their own capacity, determine and pursue their interests independently, within the ambit of international law. Russia engages BRICS to pursue such a broader, evolved approach. As such, BRICS is presented by Russia in a specific way: it is the only state which assigns specific meaning to BRICS⁴⁰ and which mentions BRICS in every UNGA speech. Through an independent stance, it drives the international audience's perception of BRICS.

Russia frames BRICS in terms of a conversation about opposing unilateralism. It maintains that global relations consist of national (sovereign) realities; it always speaks of states as the centers of power. Instead of antagonizing difference and seeking likeness, it presents itself as "open to joint work with all those who show reciprocal readiness to cooperate on the basis of equality"⁴¹ among states as the means of (democratic) international affairs. Sovereignty is central to Russia's strategy, it functions as strategic means, ways and ends. Cooperation with Russia is a way to network sovereignty, transcending the right to be left alone, emphasizing capacity and the need to unite against global hegemony and unilateralism. Sovereignty involves two-way reinforcement. First, it requires legitimate authority over the domestic, as determined by the state and its citizens. Second, it requires recognition from the international arena that a state constitutes a legitimate, equal member of the collective. Being in possession of both provides the right of a state to decide its own socio-political reality (non-interference) and to engage among other equals in an open collective (cooperation).

Russia affirms these UN norms by characteristically claiming its independence, imploring others to do the same and thereby weakening the grip of the perceived hegemonic centralization of global power. It directly antagonizes Western power in global relations.⁴²

³⁸ "The world needs a Security Council that reflects contemporary realities; a Council that brings in new permanent and non-permanent members, especially developing countries. Brazil is ready to shoulder its responsibilities as a permanent member of the Council". Rousseff, Dilma. "Statement by H.E. Dilma Rousseff, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil". September 21, 2011. Accessed August 15, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/66/BR_en_0.pdf

³⁹ Lavrov, Sergey. "Statement by H.E. Mr. Sergey V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation". September 28, 2012. Accessed May 16, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/67/RU_en.pdf

⁴⁰ "BRICS does not aim at confrontation with anyone, its goal is to enhance productive multilateral collaboration to address the urgent problems of the contemporary world". Lavrov, Sergey. "Statement by H.E. Mr. Sergey V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation". September 27, 2011. Accessed May 16, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/66/RU_en_0.pdf

⁴¹ Lavrov, Sergey. "Statement by H.E. Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation". September 21, 2017. Accessed August 15, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/72/ru_en.pdf

⁴² "The US-led western alliance that portrays itself as a champion of democracy, rule of law and human rights within individual countries, acts from directly opposite positions in the international arena, rejecting the democratic principle of sovereign equality of states enshrined the UN Charter and trying to decide for everyone what is good or evil". Lavrov, Sergey. "Statement by H.E. Mr. Sergey V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation". September 28, 2014. Accessed May 16, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/69/RU_en.pdf

Its actions seek to diminish the power of the West, to motivate reform and achieve an open strategic environment for it to express its will. Russia proposes that “the policy ultimatums and philosophy of supremacy and domination do not meet the requirements of the 21st century and run counter the objective process of development of a polycentric and democratic world order.”⁴³ Russia, as is the case with China, does not stress reform so much as say that the existing principles and purposes of the international system need to be activated in earnest.

5.3 India

India takes a careful yet firm position at the UNGA. It affirms the UN by pointing out global failures, primarily the failures of global economics and concomitantly the failures to advance developing states. India speaks in general terms, avoiding attributing blame or praise to other nations and thereby grouping them into blocs. It broadly commits itself to issues that affect the global community at large.⁴⁴ As is the case among all other BRICS states, India’s addresses to the Assembly are used to show how its actions confront certain core issues of the UN; it takes responsibility for shared resolutions.

The issues that India raises are general to the international community. It addresses the Assembly as one, raising common issues, such as gender equality and youth development. These are issues that require collaboration and partnership. By stressing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and SDGs, it indirectly calls upon all states to assume their individual and collective responsibilities. India’s UNGA story is, therefore, akin to BRICS’ core tenet: the UN is the legitimate global governance mechanism.

“At a time when the world is facing multiple challenges, there is renewed attention on the role of the United Nations in advancing international peace, security and prosperity... Nearly seven decades of the work of the United Nations hold one simple lesson and that is this: we are most successful when we adhere to the letter and spirit of the United Nations Charter, basing our decisions on the widest possible consent and balancing equitably the needs and responsibilities of nations at different stages of development. In these seven decades, the world has changed in fundamental ways. Asia and Africa are independent and resurgent. Countries are now not only more interdependent but also face new and increasingly complex challenges. For multilateralism to remain relevant and effective in the future, multilateral institutions need to be reformed.”⁴⁵

To ensure open and mutually beneficial cooperation, India proposes that the UN be reformed in order to align with modern international realities.⁴⁶ Accordingly, it must become “more democratic and participative. Institutions that reflect the imperatives of 20th century won’t be effective in the 21st. It would face the risk of irrelevance; and we

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ For example: “India remains committed to addressing climate change”. Krishna, S.M. “Statement by His Excellency Mr. S.M. Krishna, Minister of External Affairs of India”. October 1, 2012. Accessed May 15, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/67/IN_en.pdf

⁴⁵ Singh, Manmohan. “Statement by H.E. Dr. Manmohan Singh”. September 28, 2013. Accessed 15 May, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/68/IN_en.pdf

⁴⁶ “Reform cannot be cosmetic. We need change the institution’s head and heart to make both compatible to contemporary reality”. Swaraj, Sushma. “General Debate of the 73rd United Nations General Assembly”. September 29, 2018. Accessed May 15, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/73/in_en.pdf

will face the risk of continuing turbulence with no one capable of addressing it.”⁴⁷

According to India, developing countries must be set free and enabled. While domination from the wealthy continues, the poor remain unable to access the power conferred by their nominal independence. States are impeded by hegemony and power blocs that create zero-sum games, where the poor, unable to claim domestic or international responsibility, remain on the losing side.⁴⁸ It is through shared but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities that India seeks to confront international crises such as climate change and terrorism.

Whereas other BRICS states address democracy among sovereign states, India commends states around the world for (domestically) adopting democracy domestically. This approach distinguishes India as an outlier among the BRICS, thereby contradicting the core BRICS message which avoids commenting on individual systems by focusing on relationships among states. India thereby comes across as a beacon for the trend of democracy. While doing so, India critiques power blocs and the zero-sum game that such alliances lead to. In this way, India’s approach to cooperation vis-à-vis competition is closely related to that of BRICS. India suggests that states should assume their responsibility to collaborate as state-nodes in an open manner.

5.4 China

Of all the states, China’s overall message to the UNGA is the closest to that of BRICS. Besides insisting upon reform, China annually details the central legitimacy of the UN and upholds the existing measures of the Charter as suitable for guiding states’ interactions. It does not impose new matters, but rather invokes the Charter to be affected, developing a new method of international relations. Though reform is mentioned, it is not the structure or system of international relations that should change; instead, the processes and engagements among members are said to be reformed. The world would not require reform to make states equal and independent. They already are.⁴⁹ As such, China does not explicitly suggest what should change, but instead what should be put into motion. It is upon the foundation of equality that all states should respect each other’s independence, interests and preferences in governance. This, as is underscored by Russia and the BRICS, is the promotion of greater cooperation in international relations. China invokes states to activate their sovereign positions, to claim their own truths and contribute to a new system of international relations. China uses BRICS as an example of where it makes a tangible contribution to such new models of exchange: “efforts of emerging markets

⁴⁷ Modi, Narendra. “Statement by H.E. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India”. September 27, 2014. Accessed May 16, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/69/IN_en.pdf

⁴⁸ “Today, we still operate in various Gs with different numbers... On the one side, we say that our destinies are inter-linked, on the other hand we still think in terms of zero sum game. If the other benefits, I stand to lose. It is easy to be cynical and say nothing will change; but if we do that, we run the risk of shirking our responsibilities and we put our collective future in danger”. Ibid.

⁴⁹ “We should renew our commitment to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, build a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation, and create a community of shared future for mankind. To achieve this goal, we need to make the following efforts: We should build partnerships in which countries treat each other as equals, engage in mutual consultation and show mutual understanding. The principle of sovereign equality underpins the UN Charter. The future of the world must be shaped by all countries. All countries are equals. The big, strong and rich should not bully the small, weak and poor”. Jinping, Xi. “Working Together to Forge A New Partnership of Win-Win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind”. Statement by H.E. Xi Jinping”. September 28, 2015. Accessed May 16, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/70/70_ZH_en.pdf

represented by BRICS countries explore a new model of global cooperation.”⁵⁰

To China, the actuality of the UN means that states are connected and interdependent. They should, therefore, adopt a common responsibility for improved global relations. The failure or success of one state ensures the failure or success of all states. States are, therefore, seen as inalienable to each other, cooperation and “win-win” relations ensuring benefit for all.⁵¹ “we should pursue common progress by embracing diversity of civilizations.”⁵² China presents its success as a success for the world as well. This indirectly brings the interests and destinies of other states into the ambit of China. While China may verbally oppose hegemony, its growth and power will influence the independence of others. To avoid these effects being perceived negatively, China positions itself as a legitimate member, among equals. To avoid the responsibilities of developed states, it maintains that it too is a state undergoing development.

As a constituting member of the Assembly, China does not seek for power to be given to it, but instead claims the agency that comes with its membership.⁵³ China’s message to the UNGA has remained constant over the years. This reflects its independent foreign policy, which has been in place for much longer than the existence of BRICS.

5.5 South Africa

South Africa is the latest entrant into the BRICS group. It is also the youngest, smallest and weakest member state. Its presentations at the UNGA are less expressive and more indirect. On the UN’s legitimacy and its requisite reform, South Africa advances BRICS’ postures and language.⁵⁴ While South Africa supports the centrality of UN principles and purposes and affirms it as the foremost international multilateral forum, it does not, in the manner of other BRICS states, demonstrate these principles through its own actions and rhetorical motions. Furthermore, unlike other BRICS states, South Africa’s presentations to the Assembly are often not made as only representing itself, but as representing the African continent and the African Union. This indirect approach uses Africa’s lack of representivity and wealth to amplify the voice of change and press for greater gain. While it comprehensively seeks greater agency for Africa,⁵⁵ achieving gains for Africa would

⁵⁰ Jiechi, Yang. “Work Together to Achieve Common Security and Development”. Statement by H.E. Yang Jiechi, Minister of Foreign Affairs. September 27, 2012. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/67/CN_en.pdf

⁵¹ “We should pursue mutually beneficial cooperation. A country should align its own interests with those of others and work to expand areas where their interests converge”. Yi, Wang. “Jointly Pursue Peace and Development and Uphold Rule of Law and Justice”. Statement by H.E. Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs”. September 27, 2014. Accessed May 16 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/69/CN_en.pdf

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ “We will be fully and more actively engaged in international affairs and work closely with other countries to meet complex global challenges and tackle difficult issues facing mankind. We will voice China's views, offer China's wisdom, propose China's solutions, play China's due role and provide more public goods to the international community”. Yi, Wang. “China at a New Starting Point”. Statement by H.E. Mr. Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs”. September 27, 2013. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/68/CN_en.pdf

⁵⁴ “Institutions like the United Nations, World Bank, IMF and the WTO need to be reshaped and enhanced so that they may more effectively meet the challenges of the contemporary world and better serve the interests of the poor and marginalised. Reform of the United Nations, and particularly its Security Council, is a priority if we are to give full effect to the values and principles enshrined in the UN Charter”. Ramaphosa, Cyril. “Statement by H.E. Mr Cyril Ramaphosa”. September 25, 2018. Accessed May 18, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/73/za_en.pdf

⁵⁵ “It remains un-representative and undemocratic in both its composition and decision making. We would like to see a more meaningful representation of Africa in the UN Security Council”. Zuma, Jacob. “Statement by H.E. Mr Jacob Zuma”. September 25, 2012. Accessed May 18, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/67/67_ZA_en.pdf

also incur gains of its own. Voicing the interest of Africa, South Africa performs a function central to BRICS. It voices the claim of a group bigger than itself. It therefore speaks for an entity broader than itself,⁵⁶ allowing it to claim agency while avoiding taking responsibility. Although separate from BRICS, this approach is also how BRICS functions.

In presenting the continent, South Africa also seeks to influence those it purports to represent. It does so to be regarded as a leader by others. In steering the case for Africa, South Africa furthers action against poverty, inequality and underdevelopment.⁵⁷ This action, it insists, must come from the developed world. South Africa regularly repeats UN resolution 2626 from 1970, which urges economically advanced states to commit 0.7% of their gross national product to assist the development of poorer states. South Africa's message at the UNGA is, therefore, that the international community has failed to cooperatively foster Africa's development. Hence, it needs a new, remodelled approach to meet the targets of agreements such as the SDGs, which states have already consented to.

To South Africa, the UN is an arena of both influence and accomplishment. It regularly refers to the effective role the UN played in ending Apartheid. By pointing to this positive outcome, it invokes collective determination for effective reform. The UN's real power lies in multilaterally putting into effect its principles and purposes. It is by supporting the implementation of agreements such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change that South Africa applies BRICS' directive to cooperate in progressive ways to achieve goals.⁵⁸ The emphasis here is on cooperation as a purely rhetorical gesture.

6. Policy Considerations: Drawn from BRICS

The exploration of BRICS' Declarations and BRICS members' statements at the UNGA raises central concerns regarding contemporary global governance. There is collective unease surrounding the interregnum in the global order and there is real danger in maintaining the inertia of the interregnum. States are increasingly agitated by the perception that the system works neither in general nor in their favour. This precedent is dangerous. When states start breaking the rules, the global governance system is in danger of collapsing. The overlapping interests among a disparate group of states, such as BRICS, point to indicators which the global community and individual states should take note of as a new epoch of global relations dawns.

According to BRICS, states should individually and in concert reinforce a networked, multilateral order. Agreement between BRICS and national considerations, as discussed here, provides insight into the considerations that BRICS is introducing into the international strategic equation. To BRICS, these considerations will advance peace, stability and equitable reform. The following policy considerations are those of BRICS.

⁵⁶ "It is through collective efforts, cooperation between the AU and the UN that solutions towards peace and stability can be found." Zuma, Jacob. "Statement by H.E. Mr Jacob Zuma". September 20, 2016. Accessed May 18, 2019. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/71/71_ZA_en.pdf

⁵⁷ "We committed ourselves to an ambitious and transformative global development program that seeks to address the triple challenge of this century, which is Poverty, Unemployment and Inequality ... (advancing) programmes and policies aimed at poverty eradication and in addressing socioeconomic development particularly in Africa". Ibid.

⁵⁸ "It is within our hands, as the leaders assembled here today, to forge a more representative, equal and fair United Nations that is empowered and equipped to lead the struggle to end poverty, unemployment and inequality in the world". Ramaphosa, 2018

6.1 The UN Must Claim Its Power

To transcend the interregnum, the center of global governance must hold and be reinforced. The UN forms the core of this judicious multilateral arrangement. Through its uniqueness, the UN remains the authoritative terrain upon which the global political balance rests. Its autonomy must be entrenched, and its functions empowered so as to maintain its legitimacy. The UN must be more vocal through its various programs, affirming its centrality and opposing unilateralism, hegemony and all actions which contradict its principles and purposes.

The UN, which has existed mainly as a mediator among parties, has been strong on weak states and weak on the strong. As such, it has made an example of rogue small states, while allowing powerful entities to settle their business amongst themselves. With the rise of new emerging powers and the decline of the old, the UN must take a creative and authoritative position, especially regarding relations between big powers. The UN must demand greater primacy, ensuring that it remains the forum where global order is constituted in word and deed.

Instead of remaining on the sidelines, it must take an active position to call out and hold to account individual states which act out of line. In asserting its authority in a just and equitable way, the UN can have a direct impact to ensure cooperation over coercion. In taking a firm position, it will show that the Assembly will not be held to ransom by any individual state or group of states. Another direct action the UN can take is to reconsider states' proclivity for vetoes. Such reform will directly address matters of representivity and empowerment while bringing the UN into accordance with the modern international reality, where there are many states willing and able to express their wills.

6.2 States Must Empower the UN by Empowering Themselves

The UN framework is constituted and mandated by member states; it can only be realized through cooperation. States are the centers of power. To ensure normative equality and judicious international relations, states should recognize and engage each other accordingly. It is incumbent upon states to strategically declare the principles and purposes of the Charter, thereby insisting that all states are afforded their respective dues. In so doing, effective governance, equality and multilateralism are advanced and committed to in practice.

While many states use their yearly UNGA statement to do this, it is imperative that states go beyond merely speaking the UN's language in its Assembly. Instead, states must be encouraged, in statements by UN bodies and by other member states, to incorporate these values in their sovereign considerations. States should commit to and be held accountable to the values and norms of the UN. As such, states should in every practicality express these values and norms, as only in doing so will they avoid duplicity and ensure agreement on the UN's foundational significance as a shared authoritative code beyond which no exception should be allowed.

When states accentuate the primacy of these values and norms in their relations with other states, they openly recognize each other while appealing for recognition in return. When states are pressured to behave in these specific ways, they claim their sovereignty and exact their power as provided in the Charter. They also hold each other to account, as the UN's norms stipulate a clear program where no state is above another. Reform, therefore, is initiated by the states, for the states. This judicious approach employs the authoritative territory afforded by the UN to practise multilateralism and avoid hegemony.

6.3 States Must Empower Themselves by Claiming Their Independence

As the centers of global power, states must be legitimately constituted and appropriately governed. To ensure legitimacy and stability, appropriate governance should be decided upon, in accordance with the UN Charter, only by the people of each state. In determining their system, the people proclaim their sovereignty. States empower themselves by developing a sovereign identity and expressing a self-determined strategy. States do not receive their sovereignty from other states or from bodies such as the UN. Sovereignty must be domestically claimed and internationally expressed in networked cooperation. In so doing, each separate state legitimates itself as one center of power among other centers of power. All states should return to and employ the core principles of the UN Charter in order to define themselves and their relations with others. In this manner, they will exercise multilateralism and reject hegemony and unilateralism; their expression and command of independence forms the most potent defense against domination. To claim independent power and legitimacy, states must exact and execute these principles and norms.

The UN should, as a matter of practicality, portray a clear, contemporary projection of how this is to be done. It should, in determined, practical ways, support and consult on the exercise of multilateral norms, without impeding the sovereign project of each state. By practically capacitating the UN, recognizing others' legitimate rights and claiming their own, states effectively embody and perform legitimate global governance.

7. BRICS' limitations

Understanding BRICS' positions and strategy allow for greater insight into what remains a largely misperceived body. While these insights are valuable, they overlook real and potential pitfalls, such as those circumstances where sovereignty is not supported by BRICS (e.g., Taiwan) and BRICS' disproportionate benefit from the current system and proposed reforms. Nor do they detail opportunistic and contradictory actions by BRICS states themselves. Fundamental to any consideration of a global order is the need to pay for global public goods and costs. These public goods are the stuff of order and relate to economic and social resources that are supplied by global powers to aid the global public. While BRICS talks about effective multilateralism, its inaction, reluctance and inability to take on global costs remains a central limitation to its intentions. Its considerations regarding these public costs will be integral to its influence and the achievement of its goals.

BRICS has no foundational treaty of its own. It exists as an agreement of convenience and its existence remains unclear. BRICS' fluidity makes it difficult to assess and its future difficult to predict. Nevertheless, its message has been very stable and repetitive from its inception. Instead of exerting efforts to directly implement the global changes it seeks, it presses for global restructuring. While its goals are broad and should best be considered over a longer period, its rhetorical achievement in its decade of existence has been an attempt at best. BRICS' presence in and effect on global discourse, its global influence and its opposition to hegemony have not been significant. Neither in BRICS states nor globally has it become a meaningful player. This account is anecdotal and is based on personal reading over the last five years.

BRICS' failure is partially due to its own paradoxical existence: it is an alignment, not alliance; it calls for action, but cannot act; it calls for empowerment of the UN, while individually bypassing it; it is an organization that opposes organisational power, etc.

While BRICS' message is compelling and its members are powerful entities, its indirect approach leaves it handicapped. As long as the UN remains unreformed, BRICS has no driving interest to empower it – as BRICS states will remain comparatively weak. Therefore, instead of empowering the UN, it is left to lament the UN's not being reformed. BRICS states, as constituent parts of the greater international interregnum, remain confined to the stasis caused by it. Effectively, to achieve its ends, BRICS requires others to regard it as significant, affording it influence. This has not been forthcoming.

BRICS is, however, not the only strategic vehicle that member states use to pursue their international ends. China and Russia, in particular, use a number of strategic vehicles to advance regional and global interests. BRICS offers a prime opportunity for democratic India, Brazil and South Africa (which before BRICS met as IBSA) to develop forms of extra-Western, post-liberal internationalism. They are given the opportunity to exert influence, promote their way of thinking and introduce into the global domain a reformed internationalism unconstrained by Western failures. These contributions, however, do not appear forthcoming, as India carefully takes a middle-ground position in global affairs while Brazil and South Africa remain pre-occupied by internal politics.

BRICS' future remains unclear. It functions as an extension of members' strategic means and ways, and its survival is not ensured. Whether BRICS can function as a counterpart to Western power also appears inconclusive. This is largely due to the modest interest it draws internationally. The global fracture taking place under the guise of strategic retreat from Western powers, rising nationalism and new forms of non-traditional power further complicate the cooperation between these non-allies. On the other hand, the enduring support that members afford BRICS is telling. All heads of state have attended every summit. This signals the strategic importance the platform holds. BRICS' success has been its creativity and a disposition to share and cooperate. It has consistently endeavoured to propose answers to multilateralism's failures.

8. Conclusion

While it is clearly limited and lacks the resolve to directly achieve its goals, BRICS' strategic approach to overcoming the interregnum provides crucial insight into perceiving global political realities. The group's indirect approach to change results globally in a blurred and weak perception of its organizational purpose. Its incoherence and unusual structure force BRICS into the background of geopolitical rhetoric. As such, BRICS' primary mode of power, or simply its lack thereof, prevents it from explicitly achieving its ends. Furthermore, by focusing on and reiterating known facts, that the UN is authoritative and that states must constitute the units of global power, BRICS contributes to the stasis in the global order. BRICS does this in order to protect the sizeable gains its members have made in the very system it criticizes.

Then again, BRICS' lofty goals are not its own but that of its members. Herein, and through its agreements, cooperation and general operation, whether tacit or real, it moves towards overcoming the interregnum and emergence into something new. BRICS endeavours to do what no emerging or aspirational state is willing or able to do without explicitly standing outside the normative legal order. It shows that the global arrangement is skewed: it details the persistent inequalities in global power. It highlights how another reality is possible: its actions are cooperative and mutually beneficial without constituting an alliance. And critically, it shows what an alternative, post-interregnum world would look like: through BRICS, emerging states claim and, albeit slowly, enact power structures such as the New Development Bank that previously were strictly the domain of the West. Regardless of its failures, in simply drawing attention to the inconsistencies and vulnerabilities of global power, to the reality of the interregnum, BRICS serves as a potent and catalysing example for the international community.

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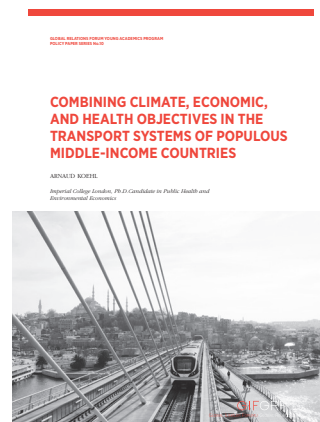
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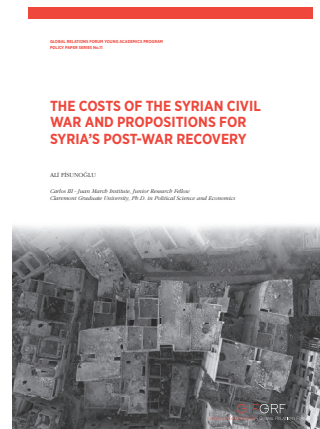
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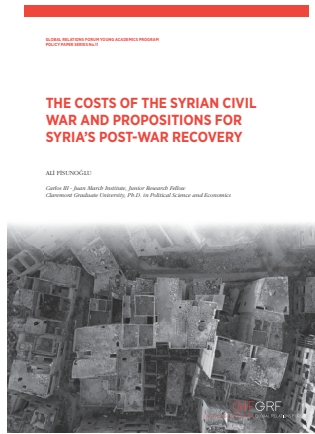
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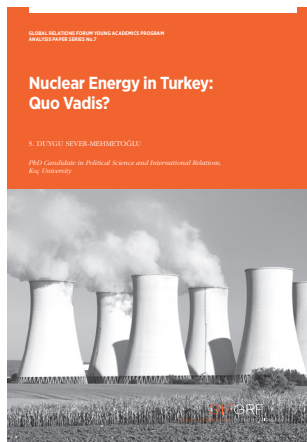


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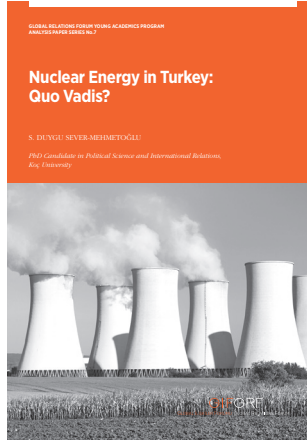


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Klaus Kotzé is the A.W. Mellon-UCT Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Rhetoric at the Centre for Rhetoric Studies, Law Faculty, University of Cape Town. In 2019, he completed his Doctorate (BRICS: Strategies of Persuasion), where he employed rhetorical analysis to explore the official strategic communications of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) intergovernmental regime.

Klaus' research interests include global power relations; national and international strategy (strategies of persuasion); and emerging and extra-Western forms of international power and order. He regularly writes for South African newspapers and is featured on international political and strategic platforms, including Geopolitical Monitor, Global Risk Insights, and Modern Diplomacy.

Klaus holds a BA (Social Dynamics) from Stellenbosch University and a BSocSci Honours (Political Communication) from the University of Cape Town. In 2014 Klaus completed his MA (Global Studies), cum laude, at the Global and European Studies Institute, Leipzig University. For his MA, which explored China's charm offensive into the African mediasphere, he was awarded a European Commission (Erasmus Mundus) scholarship. Before commencing his Doctorate, Klaus was the Operations Officer at the FW de Klerk Foundation, a public advocacy advancing South Africa's Constitutional democracy and national accord.