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South Africa's BRICS membership: A win-win situation?

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After significant diplomatic efforts, South Africa's inclusion into the BRICS grouping in 2011 can be regarded as one of South Africa's principal foreign policy achievements over the past years. It also fundamentally altered the nature of the BRICS group, giving it a more global structure. Yet little is known about why South Africa sought BRICS membership, why it was chosen over larger economies (e.g. Indonesia) or faster-growing countries (e.g. Nigeria), and how this altered South Africa's insertion into the international system. This article details the deliberations about South Africa's inclusion into the BRICS and its premiere as a BRICS member at the 3rd BRICS Leaders' Summit in Sanya in 2011, which symbolized an important step towards the institutionalization of the BRICS grouping. It argues that Brazil's, China's and India's previous interaction with South Africa, for example in the context of the BASIC and IBSA groupings, contributed to generating trust between large emerging powers and South Africa. South Africa was therefore a far more natural choice and involved fewer risks of reducing the group's capacity to develop joint positions in multilateral fora. While both the BRICS grouping and South Africa significantly benefitted from the inclusion, it also made South Africa's foreign policy challenges more complex, as it increasingly has to balance its emerging power commitments with its role as representative of Africa's poorer nations and that of regional leader.

Key words: South Africa, emerging powers, BRICS, IBSA, BASIC, Sanya.

INTRODUCTION

On April 14, 2011, the 3rd BRICS Summit began in China's southern resort city of Sanya. After two successful summits in Yekaterinburg in 2009 and Brasília in 2010, this third summit in China marked the definitive establishment of the BRICS grouping as an important part of South-South Cooperation. Most importantly, however, for the first time South Africa participated as the fifth member of the group, whose name thus officially changed from 'BRIC' to 'BRICS'. By inviting a country that the creator of the term, Jim O'Neill, had not initially included, and whose inclusion he severely criticized (Hervieu, 2011), policy makers in emerging powers assumed ownership of the grouping (Stuenkel, 2012). The BRICS were now primarily a political construct, no longer a mere investment category devised by an economist at Goldman Sachs. This process can be seen, along with the creation of the G20 in the same year, as the most significant innovation in global governance in almost two decades.

After significant diplomatic efforts, South Africa's inclusion into the BRICS grouping in late 2010, several months prior to the 3rd Summit, can be regarded as one of South Africa's principal foreign policy achievements over the past years. It also fundamentally altered the nature of the BRICS group and gave it a more global structure. Yet little is known about why South Africa

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sought BRICS membership, why it was chosen over larger economies (e.g. Indonesia) or faster-growing countries (e.g. Nigeria) (Mittleman, 2013: 32), and how this altered South Africa's insertion into the international system. Was the BRICs' decision to invite Africa's leading economy based on South Africa's strategic location? Or was it guided by the expectation that South Africa's inclusion would provide the group with greater visibility, while Pretoria's foreign policy positions were largely aligned with those of the BRIC countries, thus posing little risk to the group's cohesion? How important is the fact that Brazilian, Indian and Chinese policy makers were able to continuously and successfully cooperate with South African negotiators during years of climate negotiations, during which the BASIC grouping (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) was able to show a surprising degree of unity?(Qi, 2011). In the same way, in how far did it matter that Brazilian and Indian policy makers were very well aware of South Africa's positions after having frequently cooperated since 2003 in the IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) framework (Mokoena, 2007)?

Far from being a mere additional member of an already mature structure, South Africa's inclusion has fundamentally altered the nature of the BRICS grouping – turning it into a more global alliance with a stronger capacity to speak on behalf of the emerging world (Moore, 2012). South Africa's inclusion also underlined the BRIC countries' long-term commitment to strengthening their presence in Africa, and as an effort to depict themselves as Africa's partners in the larger context of South-South cooperation. Did South Africa's inclusion provide the BRICS grouping with such advantages? In the same way, accession to the BRICS had a major impact on South Africa's role in the global arena, significantly increasing its visibility as part of a global 'emerging power elite'. Yet did BRICS membership provide South Africa with the expected benefits? Or did it also bring disadvantages, for example by increasing the tension between its commitments to the BRICS grouping and its commitments as a representative of African interests in the global arena? The article is based on a series of interviews with policy makers from all five BRICS countries to provide a more adequate account of South Africa's accession. By tracing South Africa's accession to the BRICS grouping and evaluating the impact this move had for both South Africa's and the BRICS' strategic standing, the article argues that both sides have gained considerably.

South Africa's diplomatic activism

South Africa's desire to join the BRIC dates back to the first BRIC Summit in 2009 in Yekaterinburg, when South Africa's foreign minister wrote a letter to the participants expressing its wish to join the grouping (Malcomson, 2011). In 2010, South Africa's President Jacob Zuma visited the four BRIC countries in what was the most systematic attempt by any country to join the exclusive alliance of emerging powers. In April, Zuma visited Brasília for the 4th IBSA Summit, which coincided with the 2nd BRIC Summit. This gave the South African President the opportunity to hold bilateral meetings with all BRIC leaders (The Presidency-Republic of South Africa, 2010, April 17). Two months later, he visited India (Mail and Guardian, 2010). Next, in early August, Zuma took a delegation of cabinet ministers and more than 100 South African business people to Russia, where he sought to promote trade ties and his country's inclusion into the BRIC alliance (South African Government News Agency, 2010, August 6).

Later in the same month, Zuma, heading a delegation of 400 business representatives and eleven government ministers, visited China to promote the idea of his country's entry into the BRIC grouping. During a speech in Beijing, he argued that South Africa's participation in BRIC "would mean that an entire continent that has a population of over one billion people is represented" (Guangjin and Jiao, 2010). At the same time, he sought to downplay growing criticism of China's role in Africa, saying that labeling China's engagement with Africa "new colonialism" was untruthful (China Daily, 2010, August 25). At the meeting, China and South Africa upgraded relations to a 'comprehensive strategic partnership'.

This was part of a wide-ranging diplomatic campaign to help South Africa become a permanent member of the BRIC group (Patel, 2012) which consisted of projecting South Africa as an emerging power and regional leader, strengthening bilateral ties with BRIC countries –mostly China (Davies, 2012) -and lobbying Jim O'Neill, the creator of the acronym, to include South Africa into the BRIC acronym (Patel, 2012). While Jim O'Neill, who received such requests by many countries, never agreed to modify his acronym, South Africa's activism ultimately proved successful: One month after Zuma's visit to China, at a meeting in New York on September 21, 2010, BRIC Foreign Ministers agreed that Africa's leading economy would be invited to join the group (Ministry of External Affairs-Government of India, 2013, March 7). In late December 2010, the Chinese government invited South Africa to attend the 3rd Summit six months later, in Sanya (Hervieu, 2011).

Why did South Africa seek to belong to the BRICS grouping? South African Minister of International Relations and cooperation Maite Nkoana-Mashabane (2013) argued that South Africa joined BRICS to "advance our national interest, (…) promote our regional integration program and related continental infrastructure programs

Table 1. South Africa's GDP.

	GDP	GDP per capita	Population	Territory	Life expectancy
Brazil	US$ 2.223 trillion	US$ 11.340	198.656.019	8.459.420 km²	73.43
Russian Federation	US$ 2.015 trillion	US$ 14.037	143.533.000	16.376.870 km²	69
India	US$ 1.842 trillion	US$ 1.489	123.668.6732	2.973.190 km²	65.47
China	USS$ 8.227 trillion	US$ 6.091	1.350.695.000	9.327.489 km²	73.48
South Africa	USS$ 384.3 billion	US$ 7.508	51.189.306	1.213.090 km²	52.61

Source: World Bank.

and partner with key players in the South on issues related to global governance and its reform."

In more general terms, one may argue that the BRICS term served each country's particular needs of increasing its international status – and this is likely to be why the grouping decided to hold annual summits in the first place. In the eyes of Brazilian, Russian, Indian and Chinese policy makers, the BRIC label seemed to strengthen each country's status as a dynamic and emerging power with a growing role in global affairs, provides additional legitimacy and authority, and helps them be *recognized* as such by established powers. Being a BRICs member implies a considerable degree of social recognition – partly provided by the other members but also by Goldman Sachs forecasters and global opinion - which is likely to enhance each country's individual bargaining power. This was the true thrust behind the first summit in 2009 which turned Brazil, Russia, India and China into de facto representatives of the emerging world, and indispensable actors in the construction of tomorrow's global order. The very same reasons led South Africa to seek membership – rightly expecting that BRICS membership would provide Africa's leading economy additional international recognition as an emerging power.

Yet perhaps more interesting is the question of why the BRIC countries chose to invite South Africa, and not Indonesia, Nigeria, Turkey, South Korea or Mexico. Several are either bigger economies, have higher growth rates, or both (Patel, 2012). Turkey is nearly double the size of South Africa, Indonesia more so, and Korea and Mexico nearly three times as large. As Jim O'Neill wrote, China's dollar value of GDP is creating the economic equivalent of a new South Africa every four months (O´Neill, 2012).

Indeed, in 2010, when South Africa's potential membership was discussed, it was clear that economically, South Africa would always remain by far the smallest BRICS member. While it has Africa's largest GDP, it does not figure among the world's largest twenty economies and it is a G20 member largely to increase the group's regional representation and global legitimacy.[1] In addition, there is little reason to believe that South Africa will climb up the ranks. If current trends continue, Nigeria -- and one day Egypt and Ethiopia – will challenge and overtake the continent's leader, and South Africa may very well slip out of the thirty largest economies. The rest of the BRICS, by contrast, are expected to continue their rise and eventually overtake traditional powers. South Africa's inclusion, critics have argued, thus threatened the very notion that undergirds and sustains the idea of the BRICS, which allows them to consistently 'punch above their current weight'. Hence, in addition to its smaller size, South Africa lacks the growth outlook that adds to the other members' strategic clout. As a consequence, Jim O'Neill, who coined the term, argued at the time that South Africa did not deserve to be a BRICS member, charging that it did not even qualify to be part of the 'Next 11', another (much lesser known) grouping he invented.

As James Mittelman argues,

With a population of 49 million, a life expectancy on average of only 52 years and a poverty rate of 23%, in what sense is South Africa really in the same league as China, whose 1.3 billion people average 73 years of life and experience a poverty rate of 2.8%?(Mittelman, 2013) (Table 1).

Yet rather than 'opening a spot' and then deciding upon the best candidate, the specific possibility of South Africa's inclusion seems to have been considered – implicitly – for quite some time. While the BRIC could have chosen larger economies (such as Turkey or South Korea) or faster-growing economies (e.g. Mexico) than South Africa, a series of reasons helped South Africa become the grouping's fifth member.

The first reason is the rise of Africa in more general terms – a phenomenon that, from the BRICS point of

[1] Some interviewees have suggested that South Africa also deserves to be included due to its sophisticated banking system. Conversation with South African diplomats, 2012, August.

view, is of significant strategic and geopolitical importance. Brazil, India, Russia and China are rapidly increasing their presence in Africa, fundamentally altering the power dynamics on a continent that was once seen as little more than a recipient of Western aid. BRICS-Africa trade is set to increase more than threefold, from $150-billion in 2010 to $530-billion in 2015 – a trend already apparent in 2011. In 2010, China overtook the United States as Africa's largest trading partner, while Brazil and India currently rank as Africa's sixth and 10th largest trading partners, respectively. Russia, the BRIC country least involved in Africa so far, seeks to emulate its fellow BRICS members and build stronger ties with Africa. In 2009, a high-profile delegation of 400 businessmen and bureaucrats led by President Dmitry Medvedev visited Egypt, Nigeria, Namibia and Angola.

Africa South Africa's aggregate capabilities in terms of economic, diplomatic and military capacities, in relation to other African nations, automatically defined it, as a regional leader (Habib, 2009). Given this leading position on the continent, South Africa has long promoted the narrative that it represents the entry point to Africa, thus standing not only for itself at both the BRICS and the G20, but also for the emerging African continent as a whole (which, in its entirety, boasts growth figures and a market size that are indeed worth of BRICS membership). As South Africa's *Standard Bank* argued at the time of the country's inclusion, "South Africa provides the institutional stability, depth of financial markets, and regulatory efficiency that many corporates will look to capitalize on as a base for wider pan-African operations" (Hervieu, 2011). As a South African policy maker stressed, "South Africa's destiny is tied to Africa's destiny."[2] This turned out to be more than just mere rhetoric: Contrary to other BRICS members, which do not pretend to represent their region, South African policy makers have attempted, since their inclusion in the BRICS grouping, to regularly consult with their African neighbors before articulating their strategy at BRICS and G20 summits.[3]

Aside from its economic leadership, South Africa is also politically influential on the rest of the continent, as evidenced by the recent election of a South African to head the African Union in 2012. In the same way, South Africa's candidacy for its seat on the UN Security Council was explicitly endorsed by Africa under the aegis of the African Union (AU) at its 14th Ordinary Session in early 2010 (Serrão, 2011). The invitation to join BRICS can thus also be strongly related to South Africa's contribution contribution to shaping the socio-economic regeneration of Africa, as well as the active involvement in peace, security and reconstruction efforts on the continent. For example, in what can be seen as a major contribution to peace on the continent, South Africa has been instrumental in nego-tiating the shift from 'non-intervention' to 'non-indifference' in Africa during the 1990s and 2000s (Landsberg, 2010).

While Jim O'Neill pointed out that South Africa was "not in the same league" as the other BRICS members, he did concede that South Africa

"..can justify its position as a representative for Africa. The continent has the combined number of people and GDP size to be regarded as a true Bric. The combined GDP of the 11 most-populated African nations is similar to that of either India or Russia and has the potential to be as large as Brazil by 2050, something as large as $10-trillion, between six and 10 times bigger than today. Now that South Africa is present in the Brics group, I think it is incumbent on the country to be at the forefront of trying to help Africa, at least economically, to pursue goals of behaving as a continent….. South Africa can be a role model for the continent." (O´Neill, 2012).

Of course, the idea of South Africa as a representative for Africa is far from problem-free (Graham, 2011). Representing 55 countries is extremely difficult, further complicated because African countries are bound to have contradicting interests (Mokoena, 2007). In addition, South Africa's reality strongly diverges from that of far poorer African countries that face different domestic and international challenges. Foreign investors -- such as Brazil and China -- are capable of engaging directly in other regions and do not need the South African 'gateway'; doing business in South Africa is not necessarily easier than in places such as Rwanda or Ghana. Still, it seems that this rationale proved to be a major factor for South Africa's selection as the fifth member of the BRICS grouping.

Trusted partner

Of perhaps even greater importance seems to be that Brazil's, China's and India's interaction with South Africa in the context of the BASIC grouping during climate negotiations contributed to generating trust between large emerging powers and South Africa. As Xinran Qi points out, major negotiations such as the annual COP provided an excellent opportunity for the four BASIC countries to come together as a group as well as to test their solidarity (Qi, 2011). In 2007, the four countries first recognized that working together as a group provided advantages for each of them and had the potential to add a new voice to

[2] Personal conversation with South African diplomat, 2012, August.

[3] In the same way, South Africa has tried to represent Africa's collective voice in the UN Security Council in 2011 and 2012, coordinating with Nigeria and Gabon as an African »G3«. (See: Serrão, 2011: 1)

the negotiations. From then on, they frequently co-ordinated their positions during climate negotiations (Qi, 2011). A ministerial meeting in Beijing in November 2009, a week before the Copenhagen Conference, is thought to mark the foundation of the BASIC alliance. BASIC promptly assumed a leadership role in Copenhagen, allowing diplomats from the four countries to closely work together over an extended period of time.

After the Copenhagen conference, the BASIC representatives decided to regularly hold meetings at the ministerial level to institutionalize their coordination and turn into a cohesive group, to serve "not just a forum for negotiation coordination, but also a forum for cooperative actions on mitigation and adaptation including exchange of information and collaboration" (Joint Statement of ministers of BASIC Group, 2010). South Africa was therefore a far more natural choice and involved fewer risks of reducing the group's capacity to develop joint positions in multilateral forums.

In the same way, Brazil's and India's experience in working together with South Africa in the context of the IBSA framework has been, according to Brazilian and Indian diplomats, decisive in building trust between the countries, making South Africa's inclusion seem a relatively safe choice.[4] Refilwe Mokoena writes that when the IBSA countries first engaged in 2003, "it rapidly became clear that the three countries shared common views on a range of global challenges and that by working together in multilateral forums, especially the UN and the World Trade Organization (WTO), they could further their collective aims"(Mokoena, 2007). As Manmohan Singh pointed out, IBSA was based on a "common political identity" – and defined by members that came from different continents, but that shared "similar world views and aspirations"(Gratius and John de Sousa 2007). Since 2003, the IBSA platform has spawned working groups on areas as diverse as science and technology, health, education, poverty culture and tourism. It also fostered cooperation on research issues, created stronger ties between societies, and helped build business partnerships – thus slowly building up a dense network of personal and institutional contacts that fundamentally altered South Africa's bilateral relationships with India and Brazil. Analyzing the IBSA members' voting patterns in the UN General Assembly for the first five years after the grouping's inception, Suzanne Graham concludes that "For the most part South Africa agrees with Brazil and India (and vice versa) on matters brought before the UN"(Graham, 2011).

It is thus fair to say that without BASIC and IBSA, South Africa's inclusion into the BRICS grouping would have been far less likely. In addition, one may argue that IBSA's focus on 'soft issues' has made a significantly impact on the themes now dealt with at the BRICS summits, which are, just like the IBSA meetings, increasingly looking at social aspects and domestic challenges.

In more general terms, South Africa's diplomatic leadership over the past two decades in multiple forums – ranging not only from IBSA to the UN but also to regional bodies such as the AU – added further to the attractiveness of adding South Africa, and allowed it to be chosen over a faster-growing Nigeria (Pinto, 2012). This is tied to South Africa's reputation and the positive legacy of the country's peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy (Patel, 2012). As a South African policy maker recently argued, "our membership in BRICS (…) recognizes South Africa's own unique historic political transformation process to become a constitutional democracy "(Mashabane, 2013). Indeed, no other 'candidate country' – be it Nigeria, Indonesia, Turkey or Mexico – has comparable ties to the BRIC nations. This shows that the BRICS platform today is far more than a group of large countries with high growth rates: It is about common ideas and policy positions, and South Africa's track record had shown its compatibility with the BRIC group. Seen from this perspective, it becomes obvious why South Africa was preferred to larger or faster-growing economies.

The 2011 BRICS Leaders' Summit: From BRIC to BRICS

What where the key issues discussed at the 2011 Leaders' Summit, and how did South Africa fit in? Did South Africa's inclusion reduce the grouping's capacity to find agreement on certain policy issues?

Two important overarching themes dominated the 3rd BRICS Summit in Sanya. The first concerned a global debate about humanitarian intervention, which occurred at a time when all the BRICS were represented on the Security Council. In addition to China and Russia as permanent members, Brazil, India and South Africa all held a rotating seat. The host of international crises that occurred during the year 2011 thus provided emerging powers with an unusual amount of international attention, particularly in the realm of security.

Only a month prior to the BRICS Summit, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1973 on Libya, which was the first time the UN Security Council approved the use of force against a functioning state following the Responsibility to Protect. R2P thus turned from an abstract idea into a highly visible foreign policy instrument. None of the BRICS countries voted against resolution 1973, which authorized a coalition of the willing NATO members

[4] Personal conversations with Indian and Brazilian diplomats, 2012. May and June.

at the core to use "all necessary" measures to protect civilians under threat in Benghazi. Brazil abstained in the vote alongside China, Russia, Germany and India. Despite the concerns raised by Brazil and others in the debate on the resolution, the BRICS' abstention came across as moderately supportive of the resolution. South Africa, in a surprise move, had decided to support the resolution.

The second overarching trend was China's definitive rise as each BRICS members' most important bilateral economic partner. China had already become Brazil's and South Africa's most important trading partner in 2009, and it also became Russia's and India's leading trading partner soon after (Jiao, 2011). This cemented China's special role in the grouping, arguably allowing it to exert considerable influence during intra-BRICS debates prior to and during the summit in Sanya.[5] It was in this context that South Africa's inclusion has been continuously described as a Chinese initiative, even though negotiators from Russia, India and Brazil have always been supportive of the move.[6]

In an impressive sign that South Africa's inclusion into the grouping did not reduce the grouping's capacity to reach consensus on broad policy questions, the summit declaration's scope was significantly broader than those of the first and second BRIC Summits in Yekaterinburg and Brasília. Notably, the BRICS articulated for the first time very specific ideas in the security realm, an issue that previous declarations had not mentioned. In the Sanya Summit Declaration, the word "security" appears eleven times – certainly a reflection of the BRICS' joint presence in the UN Security Council in 2011, as well as the multitude of crises in both the Middle East and Africa at the time. The declaration made explicit reference to this unique situation:

We underscore that the concurrent presence of all five BRICS countries in the Security Council during the year of 2011 is a valuable opportunity to work closely together on issues of peace and security, to strengthen multilateral approaches and to facilitate future coordination on issues under UN Security Council consideration.(Sanya Declaration of BRICS Leaders Meeting, 2011)

The BRICS' decision to comment on security issues must clearly be understood in the context of emerging powers' dissatisfaction over the way the intervention in Libya was conducted (Security Council Report, 2011, April 29). The summit took place at the height of NATO's air campaign - NATO's foreign ministers met on 14 April in Berlin to discuss NATO's strategy in Libya - and by the time the BRICS' support for resolution 1973 had already begun to weaken significantly. While it voted in favor of the resolution, South Africa had begun fall in line with the other BRICS members, and started criticizing the resulting NATO-led airstrikes by the time of the summit. Brazil's and India's criticism also became more vocal. China joined India and Russia on March 22 in demands for a cease-fire and suggested that allied forces had exceeded the UN's mandate by putting civilians at risk in Libya (O'Brien, 2011). As the intervention lengthened, the Indian and the Russian government powerfully articulated the view at the UN that NATO was no longer acting as a defensive shield for populations at risk, but merely pushing for regime change (Adams, 2012).[7] Their joint statement, strengthened by an African voice – considering that the intervention took place in Africa – had a considerable impact on the global debate about humanitarian intervention and weakened the Western narrative that resolution 1973 had led to a 'model intervention', as US Ambassador to NATO, Ivo Daalder, had sought to argue (Daalder and Stavridis, 2012). This can be seen as a clear example of how South Africa's membership lent the BRICS' voice stronger legitimacy.

Aside from the novelty of security issues in the final declaration, the reform of international institutions continued to figure prominently in the final declaration: in a wording identical to those of the first and second summit declarations of 2009 and 2010, China and Russia reiterated the importance they attach to the status of India and Brazil in international affairs, and understand and support their aspiration to play a greater role in the UN – with the only difference being that this time, South Africa's aspirations were supported as well (Sanya Declaration, 2011, art.8). This statement alone, despite its vagueness (it did not specifically mention a permanent seat on the UN Security Council) represented a foreign policy success for South Africa, which now figures as one of the leading candidates for a permanent seat should UNSC reform take place. In addition to UN reform, the declaration voiced strong support for the G20 as a principal platform to deal with economic and financial issues, as well as a reminder to implement IMF and World Bank reforms soon (Sanya Declaration, 2011, art.14,15).

Finally, the 3rd BRICS Summit in Sanya presented the novelty of a detailed "Action Plan" at the end of its final declaration – in a sign that the grouping sought to be more than just a mere consultation group and would much rather broaden and deepen cooperation on issues

[5] Personal conversation with a Brazilian diplomat, February 2012.
[6] Personal conversations with diplomats from Russia, India and Brazil, 2012.
[7] Two weeks after the BRICS Summit, Gaddafi survived a NATO airstrike in Tripoli. Russia said on 1 May that the NATO attack raised "serious doubts about coalition members' statement that the strikes in Libya do not have the goal of physically annihilating Mr. Gaddafi and members of his family." (See: O'Brien 2011: 16)

as diverse as education, international security, finance, agriculture and statistics (Sanya Declaration, Action Plan).

Interestingly enough, the summit declaration did not make any reference to the strains that had affected several bilateral ties prior to the summit (Jinwei, 2011). Fears in both Brazil and India of the negative effects of an unequal trade relationship with China had become visible in the months prior to the summit, a worry that had also led to political tension in South Africa. During previous bilateral meetings, India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had urged China to increase imports of Indian technology and pharmaceuticals as a means to reduce India's trade deficit with China (Forsythe, 2012). Brazil sought to convince China to allow Embraer to produce its E-190 aircraft in China, which had been blocked by the Chinese government previously. The decision to demonstrate unity despite underlying problems in several bilateral relationships can be interpreted as an attempt to show unity and respond to critics who had continuously argued prior to the summit that the BRICS were too disparate of a group to agree on anything meaningful (Stephens, 2011).

In the 2011 Sanya BRICS Compliance Report, a group of academics from Canada and Russia found that for the period from 15 April 2011 to 12 March 2012, BRICS countries achieved an average final compliance score of +0.48, which translates to 74% on the percentage scale (Sanya BRICS Compliance Report, 2011, March 27). Based on the aftermath of the summit in Sanya, the group of scholars also found "evidence of BRICS gradual institutionalization, improvement in the quality of dialogue and the ability to coordinate decisions on an expanding number of issues"(Sanya BRICS Compliance Report, 2011).

One can thus argue that the grouping's expansion did not reduce the ongoing process of deepening cooperation. The 3rd BRICS Summit in Sanya thus represented a successful broadening and deepening of intra-BRICS cooperation. This can, to a large part, be ascribed to the fact that South Africa's positions on a large range of matters were already aligned with those of the BRIC countries – the BRICs' assumption that South Africa's inclusion would prove a low risk to the group's cohesion thus turned out to be correct.

South Africa's inclusion: Implications for BRICS and South Africa

South Africa's inclusion into the BRICS grouping was far from a minor detail for the BRICS grouping. Most importantly, it globalized the grouping by making it geographically more diverse, providing it with enhanced legitimacy to speak on behalf of the emerging world (Wenping, 2011). The inclusion of South Africa was notable for three reasons. First of all, it sought to weaken the importance of the civilizational aspect in international politics – after all, the BRICS hail from, using Samuel Huntington's definition, five different civilizational backgrounds. It is in this respect that BRICS most radically differs from common alliances in international politics.

Secondly, the inclusion of an African country into a grouping known for its economic might and dynamism that may even threaten the Western-led global order at some point went strongly against Africa's traditional image of a passive, poverty- and conflict-stricken supplicant, whose voice is muted in global deliberations (Sidiropoulos, 2009: 276). By including South Africa, today's emerging powers thus responded to a "core conviction that Africa has to be repositioned in the global system to assume its rightful place"(Mashabane, 2013). This was far from altruistic: By inviting South Africa as a full member, the BRIC countries sought to send a signal to African leaders in general that today's emerging powers sought to engage with Africa differently than the West's prior attempts. The relationship the BRIC sought to offer Africa was one of equality and partnership that produces mutual benefits rather than the unequal relationship of donor-hierarchies and conditionalities that represent the West's relationship with Africa. Or, as some say, the BRIC may have acted in response to the growing criticism of China's presence on the African continent. South Africa's inclusion thus sought to reconceptualize Africa's role in global affairs, as for the first time an African country became part of an exclusive grouping other non-African countries sought to belong to.

It also strengthened the narrative about South-South cooperation, which, according to emerging powers, is based on equal and mutually respectful partnership – even though this notion remains very much contested.[8] Considering the long-term economic and strategic interest the BRIC countries have in Africa, this move was also meant to improve emerging powers' reputation in Africa, countering the notion that the BRIC countries are merely substituting the West in exploiting Africa's resources. As a South African policy maker argued, "BRICS has nourished Africa's economic emergence and

[8] Candice Moore rightly argues that "there is a risk of overlooking some of the key assumptions about South-South cooperation when this label is linked to BRICS. These include: the belief that trade between Southern states would be less exploitative than that between the South and the North (i.e. trade balances would favor developing countries, rather than those better off); and, the belief that economic interactions between states of the South would be more responsive to the development needs of the South." She argues that "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.

elevated the continent's contemporary global relevance"(Mashabane, 2013). In support of this narrative, BRICS leaders expressed support in the Sanya Declaration for infrastructure development in Africa (Sanya Declaration, 2011). Making the BRICS partly African is thus an important element of promoting emerging powers' role on the African continent.

Finally, South Africa's inclusion ultimately symbolized the BRIC countries' decision to take ownership of the idea and no longer rely on Jim O'Neill's judgment about which country deserved to be a BRIC and which did not. The decision to invite South Africa as a full member despite Jim O'Neill's doubts showed that the BRICS idea has developed into something entirely different and requires new thinking. Arguing that O'Neill's parameters are still decisive to the existence of the BRICS concept is intellectually limiting and amounts to agreeing that the term is no longer useful: After all, what made the BRICS concept stick in 2003 is no longer the case: the BRICS are no longer the fastest-growing economies, and Jim O'Neill himself has moved on and is now promoting new ideas such as the Next11, a group of smaller, but faster-growing countries.

In general, we can therefore argue that South Africa's inclusion strengthened the BRICS' global visibility and legitimacy to speak for the emerging world, while not reducing its capacity to develop joint positions. Quite to the contrary, the first BRICS summit with South Africa's participation seemed to go further than the previous two summit declarations in 2009 and 2010 in Yekaterinburg and Brasília, respectively.

For South Africa, the inclusion into the BRICS grouping can be seen as one of the most notable foreign policy achievements over the past years, and a significant step towards establishing itself as a regional leader and recognized representative of the African continent (Davies, 2012). South Africa's BRICS membership has thus helped it obtain – particularly in the eyes of international observers – a status of emerging power with potentially system-shaping capacity – a status it otherwise would have hardly achieved, given that it does not fulfill the usual requirements associated with this categorization. At the same time, it must also be recognized that given its late arrival to the grouping, South Africa is at times not yet accepted as a "full member" both within and outside of the country (iafrica.com, 2013, March 5) – even though this is likely to change now that the first BRICS Summit has been held in South Africa. Despite this, real benefits were immediately tangible: Article 8 of the BRICS Declaration indicated that Russia and China "understand and support" South Africa's aspiration to play a greater role at the UN" (Sanya Declaration, art.8) – which could indeed prove decisive during a possible UN Security Council reform.

Yet at the same time, South Africa's BRICS membership may complicate South Africa's ties to its own region. Increasingly present on the global stage, its smaller neighbors may accuse South Africa of caring more about global summitry such as the BRICS and the G20 than about the neighborhood – a problem Brazil may also face (Mittleman, 2013: 30). As Sanusha Naidu argues,

"*South Africa's ability to represent the African voice in multilateral forums, and be a gateway for BRIC countries into Africa, is questionable, and it is not clear whether the African bloc actually sees South Africa in this way. The attempt to identify Pretoria as a leader of the African agenda could in reality create a backlash due to post-apartheid South Africa's own prejudices and xenophobia against African migrants, or be interpreted as (…) a sub-imperial agenda across Africa."(Naidu, 2011)*

In a similar fashion, Refilwe Mokoena calls South Africa a 'reluctant hegemon' and points out that many African elites perceive South Africa as a "self-interested 'neo imperialist' actor" (Mokoena, 2007).

In addition, in an attempt to align with the other BRICS nations, South Africa – as arguably the weakest member and a newcomer – may see itself forced to align with BRICS' positions which –regarding topics such as human rights – may not be in South Africa's interest.

As Kadija Patel argued,

"while Brics has offered the ideal platform for South Africa to promote pet causes like United Nations reform, the fact that we are not a "natural" member of the club is seen to leave us in a position of relative weakness" (Patel, 2012).

Critics have pointed out that South Africa is behaving submissively towards China. For example, South Africa denied the Dalai Lama a visa when he sought to visit South Africa's Nobel recipient Desmond Tutu in October 2011 – less than a year after China had agreed to invite South Africa to join the BRICS grouping (Magubane, 2013). Against this, South Africa's foreign minister argued that the BRICS countries' foreign policy was guided by national interests and states would make decisions according to what met those interests. He continued by saying that he does not believe that,

"the majority of South Africa cares much for the Dalai Lama coming to the country…. South Africa is better off in BRICS than outside it and we have to make difficult decisions to serve the national interest." (Magubane, 2013).

South Africa's foreign policy was also criticized as being too focused on aligning with its future BRICS members

during the climate negotiations at the summit in Copenhagen. As Qinran Xi writes about the results of the climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009,

"the South African environment minister called the failure to produce a legally-binding agreement 'unacceptable', largely as a response to the criticism from many African countries in Copenhagen. Widely expected to represent the African continent in Copenhagen, South Africa's alignment with the small BASIC Group and its role in jointly drafting the non-legally-binding Copenhagen Accord disappointed many African countries, and led to accusations of South Africa's betrayal of African interests. This may put South Africa in a dilemma brought on by its duel identity as a member of both the African Group and the BASIC Group, given the latter's opposition, mainly raised by China and India, to any legally-binding agreement in the near future. Balancing the competing interests of different international partners presents a challenge to South Africa's climate diplomacy." (Qi, 2011).

Against this, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane assured that "our interaction with fellow BRICS states is premised on three levels of engagement: firstly, national, where we advance our national interests; secondly, regional, (…); and, thirdly, on a global level (…)" (Mashabane, 2013).

Finally, some have criticized South Africa's 'gateway narrative' as it may hurt South African business interests in its region (Moore, 2012). According to this argument, rather than attracting competitors from BRIC countries to enter Africa's markets, South African firms should first strengthen their own presence in the region. Is South Africa merely the gateway for a second scramble for Africa? (Mittleman, 2013). In the same way, Davies points out that the BRICs' move into Africa poses a challenge to South Africa's strategic economic interests, particularly in those markets into which South Africa has been slow to expand – such as Angola, where Brazil and China have established themselves as major players. He argues that the rise of the BRIC countries in Africa, combined with South Africa's economic interests in the region require a "delicate balancing act" by South African policy makers (Davies, 2012). In a similar way, Brazil's economic presence in Mozambique is growing strongly, directly competing with South African interests. Both India and China regard expanding their economic presence in South Africa's immediate neighborhood as a key aspect of their expansion on the continent. The BRICS are certain to be among South Africa's fiercest competitors as South African companies will seek to penetrate markets in the country's vicinities.

However, as several diplomats have pointed out, there is little doubt that firms from emerging powers would enter Africa in any case, and that South Africa's decision to position itself as a gateway merely serves to benefit from a process that would happen with or without South Africa.[9]

Conclusion

After significant diplomatic efforts, South Africa's inclusion into the BRICS grouping in 2011 can be regarded as one of South Africa's principal foreign policy achievements over the past years (Hervieu, 2011). This occurred not because of South Africa's market size or growth rate, but because it aptly demonstrated that its foreign policy positions were largely aligned with those of the BRIC grouping – underscoring that the BRICS have a political project in mind that depends on their capacity to develop cohesive policy positions.

South Africa also fundamentally altered the nature of the BRICS group and gave it a more global structure. Aside from the narrative that South Africa acts as a 'gateway' and representative of the African continent, Brazil, China and India's previous interaction with South Africa, such as in the context of the BASIC grouping since the climate negotiations since the Bali conference in 2007, contributed to generating trust between large emerging powers and South Africa. In the same way, Brazil, India and South Africa's cooperation in the context of the IBSA grouping served as a trust-building measure. South Africa was therefore a far more intuitive choice and involved fewer risks of reducing the group's capacity to develop joint positions in international institutions. The BRICS grouping as a whole benefitted significantly from South Africa's inclusion, becoming a more globalized outfit with increased legitimacy to represent the emerging world. Its new African member provided it with additional clout when criticizing the NATO-led intervention in Libya, significantly reducing the notion that it had been a model intervention. Most significantly, South Africa's inclusion did not reduce the BRICS' capacity to maintain co-operation, but increased their capacity to develop joint positions. For the first time, the 3rd BRICS Summit included an 'Action Plan' with specific goals, the large majority of which the BRICS were able to implement over the next 12 months. South Africa also significantly benefitted from the inclusion. Yet, it also complicated South Africa's foreign policy challenges, demanding that it now must delicately balance its emerging power obligations with its role as representative of Africa's poor nations and regional leader. This has, in several instances, led to tension, a notable example being when

[9] Personal conversation with South African diplomats and former diplomats, August 2012.

South Africa seemed to have sided with the members of the BASIC grouping rather than defend the interests of smaller African countries. In the same way, critics argue that the BRICS' growing economic presence in Africa is not necessarily to South Africa's advantage, even if the country is used as a 'gateway' to the continent. Rather, competition from Brazil, Russia, India and China in countries such as Angola could very well have negative impacts for South Africa's strategy to assume regional leadership. Despite these challenges, faced by most regional powers with aspiring global ambitions, South Africa's inclusion into the BRICS grouping can be regarded as beneficial to all sides.

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