# BRICS, club diplomacy and South Africa's geopolitical repositioning

**by**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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## Abstract

This study sets out to explore whether South Africa's membership of the BRICS forum serves the country's national interests. More particularly this examination is approached from the perspective of the motivations given by South African policymakers for joining the forum. In this regard, the indications are that the South African Government views the implications of its membership of the forum quite differently from the foreign policy approaches indicated by Brazil and India, the two other democracies belonging to the forum.

What comes to light in examining the decision to adhere to BRICS is that although South Africa views this as part and parcel of its commitment to multilateral diplomacy in a multipolar world, it also sees BRICS as a counterweight to the developed Western powers and therefore as a useful mechanism for undermining the existing Western liberal international order. South Africa's apparent enthusiasm for undermining the liberal order is not shared to the same extent by Brazil and certainly not by India. Indeed, the evidence suggests instead that India regards BRICS as a "counterpoise" and "partner" to the existing Western multilateral processes. On the other hand, when in 2009 Russia convened the first BRIC heads of states summit at Yekaterinburg, Moscow was experiencing a period of increasing isolation from the West. It was therefore in Moscow's interest to signal that there was an alternative to a West-dominated global order. This need became even more important for Russia in 2015 after the start of the Ukraine and Crimean crises. An important narrative coming out of the BRICS Ufa Summit in 2015 was that Eurasia is a new centre of economic and political gravity, where Russia and China can peacefully cooperate without United States interference.

Similarly, in recent years China has been changing its low-profile image to one of a more assertive power, manifesting policies that vary from being status quo orientated to anti-status quo – in other words acting as a revisionist power though perhaps not to the same extent as Russia – and pushing against the West. Yet, China's newfound assertiveness has been particularly manifest in the Asia-Pacific region to the extent that the outbreak of great power armed conflict in that region, whether accidental or otherwise, cannot be excluded.

In addition, China's "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) project, is also likely to be one of Beijing's principal foreign policy focus areas for the next five to ten years and this is another manifestation of the country's newfound assertiveness carrying as it does significant geopolitical implications for the future. Seen against the background of these new geopolitical developments, BRICS has a utility for both Moscow and Beijing as the forum offers both Russia and China a political and diplomatic buffer zone between themselves and the West.

Research indicates that India's approach to BRICS is non-ideological, but nevertheless regards its membership of the forum as imperative in view of China's presence therein. Relations between India and China, and between these two countries and Russia, have a different character from just normal or routine bilateral relations and tend to take on existential overtones. Accordingly, the relationship between these three countries has been characterised as ambivalent. All this suggests that national interest considerations were as important as notions of multilateralism when the BRICS countries, initially four then five, chose to adhere to the association or forum.

Although in BRICS South Africa has committed itself to a variation of alliance politics, the country has consequently also effectively exposed itself to old fashioned power politics, particularly as far as Russia and China are concerned. At the same time, as the study highlights, because South Africa is only a middle power by committing itself wholeheartedly to BRICS, even describing BRICS as the country's principal platform for relations with the global South, the negative side-effect of BRICS membership has been to limit the country's foreign policy options and strategic manoeuvrability. BRICS membership has therefore not come cost-free. The study highlights that South Africa's decision to join BRICS was to a great extent ideologically driven and it is not evident that adequate cost-benefit and evidence-based foreign policy analysis was undertaken prior to accession.

As indicated in the study, the BRICS concept of diplomacy is described by some scholars as constituting a new innovation in global governance. Yet, BRICS is located within a variant of multilateral diplomacy known as club diplomacy which has a long lineage going back to the 19$^{th}$ Century. Club diplomacy is essentially state-

centric and the very epitome of state-centric club diplomacy would appear to be the BRICS. The state-centric aspects of BRICS help explain why South Africa applied for BRICS membership and why South Africa sees BRICS as a natural fit. However, club diplomacy also has drawbacks as it lacks the rules and protections provided by formal multilateral and inter-governmental organisations to smaller and middle powers, particularly when they choose to associate themselves closely with the diplomacy of great or major powers, and this places South Africa in a dilemma.

Seen from the perspective of the classical geopolitical theories of Sir Halford Mackinder's Heartland and Nicholas Spykman's Rimland, the study demonstrates that BRICS constitutes the very opposite of the United States' Cold War era strategy of containment which in recent years has been revived in view of Russian President Vladimir Putin's assertive and muscular foreign policy. This aspect potentially raises problems for South Africa in its diplomatic relations with its traditional and historic partners in the developed North but without bringing additional advantages to its diplomatic relations with its partner countries in Africa. It is therefore open to doubt whether BRICS significantly benefits South Africa's national interests.

The study recommends that South Africa sheds its ideological bias and recalibrates its foreign policy by taking into account the complexities of contemporary international politics. This does not necessarily involve leaving BRICS, which could lead to further loss of prestige by the country, but it does require adopting a more independent approach particularly as regards Russia and China. Inescapably tied to this recommendation is that South Africa focuses on how its foreign relations could facilitate its own economic growth and job creation. South Africa's trade with the BRICS economies is largely with China but this has been at the expense of the de-industrialisation of the South African economy and the loss of tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs. It is essential that South Africa moves its economy up the value chain and as far as possible escapes the commodities rut for an economy benefits most from the type of advanced intra-industry trade which characterises much of South Africa's trade with the European Union and the United States. South Africa should, therefore, improve its somewhat frayed relations with its traditional Western partners and desist from looking at the world only through a BRICS-prism.

From a diplomatic perspective it would be prudent for South Africa to factor in the possibility that BRICS' future is uncertain. South Africa should carefully monitor developments in the United States and China closely as they both significantly influence world politics and the global economy. South Africa should also refocus on its African Agenda which for some years now has lost momentum as well as political support both from South Africa and from other African states. For South Africa's security and economic growth also depend on a stable and economically productive Africa and Southern Africa. Finally, South Africa should strive to restore its domestic governance practices to an acceptable level and to once again advance a rules-based international system which, *inter alia*, would enable South Africa to resume its role as a bridge-builder which previously earned it much diplomatic prestige.

## List of abbreviations and acronyms

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| AFP | - | *Agence France-Presse* |
| AGOA | - | African Growth and Opportunity Act |
| ANC | - | African National Congress |
| AU | - | African Union |
| BBC | - | British Broadcasting Corporation |
| BICS | - | Brazil, India, China and South Africa |
| BRIC | - | Brazil, Russia, India and China forum |
| BRICS | - | Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa forum |
| BRICSMAR | - | Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa Maritime (Joint Naval Manoeuvres, proposed but not implemented) |
| CRA | - | Contingent Reserve Arrangement (of BRICS) |
| CCP | - | Chinese Communist Party |
| DIRCO | - | Department of International Relations and Cooperation |
| DRC | - | Democratic Republic of Congo |
| EPA | - | Economic Partnership Agreement |
| EU | - | European Union |
| FICCI | - | Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry |
| FTA | - | Free Trade Agreement |
| G7 | - | Group of Seven |
| G8 | - | Group of Eight |
| G8 + 5 | - | Group of Eight plus Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and South Africa |
| G20 | - | Group of Twenty |
| GDP | - | Gross Domestic Product |
| HP | - | Heiligendamm Process |
| IBSA | - | India, Brazil, South Africa Dialogue Forum |
| IBSAMAR | - | India-Brazil-South Africa Maritime (Joint Naval Manoeuvres) |
| ICC | - | International Criminal Court |
| IGO | - | Intergovernmental Organisation |
| IMF | - | International Monetary Fund |
| LDCs | - | Least Developed Countries |
| MSF | - | *Médecins Sans Frontières* (Doctors Without Borders) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| NAASP | - | New Asian-African Strategic Partnership |
| NAM | - | Non-Aligned Movement |
| NATO | - | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation |
| NDB | - | New Development Bank (“BRICS Bank”) |
| NDR | - | National Democratic Revolution |
| NEPAD | - | New Partnership for Africa’s Development |
| NGC | - | ANC National General Council |
| NGO | - | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NSG | - | Nuclear Suppliers Group |
| NTBs | - | Non-Tariff Barriers |
| OBOR | - | One Belt, One Road |
| OECD | - | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| RIC | - | Russia, India and China forum |
| ROSATOM | - | Rosatom State Atomic Energy Corporation (Russian) |
| RTA | - | Regional Trade Agreement |
| SADC | - | Southern African Development Community |
| SAIIA | - | South African Institute of International Affairs |
| SARS | - | South African Revenue Service |
| SCO | - | Shanghai Cooperation Organisation |
| SOE | - | State Owned Enterprise |
| SSS | - | South-South solidarity |
| TPP | - | Trans-Pacific Partnership |
| UN | - | United Nations |
| UNSC | - | United Nations Security Council |
| US | - | United States |
| WTO | - | World Trade Organisation |

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Identification of the research theme

On 24 December 2010, South Africa officially became a member of the Brazil, Russia, India and China forum (BRIC), henceforth to be known as BRICS. Matshiqi (2012: 41) described this admission to BRICS as an "international relations coup". Ms Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, said South Africa was "now a respected global player" (Hengari: 2014: 16) and Cooper (2015: 2) writes that South Africa "sees its status as being enhanced globally by being part of BRICS". South Africa's decision to join BRICS was informed by its commitment to multilateral diplomacy in a multipolar world (Ebrahim: 2014). BRICS committed its members to promoting "more equitable development and inclusive global growth" and to furthering "complementarities" between the member countries (*eThekwini Declaration*: 2013: par. 2). This included the establishment of a BRICS New Development Bank (NDB). In addition, South Africa's focus included "decoupling" from the West and turning to the BRICS economies (Bezuidenhout and Claassen: 2013: 227). An objective was to direct BRICS diplomacy to support the African Agenda, as was done at the BRICS Durban Summit of 2013 which was "a political and diplomatic success for South Africa" (Kornegay and Bohler-Muller 2013: 4). South Africa recognised that small groupings of "like-minded countries", such as the G20, BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India and China), IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa Dialogue Forum) and BRICS were "important mechanism[s] for consensus building ... on global issues related to political, security, environment and economic matters" (*White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy*: 2011: 25). As a form of club diplomacy, BRICS membership placed diplomacy centre stage and would advance South Africa's national interest (*White Paper*: 2011: 26; 35-36).

Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2013a) acknowledged that "the emergence of BRICS has not been well received by all" as some believe BRICS will threaten the status quo and international balance of forces. Deputy Minister Ebrahim Ebrahim (2014) also saw "the era of western primacy" coming to an end. Landsberg and Moore (2013: 10) asked whether there was not a danger of BRICS membership harming South Africa's "other foreign policy initiatives of longer standing". As Kornegay (2011:

9) elaborated, questions have been raised about South Africa's "foreign policy independence and strategic autonomy". Olivier (2013a: 411) wrote that at the United Nations (UN) South Africa's position "is conspicuously congruent with the positions of Russia and China". Bond, (cited by Chiyemura 2014: 2-3), interpreted BRICS as extending China and India's "imperialist agenda in Africa", a view supported by former Nigerian Central Bank Governor Lamido Sanusi (in Wallis: 2013). South Africa's enthusiasm for BRICS, not shared by Brazil and India, may be inimical to South Africa's national interest. As Qobo and Dube (2012: 21) point out, whereas India regards BRICS as a "counterpoise" and "partner" to the existing Western multilateral processes, South Africa appears to view BRICS as a "counterweight" undermining the Western liberal international order. Al Doyaili *et al*. (2013: 305) view this approach as watering down the liberal democratic "strategic glue" of IBSA and augmenting "the allure of statist solutions" including within South Africa. For Hengari (2014: 6) it reflects a departure from the "normative framing" of South Africa's external relations.

Against this background, the study describes, explains and assesses the interrelationship between BRICS membership, the club diplomacy associated with this membership and the geopolitical repositioning it suggests, to determine whether or not this is beneficial to South African diplomacy in a turbulent world (see Alexandroff: 2015: 249). The theoretical relevance of this study lies in its emphasis on the ambiguous phenomenon of club diplomacy and the linkage of BRICS as a variant of club diplomacy to classical geopolitical theories in the contemporary context of diplomatic realignment. Its practical relevance, within this conceptual-theoretical context, resides in its critique of South Africa's participation in this forum, which all too easily appears to translate into a form of alliance-making known as "bandwagoning", and in its analysis of the longer term implications of BRICS for the nature and scope of South Africa's diplomatic relations.

## 1.2 Literature overview

South Africa's admission to BRICS generated considerable scholarly and political interest and commentary. A conceptual-theoretical problem in studying BRICS is defining it as an actor in international relations. In the literature an aspect that

emerges is the problem of classifying BRICS. Utzig (2014: 2) posits that "the group is at the margin of public international law". Akulov (2012) variously describes BRICS as a "multilateral grouping", an "organisation" with "a political dimension", and an "alliance of reformers". He cites former President Medvedev's depictions of the BRICS as a "bridge", an "intermediary" and a "forum". BRICS lacks the qualities of a formal international organisation (IO) or intergovernmental organisation (IGO) for although the NDB and specialist committees have been established they are not concerned with the forum's governance. Rather BRICS resembles "a series of conferences or congresses" (Archer: 2015: 30). BRICS is, therefore, a hybrid actor best described as an exclusive (by invitation) regional intergovernmental forum.

Medvedev's depictions of BRICS as a "bridge" and an "intermediary" illustrates the description of diplomacy by du Plessis (2006: 124-125) as "the master institution of international relations" designed to manage international relations. But diplomacy is also "a political instrument with which to maximise the national interest of states and to pursue foreign policy goals and objectives". The link between diplomacy, foreign policy and the largely state-driven nature of BRICS in turn locate the BRICS forum within "state-centric realism", as du Plessis (2006: 120) expresses it. In particular, as indicated, BRICS is located within the mode of multilateral diplomacy which is defined as the practice of involving more than two nations or parties in achieving diplomatic solutions to supranational problems (Mahbubani: 2013: 248).

A variant of multilateral diplomacy is club diplomacy; a form of diplomacy the nature and scope of which are also covered in the literature and Grant-Makokera (2013) argues that "the BRICS is effectively a club" with its "loose arrangement" lacking any "permanent institutional structures to support its activities". Grant-Makokera compares BRICS to the G8 (now G7) and adds that "a crucial part of club diplomacy" are the closed session meetings of heads of state / government which is exactly the BRICS format. Cooper and Farooq (2015: 1) argue that the club dynamics helped BRICS circumvent internal conflicts and establish the NDB "in a short period". At the same time club culture informality – specifically its lack of institutionality – does not always translate as beneficial to the interests of an essentially weaker member or partner like South Africa. This weakness manifests itself, for example, when South Africa has to address the "broad differences in strategic interests" of its stronger

partners without the assistance of an "institutional capacity to navigate those differences" (Cooper and Farooq: 2015: 1). Indeed, Utzig (2014: 20) attributes the BRICS forum's "non-institutionalised form" to the fact that each of the member countries prioritises, or claims to prioritise, its own national interests. The result, as Notshulwana (2012: 3) explains, advantages Russia, India and China.

It is difficult to consider BRICS as an alliance due to the forum's lack of shared political and economic objectives (Besada and Tok: 2014: 77-79; Laïdi: 2012: 621).

Related literature locates the study at the overlap of various international relations theories including realism in view of the state-centric and national interest approach of BRICS membership and diplomacy (see Chiyemura: 2014: 19-20; Laïdi: 2012: 614-615) that reflect sovereignist and authoritarian governance visions (see Gowan and Brantner: 2010: 4); neo-liberalism to the extent that BRICS is based on interdependence, common interests and a particular form of international organisation (see Carmody: 2012: 236; Besada and Tok: 2014: 77; and Landsberg and Smith: 2015: 24); and constructivism concerning regional and state identity (see Meena: 2013: 580).

In search of a narrower focus the study's theoretical approach draws on Meena's (2013: 566) contention that the BRICS countries have fashioned their own (constructed) response to "anarchy" by forming a "BRICS region" and that its "global reach … dovetails with the traditional geopolitical theories" (Meena: 2013: 580). It is submitted the counter-argument is equally valid, namely that the BRICS are not a region in this sense and that the application to BRICS of the Heartland and Rimland theories suggests a result contrary to that intended by classical geopolitics. Thakur (2014: 1797) suggests that the BRICS "offers both China and Russia a forum for creating a buffer zone between themselves and the West". Irrespective of this, the renewed interest in classical geopolitical theories, as illustrated, for example, by the writings of Bottelier (2011: 35) and Fettweis (2003: 123-124), provides space for assessing South Africa's current BRICS diplomacy as implicating it in great power disputes, with a fundamentally anti-Western bias.

(Although an investigation into the concept of anarchy is outside the scope of this study it can briefly be noted that many international relations scholars hold the assumption that international politics lack order because there is no central world authority governing relations between states. Therefore, the central question needing an answer is: "under what conditions will cooperation emerge in a world of egoists without central authority"? (Milner: 1991: 68). Lack of order and lack of (central) government therefore inform the meaning of anarchy. Yet, "persistent elements of order in international politics have been noted by many" (Milner: 1991: 69). Regularised patterns of interstate behaviour are identifiable, such as the balance of power which may prevent war. In addition, "regimes ... defined as sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures" (Krasner: 1982: 186) serve to constrain and guide the external (international) behaviour of states. Consequently, "to say that world politics is anarchic does not imply that it entirely lacks organisation. Relationships among actors may be carefully structured in some issue-areas, even though they remain loose in others" (Milner: 1991: 70)).

Finally, regarding literature on South Africa's entry into and membership of BRICS, there is an abundance of literature. Seminal contributions are *Laying the BRICS of a New Global Order – From Yekaterinburg 2009 to Ethekwini 2013* edited by Kornegay and Bohler-Muller (2013), *IBSA: Fading out or forging a common vision?*, by Al Doyaili *et al.* (2013), *South African trade hegemony: Is the South Africa-EU Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement heading for a BRICS wall?*, by Bezuidenhout and Claassen (2013), and *The Burdens of Multilateral Engagement and Club Diplomacy for Middle Income Countries: The Case of South Africa in the BRICS and the G-20*, by Qobo and Dube (2012). This is supported by official documentation, of both a BRICS and South African government origin, for example: *Fifth BRICS Summit - general background*, issued by the South African Government (2013), which provides, *inter alia*, information on what South Africa brings to BRICS, and *Strategy and experience of South Africa in engaging within the BRICs and with other emerging countries* (2014), written by Ambassador Anil Sooklal, Deputy Director General: Asia and the Middle East in the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation and BRICS Sous-Sherpa, which details the premises on which South Africa's engagement with BRICS is based. Because this literature for the most focuses on the foreign policy, regionalisation and international political

economy dimensions, a lacuna exists regarding a diplomatic perspective of BRICS membership that this study intends to fill.

## 1.3 Formulation and demarcation of the research problem

BRICS membership is arguably the principal innovation of the diplomacy of the Zuma Administration. But here lies a significant research problem. On the one side there is firstly, the focus on idealism and human rights inspired by the country's democratic transition and promoted by former President Nelson Mandela's personal diplomacy and, secondly, the norm entrepreneurial role of South African foreign policy which was former President Thabo Mbeki's contribution to governance reform in Africa and at the global level.

On the other side there is the Zuma Administration's repositioning of South Africa's international relations which has included scaling back on promoting "western style democracy and human rights", focussing instead on "pragmatic" economic relations with the rising powers (Anthony *et al*.: 2015b: 6). This focus meshes particularly with the Zuma Administration's attraction to BRICS which largely gives expression to the "conviction that the global future lies 'in the East'" (Marthoz: 2012: 3). Not surprisingly, Cooper (2015: 4) submits that: "For South Africa, the important thing will be to highlight the benefits of engaging with BRICS without any detrimental economic or reputational damage".

The main research question therefore is: *From the perspective of geopolitical repositioning, does South Africa's BRICS-aligned club diplomacy maximise the national interest or not and does it, therefore, benefit or impact negatively on the country's global standing?*

As an exploratory proposition the argument statement is that the primacy advanced by the South African government to its BRICS diplomacy, as a form of club (or alternatively alliance) diplomacy, negatively affects the national interest. For one it places South Africa on a different path from Brazil and India. In this regard, against the backdrop of a changing global geopolitical environment, Brazil and India's growing realignment with the United States would appear to be the exact contrary of

South Africa's approach which is that of an increasingly close alignment with Russia and China. In addition, South Africa's prioritisation of BRICS and China and Russia, with the Zuma Administration regarding the forum as a "counterweight" to the Western liberal international order, arguably deviates from the *White Paper* (2011: 25) which sees BRICS as a "mechanism for consensus building".

The following research objectives are pursued:

- To develop a concept-based framework to determine and assess the nature of BRICS as an international actor; the nature and scope of club diplomacy associated with BRICS including various alliance mechanisms with specific reference to bandwagoning.
- To contextualise South Africa's BRICS membership and club diplomacy with reference to the historical and (foreign) policy dimensions thereof.
- To analyse and assess the diplomatic and geopolitical repositioning implicit in South Africa's prioritisation of the BRICS relationship.
- To evaluate these diplomatic aspirations in the light of international developments and the South African national interest.

The study is demarcated in conceptual, unit of analysis and time-frame terms. Conceptually, the study is limited to the forum and club diplomacy features of BRICS, and to the instrumental use of this particular type of diplomacy in service of geopolitical repositioning and the maximisation of the national interest. The principal units of analysis are BRICS and South Africa, including the institutional framework of club diplomacy within these actors. The time-frame extends from South Africa's accession to BRICS in 2010 right up to 2016, a year that reflected the growing divergences between Brazil and India on the one hand and China, Russia, and South Africa on the other – divergences revealed at *NetMundial* (23-24 April 2014), (see Kaul: 2014 and Stuenkel: 2015c), at the Ufa Summit (8-9 July 2015), (see Stuenkel: 2015c), and by the summit meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India and President Barack Obama of the United States (7 June 2016), (see BBC: 2016a and Panda: 2016). For the sake of completeness there are, however, also

brief historical references to the formation of the Russia, India, China forum (RIC) in 2001 and its subsequent development into BRIC.

## 1.4 Research methodology

The research design is that of an exploratory literature-documentary study. According to Babbie and Mouton (2003: 79-80) a large proportion of social research is conducted to explore a topic, or to provide a basic familiarity with that topic. This approach is typical when a researcher examines a new interest or when the subject of study itself is relatively new. Exploratory studies are typically undertaken, *inter alia*, to develop new hypotheses about an existing phenomenon, and to determine priorities for future research. According to Mouton (2002: 179-180) a literature review study provides an overview of scholarship in a certain discipline through an analysis of trends and debates. In effect, with reference to the present study, the object is to determine what has already been written in academic literature with reference to theory and empirical evidence about the BRICS concept. This will make it possible to identify the principal ideas, conclusions and theories concerning BRICS which in turn will assist in identifying possible gaps in the literature and thereby to facilitate further analysis and understanding of the BRICS. The literature studied will include both primary as well as secondary sources as outlined below.

Furthermore, the study takes on a critical-analytical approach, based on a contemporary revision and application of the tenets of classical geopolitics in respect of the use of BRICS club diplomacy. Inferences and conclusions are drawn from empirical (documentary and factual) evidence. As far as data sources are concerned, the conceptual and theoretical dimensions are literature based. The BRICS-South African case study relies on primary sources, for example, institutional and policy documents (including White Papers), policy statements, briefings, *communiqués*, media releases and statements available in the public domain, and on secondary sources in the form of academic books, journal articles, research reports and media reporting on BRIC/BRICS and on South African foreign policy and diplomacy.

## 1.5 The structure of the study

The study is structured as follows:

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter outlines the scope, aim and objectives of the study. It further identifies the research theme and formulates and demarcates the research problem and question. It also provides a literature survey, an indication of the research methodology as well as an outline of the study's structure.

**Chapter 2: BRICS and South African diplomacy: a framework for analysis**

This chapter clarifies two concepts in order to develop a framework of analysis. These are, firstly, BRICS as a forum type of international actor and, secondly, the club diplomacy associated with BRICS. As a forum actor, the emphasis is on constructed regionalism and multilateralism. In respect of diplomacy the emphasis is on the nature, scope and functions of club diplomacy. The geopolitical repositioning is based on a critique and revision of classical geopolitics, in order to determine what BRICS club diplomacy holds for the practice and direction of South Africa's foreign relations and its use of the diplomatic instrument.

**Chapter 3: BRICS and South Africa: accession, foreign policy rationale and forum diplomacy as a blend of innovation and atavism**

This chapter contextualises the BRICS and South Africa's accession thereto. As such it focuses on the historical, institutional and policy dimensions of this club diplomacy relationship. The South African government's declared motivations for accession to BRICS are detailed. This will permit in subsequent chapters an examination of the effectiveness of the association for the realisation of South Africa's diplomatic goals.

**Chapter 4: BRICS and South Africa: a critique of BRICS club diplomacy and South Africa's geopolitical repositioning**

This chapter analyses the diplomatic and geopolitical implications of South Africa's BRICS membership and club diplomacy with specific reference to possible "decoupling" from the West, to South Africa's view of BRICS as a counterweight to the West, and to the apparent alignment with China and Russia. This suggests that Meena (2013: 580) is mistaken in contending that the forum dovetails with classical geopolitics as the exact opposite of "containment" is happening. South Africa's prioritisation of BRICS and the geopolitical repositioning implicit therein is critiqued in the light of international developments, the South African national interest and classical geopolitical theories.

**Chapter 5: Conclusion: evaluation and recommendations**

This chapter, by returning to the initial aim, problem questions and objectives of the study and supported by a summary of its contents, states, justifies and evaluates key findings and the impact thereof. On the basis of this, policy and diplomacy as well as future research recommendations are made.

# Chapter 2: BRICS and South African diplomacy: a framework for analysis

## 2.1 Introduction

In the view of Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2013a) the BRICS countries are "driven by shared interests" both in the definition of their respective national interests and as sharing "a common vision of the world of the future". Bilateral relations among BRICS countries were "on the rise and improving across many sectors", including politically and economically. As well, the BRICS leaders were "frank and open to each other". Clearly, the South African Government views membership of BRICS as beneficial but this is surely a hasty judgement and a deeper examination is required as it is the contention of this study that South Africa's adhesion to BRICS does not come cost-free.

Accordingly, this chapter contains first a brief account of the forum's history and then an explanation why its "founder member", Russia, raised the forum's stature to head of state / government level. Next, this chapter will provide a theoretical framework for the discussions in this study with specific reference to the nature of BRICS as an international actor. An important aspect is the determination of whether BRICS is indeed an alliance of like-minded equal partners. There are several variations to alliance politics which may be determined by the objectives of the states concerned but also by their relative strengths. These variations include concepts such as "alignment", "balancing", "bandwagoning", "piggybacking", and "free riding". It may be that more than one concept characterises an interstate relationship where, for example, one state bandwagons and the other free rides. BRICS has been described as a "bridge" and an "intermediary" which terms can also be applied to illustrate the concept of diplomacy. As will be discussed, diplomacy is directly connected to the states-system. It will be shown that BRICS is located within a variant of multilateral diplomacy known as club diplomacy, a particularly state-centric form of diplomacy.

BRIC, as it was initially, was not created in a vacuum and its diplomatic emergence owes much to the phenomenon of global interdependence known as globalisation.

This brings to the fore a consideration of new regions or of regionalism and the contention that the BRICS countries have fashioned a "BRICS region" as an alternate paradigm to the Western "dominance" of international economic relations. This then finally brings the discussion to a consideration of the geopolitical aspects of BRICS and specifically the classical geopolitical theories. This theoretical background will assist in determining whether or not BRICS membership is indeed beneficial to the South African national interest.

## 2.2 Brief historical account of BRIC and BRICS

BRIC had an antecedent in the form of the annual Russia, India, China (RIC) foreign ministers-level meetings which had been taking place since 2001 to discuss Asian security-related issues. In 2006, at Russia's initiative, Brazil was included "thus turning Jim O'Neill's idea into a political reality" (Stuenkel: 2015a: 10). O'Neill and his firm, Goldman Sachs, had published papers in 2001 and 2003 predicting that "in less than 40 years, the BRICs economies together could be larger than the G6 [G7 less Canada] in US dollar terms. By 2025 they could account for over half the size of the G6. Currently they are worth less than 15%. Of the current G6, only the US and Japan may be among the six largest economies in US dollar terms in 2050" (Wilson and Purushothaman: 2003: 2).

Although, as Stuenkel (2015a: 11) points out, in 2006 the "unifying factor" was "discontent about the distribution of power in the IMF and the World Bank" and the G8's unwillingness "to include emerging powers", the initial BRIC foreign ministers' discussions dealt with "political and global challenges". The Russian initiative in raising the BRICs meetings to head of state / government level as from Yekaterinburg in 2009 was inspired, *inter alia*, by the need to better coordinate responses to the global financial and economic crisis of 2007-2008 onwards. The Yekaterinburg Summit is regarded as having established the forum as a new actor in international politics. Its initial purpose was to represent and strengthen the collective voice of the so-called major emerging economies in discussions and negotiations concerning the system of international economic governance although the forum early on took on purely political and diplomatic objectives as well.

The BRIC concept had a number of other antecedents as well. In 2003, India, Brazil and South Africa joined to form the IBSA Dialogue Forum which was supposed to hold annual summits at head of state / government level but the last such summit took place in 2011. Also, apart from United Nations (UN) System / WTO multilateral gatherings, Brazil, India, China and South Africa came to be included in global governance "club diplomacy" summits at head of state level as from the 2003 G8 Evian Summit (Shaw *et al.*: 2008: 32). (Russia attended as a member of the G8). Then, after a succession of annual G8 summits the Heiligendamm Process (HP) was proposed at the 2007 G8 summit to institutionalise dialogue between the G8 and the so-called "Outreach 5" consisting of Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa. However, the HP initiative was overtaken by the global financial and economic crisis which prompted President GW Bush of the United States to call the first G20 Leaders (heads of state or of government) summit in 2008, this step having previously been suggested by Canadian Premier Paul Martin (2013: 734).

Since 2008 South Africa has attended all of the annual G20 summits and since 2011 also all the annual BRICS summits. It can therefore be said that South Africa is well integrated in or at least well represented in key global governance and global economic governance forums. And, indeed, it can be said that the two forums, the G20 and BRICS, can theoretically function more effectively in shoring up global governance if they can be directed to collaborate. As Wei (2013: 47) writes, "BRICS can play a role ... inside the G20 in which emerging economies and developing countries coordinate positions and strive to maximise their interests". Within the G20 the BRICS could be a counterpoise to the G8 now G7 which is one of the interesting challenges and opportunities which the creation of these two platforms has provided South African diplomacy with.

### 2.3 Russia's reasons for elevating the BRIC to head of state level

Superficially Stuenkel (2015a: 6) is correct in asserting that the global financial and economic crisis of 2007-2008 onwards was both "a key element ... in strengthening the narrative of multipolarisation" and in influencing Russia in 2009 to upgrade the annual meetings of BRICs foreign ministers to head of state / government level with the intention of better coordinating responses to the crisis. Stuenkel (2015a: 6) adds

that “transforming the BRICS into a political grouping” also reflected an attempt “to develop common positions in several areas, starting with global financial governance”.

However, Gabuev (2015) contends that when in 2009 Russia convened the Yekaterinburg Summit it also had other reasons for establishing a select grouping of significant countries ostensibly in partnership or alliance with Moscow. This was a time when Moscow was facing increasing isolation from the West as a result of the August 2008 Russo-Georgian War. High-level meetings like the Russia-EU and Russia-NATO summits had been cancelled. Consequently the 2009 BRICS Summit was intended to signal that there was an alternative to a West-dominated global order. Gabuev juxtaposes Russia’s geostrategic considerations in 2009 with those in 2015 when it again hosted the BRICS Summit, this time at Ufa, and as at Yekaterinburg, again concurrently with a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). According to Gabuev jointly hosting the two summits was even more important for Russia in 2015 than it had been in 2009. Indeed, with growing pressure from the West because of its role in the Ukraine crisis, Moscow was “desperate to show that attempts to isolate Russia are doomed to fail and that the country still has many powerful and loyal friends”. Two narratives “which have become dominant in Russian foreign policy” were reflected at Ufa: “That Russia is a leading non-Western power aiming to build a truly multipolar world, and that Eurasia is a new centre of economic and political gravity, where Russia and China can peacefully cooperate without US interference”.

The significance of the above analysis is that it suggests, specifically in the case of Russia but not only, that national interest considerations were as important as notions of multilateralism when the BRICS countries chose to adhere to the association or forum. Cilliers (2017: 5), for instance, writes that China benefited from inviting South Africa to join BRIC as in so doing it “succeeded in dismantling the potential role of IBSA ... [which] has subsequently largely fallen by the wayside ... that had strengthened rival India’s claim to a permanent seat on the Security Council”. This is therefore a convenient place to examine the nature of BRICS as an international actor and its theoretical underpinning.

## 2.4 BRICS: its nature as an international actor

BRICS is frequently referred to as the “BRICS forum” and it is submitted that this would seem to be the most appropriate appellation in view of its current lack of formal permanent management structures other than the annual heads of state / government summits. Indeed, the problem in studying BRICS, writes Utzig (2014: 2) is how to define the forum as an actor in international relations. As she explains the BRICS do not have a “constitutive treaty” and therefore do not have the legal status of an international organisation or intergovernmental organisation (IGO). In effect, “the group is at the margin of public international law”. According to Archer (2015: 29-31) an IGO should possess the following elements: firstly, a “formal instrument of agreement” between the governments creating the IGO; secondly, a permanent secretariat with “sufficient organisational structure and autonomy” performing ongoing tasks and, thirdly, it should possess the capacity to pursue and execute the collective will and common interests of the member states. Though in practice the IGO may not end up achieving this it should at least not have the “express aim of the pursuit of the interests of only one member, regardless of the desires of others”. In effect, the IGO “should be separate from the continued control of one member. It is this autonomous structure that differentiates a number of international organisations from a series of conferences or congresses”.

BRICS does have a number of bodies or councils established such as the BRICS Business Council and the BRICS Think Tanks Council (these also have national-level equivalents) and notably the NDB and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), but these are not central autonomous structures furthering the administrative and organisational work of the BRICS as a separate unified entity. The NDB and CRA, though the most prominent, “permanent”, and formally constituted entities of the various BRICS bodies or entities, are not responsible for providing governance or secretarial services to BRICS as an organisation, entity or forum. The one is a development bank, the other a fund to bailout countries struggling to meet their international payments. In sum, the NDB and CRA are actually separate from BRICS and could well survive the “mother” association or forum should it be disbanded.

In the absence of BRICS qualifying for IGO status the question can be asked whether BRICS is an “alliance”. According to Dwivedi (2012: 224) “alliances play a central role in international relations because they are seen to be an integral part of statecraft ... one of the central foreign policy debates in every country centres on the issue of which nation to ally with and for how long. Strong and weak nations alike feel the need to form alliances. Weak states enter into alliance when they need protection against strong states [that is], they enter into alliances to defend themselves. Strong states enter into alliances to counter other strong states [that is], they enter into alliance to maintain balance of power. States expect their allies to help militarily and diplomatically during the time of conflict. The commitment entered into by the alliance may be formal or informal [that is], there may or may not be treaties between them”.

Dwivedi (2012: 225-226) provides explanations of other forms of alliances such “alignment” which occurs when a state cooperates with another state to the extent of pursuing identical policies with the aim of securing mutual security goals. Alignments can be strengthened or established by entering into a formal (treaty) alliance. “Balancing” occurs when a state allies with another state or group of states in order to deter a prevailing threat. This is “external balancing” whereas “internal balancing” occurs when a state augments its resources most commonly it’s military. “Bandwagoning” occurs when a state joins a stronger state or group of states for the sake of protection and payoffs but this type of alliance implies that the bandwagoning state surrenders a degree of its independence as it emulates the security policies of the protecting state or states. States can bandwagon with another state either from fear or from greed.

Dwivedi (2012: 227) cites George Liska’s analysis that “in economic terminology alliances aim at maximising gains and sharing liabilities. The decision to align, in what form, and with whom or not to align, as part of a deliberate policy – is made with reference to national interests”. And Walt’s conclusion, cited by Dwivedi (2012: 231) is that: “balancing is more common than bandwagoning because an alignment that preserves most of a state’s freedom of action is preferable to accepting subordination. Intentions can change and perceptions are unreliable, it is safer to balance against potential threats than to hope that strong states will remain

benevolent". It is also Walt's assessment that weak states are more likely to bandwagon, a view shared by Notshulwana (2012: 8-9). Randall Schweller's alternative or "balance of interests" theory, also cited by Dwivedi (2012: 232), is that "unthreatened states" resort to bandwagoning as a means of responding to "opportunities in their environment". In Schweller's view "bandwagoning is a common form of behaviour, especially among dissatisfied states" because states also "align for reasons other than security". Therefore, as well as "fear", state's motives can include "greed" or simply put, "opportunistic reasons". In Schweller's view "balancing is an extremely costly activity but bandwagoning rarely involves costs" (Dwivedi: 2012: 232). It is submitted that the validity of the last contention must surely vary from case to case.

Besada and Tok (2014: 77) contend that "the concept of soft balancing strategy is analytically useful in assessing South Africa's participation in BRICS and the consequences thereof". Notably, the two authors view BRICS as "an alliance among rivals in international markets, attempting to meet their own national interests". Of specific interest is their description of "a soft balancing strategy" as an effort by developing countries to combine in order to increase their bargaining power in matters of "trade, security, infrastructure, and representation". It is here submitted that soft balancing can well overlap with bandwagoning particularly taking into account the further elaboration of bandwagoning by Walt (1991: 55): It "involves unequal exchange; the vulnerable state makes asymmetrical concessions to the dominant power and accepts a subordinate role … Bandwagoning is an accommodation to pressure (either latent or manifest) … Most important of all, bandwagoning suggests a willingness to support or tolerate illegitimate actions by the dominant ally". Pressure can mean many things, for example, resentment at United States dominance of the international system.

Olivier (2013a: 408) uses the expression "piggybacking", but piggybacking can easily become "bandwagoning", particularly in asymmetrical relationships. There is also the concept of "free riding" where a state retains control of its own destiny and freedom of action while benefitting from actions undertaken by another state. United States President Barack Obama, for example, has expressed his aggravation at free riding on the grounds that America's allies fail to pay their "fair share" in the defence of the

liberal international order. As the President put it the defence of this order "against jihadist terror, Russian adventurism, and Chinese bullying depends in part … on the willingness of other nations to share the burden with the US" (Goldberg: 2016). Paradoxically, in the case of Africa, it is the stronger states that are the free riders, at least so contends Notshulwana (2012: 4) with reference to the role of the major powers on the continent.

It is worth noting the meaning of the word "forum" which is the descriptive term most commonly attached to BRICS. This is a word with an ancient etymology going back to the Roman Empire where it meant "a large public place in an ancient Roman city that was used as the centre of business", as *Merriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary Online* defines it. The *Oxford Living Dictionaries Online* also gives the added meaning of "a meeting or medium where ideas and views on a particular issue can be exchanged". *Ab initio* it can be suggested that this meaning fits in exactly with current BRICS practice.

### 2.5 Diplomacy, multilateralism, club diplomacy and BRICS

Former President Medvedev's depictions of the BRICS as a "bridge" and an "intermediary" (Akulov: 2012) serve well as an illustration of the description of diplomacy by du Plessis (2006: 124-125) as "the master institution of international relations" designed to manage international, and principally interstate, relations. At its most basic what is diplomacy? Bungane (2013: 18) cites the classic definitions: firstly, Sir Harold Nicolson's account of "diplomacy as, the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys". Secondly, that of Sir Ernest Satow: "It is the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states". Bungane adds that for Berridge *et al.* (2001: 1) the emphasis is on "official channels of communication employed by members of the states system", with "negotiations" as the essential method employed. And for Barston diplomacy is a tool used by states "to implement their foreign policy objectives without resorting to the use of violence". Bungane (2013: 18) continues by citing du Plessis (2006: 124) that "in the context of foreign relations,

diplomacy has been defined as the 'art of advancing national interests through the sustained exchange of information among nation states and peoples'".

As seen from the above definitions diplomacy is directly connected to the states-system. It is also true that throughout the 20th Century non-state actors, (such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), for example Oxfam, Amnesty International and *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF), increasingly came to play significant roles in the management and conduct of international relations although, it is nevertheless submitted, their activities are carried within and in the context of the states-system. Therefore, Heine (2006: 4) argues that the "nation-state" remains "a key component" of the international system even if it is "by no means the only one". As du Plessis (2006: 125) writes: "Primarily ... [diplomacy] is a political instrument with which to maximise the national interest of states and to pursue foreign policy goals and objectives" and it is a "peaceful instrument of foreign policy" though "seldom, if ever, used on its own. It is mostly used in association with economic, psychological and military instruments". Du Plessis' description of diplomacy as a "master institution of international relations" is apt because it suggests that the practice of diplomacy, particularly its official "professional" and state-centric variant is as close as the international community comes to having a constitution with a system of rules. This is also what distinguishes diplomacy from foreign policy as it does diplomacy from a "political system" or state. As Keens-Soper (2001: 100-101) says, the latter – or "body politic" – "is a unity with a common good or common will as its essential principle of existence". In contrast, "a diplomatic system of states proclaims no such principle of substantive unity". The Westphalian concept of sovereignty precludes this. Yet, what does distinguish "a diplomatic system is the existence of rules of procedure and not common policies. A states-system is systematic only in the sense of being a system of diplomacy. War by comparison is haphazard". This in turn distinguishes diplomacy from foreign policy which "can be described and analysed but hardly theorised. It is a historical enquiry". Because diplomacy is a system of rules of procedure which are essential if foreign policy decisions are to be intelligible and meaningful and without which there could be no predictability at all in international relations, that system of diplomacy, continues Keens-Soper (2001: 101), can be theorised just as constitutional theory is theorised. The comparison is both apt and valid because diplomacy does after all provide international relations

with just enough logic or even unity of sorts to give meaning, value and permanency to the concept of the sovereign equality of states.

The “logic” or “unity” provided by the “system of diplomacy” then at the very least may help to minimise the element of risk in foreign policymaking and execution through the system’s provision of a quantifiable procedure for interstate relations, a procedure known to all members of the states-system. In this sense it helps to balance a little the disadvantage or obstacle the policymaker faces which is the tendency to view the “outside world”, that is the foreign affairs environment, through the prism of his or her own national life and experience. Evidence-based foreign policy analysis remains essential for minimising risk but according to Kissinger (1973: 328-329) there still remains that “incommensurability” between “a nation’s domestic experience” which tends “to inhibit its comprehension of foreign affairs”. (See further the discussions on risk in foreign policymaking and the pernicious effect of ideology on policymaking, at subchapters 3.4 and 3.5, below).

If BRICS illustrates the functioning of diplomacy within a states-system – and in the context of the sovereign equality of states – then it also represents a paradox. In practice it only becomes possible for sovereign equal states to cooperate as they do in BRICS, while at the same time acknowledging and claiming to respect each other’s sovereignty, if they water down their self-conceptions of sovereignty. For “absolute” sovereignty makes no sense and over the centuries, since the inception of Westphalian diplomacy, the practice of diplomacy has incrementally contributed to watering down the concept of sovereignty although, again because of the Westphalian settlement, this process can partially but probably not completely, be reversed at any time, particularly by a powerful country like the United States, although a complete reversal would be an unworkable absurdity. An important vehicle for this watering down process through diplomacy has been the multilateral form of diplomacy – defined as the practice of involving more than two nations or parties in achieving diplomatic solutions to supranational problems (Mahbubani: 2013: 248). BRICS is considered a form of multilateral diplomacy.

For example, McGoldrick (2004: 446) has written that the EU is “building a world peace by watering down national sovereignty, and expanding the network of

international institutions and laws. Multilateralism and peaceful internationalism has become a kind of European white man's burden, a *mission civilisatrice*. The ICC [International Criminal Court] is as much part of EU idealism as of the UN. It cuts little ice with the Russians or the Chinese, but Europeans believe in it". That this *"mission civilisatrice"* will be a slow, perhaps even painful process, and dependant to a large extent on acceptance or at least tolerance by the great powers, is illustrated by the statement made on 14 November 2002 by John Bolton, then US Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, and cited by McGoldrick (2004: 446): The "US has decided that the ICC has unacceptable consequences for its national sovereignty. Specifically, the ICC is an organisation whose precepts go against fundamental American notions of sovereignty, checks and balances, and national independence. It is an agreement that is harmful to the national interest of the US". McGoldrick does acknowledge that "one reason for wanting the US to be part of the ICC, or other international institutions, is to check its power and curb its excesses. Perhaps even to pacify it".

Bolton spoke at a time when US foreign policy was characterised by a very high degree of unilateralism. However, from around 2007 the United States steered its foreign policy back towards a much more multilateralist course. Yet world politics never came close to the "partnership of nations" that President George HW Bush had called for in the immediate post-Cold War period (Kissinger: 1994: 804-5). Factors accounting for the current negative atmosphere include the ongoing effects of the global financial and economic crisis of 2007-2008, the transition towards greater multipolarity, the rise of anti-globalisation populism in many mainly Western countries, protectionism, nationalism and xenophobia. In the words of Laïdi (2013), "multilateralism is dying". His suggestion that the world is returning to traditional power politics seems to be borne out by almost every media report on international affairs. With globalisation pausing *The Economist* (2013) coined the term: "the gated globe". In conclusion then, not only is the nation-state or state still "a key component" of the international system, as Heine (2006: 4) conceded, but sovereignty retains its elasticity, sometimes in retreat, sometimes advancing.

As a form of diplomacy, the BRICS concept is still relatively new – Qobo and Dube (2012: 5) describe both the G20 and BRICS as "new innovations in global

governance that ... reflect the fact that the global system is in a state of fluidity and transition". But BRICS is also located within an older variant of multilateral diplomacy known as club diplomacy. "BRICS is effectively a club", writes Grant-Makokera (2013), because of its "loose arrangement" and its lack of any "permanent institutional structures to support its activities". Grant-Makokera compares BRICS to the G8 (now G7) and adds that "a crucial part of club diplomacy" are the closed session meetings of heads of state / government which is exactly the BRICS format. According to Badie (2011) club diplomacy has a long history which he traces back to 1815 and the Congress System initiated at the Congress of Vienna. This was an alliance between Russia, Great Britain, Prussia and Austria, and soon joined by France. Its object was to maintain European stability. Club diplomacy resurfaced after the First World War and survived throughout the Cold War bipolar system. Badie (2011) sees club diplomacy mainly embodied by the Permanent Five of the UN Security Council, and like Grant-Makokera, the G8 / G7. However, he considers club diplomacy to be a "façade, concealing the ineffectiveness of a world policy, suffering from a lack of regulation and the too many divergences between the ruling states". This system through its exclusion of most countries has "created a humiliating system which produces more and more frustration among those uninvited countries". The figures speak for themselves: in the Congress System five states excluded ten others belonging to the European system of diplomacy, the G8 excludes one hundred and eighty-four states and the G20 excludes one hundred and seventy-three states. At the same time the very state-centric nature of club diplomacy is evident both from its origins as well as its practice. In this sense, whatever the motives over the centuries behind club diplomacy, and specifically those behind BRICS, it can be wondered, like *The Economist* (2013) asks regarding Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs), whether BRICS isn't more of an alternative rather than a complement to multilateralism.

At the same time, club diplomacy can be described as a partial or piecemeal attempt at addressing the inability of states to reach agreement on such vital global issues as the world trading system and the all too evident failure to reform the post Second World War multilateral global governance institutions, just to give two examples. This form of diplomacy has become a trend and the UK *National Security Strategy* (United Kingdom: 2010: 15) recognised that: "We are already seeing new systems of

influence develop where countries share interests and goals which are outside the traditional international architecture". The term used by Naím (2009) for club diplomacy is "minilateralism" which he describes as "a smarter, more targeted approach: we should bring to the table the smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem". However, Badie's concerns remain specifically regarding interstate divergences. So, of course, the reverse side of the coin to Naím's "targeted approach" is that the same participants may not join forces on other issues, either because the subject matters are not national priorities or because their differences are too deep. This aspect comes through in the description by Patrick (2011) of the United States' "'horses for courses' approach – selecting the multilateral forum most appropriate to the task(s) at hand, tailored to US objectives, sensitive to US freedom of action, and likely to be effective. On these criteria, alone, the G8 needs to remain in America's institutional stable". Like Badie, Walt (2009) ties club diplomacy or minilateralism, with its "decidedly realist approach" to state-centric power politics and regards it as a reversion to 19th Century European great power diplomacy, his assumption being that to achieve anything meaningful in international relations it is necessary to have "on board" the major powers because they have more influence than weaker states.

If club diplomacy is essentially state-centric then the very epitome of state-centric club diplomacy would appear to be the BRICS. As Laïdi (2012: 615) puts it: the BRICS countries "consider that state sovereignty trumps all, including, of course, the political nature of its underpinning regimes". In this regard it can also be noted that BRICS has been described as constituting a new "region". (See the discussions at subchapters 2.6 and 4.8, below). For instance, Tsheola (2014: 189) proposes that "the nomenclature of 'nominal regionalism' appears to be the most befitting for the BRICS set; and, the establishment of the [NDB] Bank does not help because it appears to suggest that the set has no global economic or political agenda other than being a vehicle for 'mobilising resources and asserting state sovereignty' ... Ironically, the BRICS set appears to be an attempt at regionalism that functions to inscribe state powers wherein the state elite exercises and reasserts sovereignty through the regional entity".

This is not to diminish the success of various “ad hoc diplomatic gatherings”, as Mahbubani (2013: 254) calls club diplomacy and he attributes the G20 with having “saved the world from an economic meltdown in early 2009”. He submits that “its ability to deliver results also shows the value of multilateral diplomacy. The success of a club is shown when outsiders clamour to get in and no insiders want to leave it. This is certainly true of the G20”. As Cooper and Farooq (2015: 1) elaborate: “Club diplomacy downplays contentious issues while elevating and reinforcing issues of common interest”. That is obviously when members already have a prior inclination to agree. Unfortunately, it is also true that international politics were even more complex by 2016 than they had been in 2009 and the Crimea and Ukraine crises in 2014 saw considerable tension within the G20 pitting Russia, but also the BRICS countries, against the United States and its Western allies.

In these circumstances what can be said about club diplomacy, in general terms, is that although it may have the capacity to draw together countries which are “like-minded” on certain issues, this mode of diplomacy is in itself symptomatic of an international “system” that is very far from like-minded. This should be taken as a red flag warning of turbulent times ahead, or at the very least of “messy multilateralism” increasingly becoming the “order of the day”, as the President of the influential US Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Haass, put it (Patrick: 2011). And no doubt this helps explain why Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2016), though expressing South Africa’s appreciation “of the leadership the G20 has demonstrated in helping to achieve progress in multilateral institutions”, has also been careful to state her government’s position that “the G20 is not a substitute for the UN, but should support and add value to what is being done within the UN context”.

On the other hand, the question can also be tabled whether it would not be more appropriate to express caution concerning the BRICS rather than the G20 which is after all a more inclusive association. As already suggested, South Africa’s BRICS association does not come cost-free as it must coordinate its foreign policy with much stronger partners in a context of power politics.

## 2.6 BRICS and the new regionalism

BRIC was not created in a vacuum and its diplomatic emergence as RIC in 2001, then as BRIC in 2006, and its first head of state / government summit in 2009, owes much to the phenomenon of globalisation, which Meena (2013: 575) describes as an economic process that has created a global interdependence for commodities but that has also created flow networks which have improved the mobility of persons as well as of goods and services to such an extent that this has transformed peoples' understanding of "space". As the different national and regional economies in the world have become more enmeshed "within a network of global financial flows and transactions" so has space, which is now "relative" in human understanding, shrunk or moved closer.

Du Plessis (2001: 4) speaks of the "deterritorialising of the geopolitical world order, not as a borderless world but as a loosening of the spatial order (norms, rules, institutions, hierarchies)". In effect, as du Plessis asserts with reference to Critical Geopolitics, the latter "envisages a new dynamic world order and emergent ways in which space and time are experienced" in a manner different "from modern Western categories". Meena (2013: 575) continues that "one can argue that it was possible to conceive of the BRICS ... as a BRICS space or group of states because these states ended up deriving economic benefits from global capitalism during the same phase and economic gains translated into assertiveness in the political realm". Meena (2013: 577) adds that "the BRICS are making their presence felt in the international system by both contributing to it and also deriving benefits from it due to the globalisation process". Specifically, this enmeshing of regional economies within a global network also implies that regions are becoming increasingly significant factors or players in international relations.

Nolte (2010: 882) asserts that the global financial crisis underway since 2007-2008 may have accelerated the reconfiguration of the global order towards multipolarity but it also appears to have benefitted the rising powers and BRICS brings together the big emerging powers. In this process, continues Nolte: "The proliferation of multilateral and interregional forums (G8, G8 + 5, G20, BRICs, IBSA, etc.) gives … [the rising powers] more voice in the emerging global governance structure … [and

reflects] the fact that they represent different world regions". Nolte (2010: 882) concludes "that we live in a world of regions, that there is an emerging regional architecture of world politics, and that a 'multiregional system of international relations' is in the making". At the same time the "regional orders" are bound to be impacted upon by the rise of regional powers and Nolte (2010: 882) asks: "What are the repercussions for the global order? Will international politics become more conflict prone"? Nolte's question is a pertinent one for while the emergence of new regions or of regionalism might imply a consolidation of cooperation from a local to a multistate regional level, it also implies a possible differentiation or distancing from other regional groupings or units. Indeed, the world appears to be entering into a period of fragmentation. Scholvin (2014: xi) even goes so far as to say that "regional international relations have become somewhat detached from global international relations. In some parts of the world, warfare remains a means of interstate rivalry, in others, it does not". Du Plessis (2001: 6) explains this as follows: "In the West foreign policy increasingly is devoted to managing relations among highly interdependent countries that cannot afford to coerce one another. For non-Western countries, the threat of domination, both military and economic, and the absence of benefits from interdependence and domestic stability place the prospect of coercion on the foreign policy agenda". Dunn (1998-2000) has observed, that the "zones of peace, wealth and democracy contained only 15% of the world's population", whereas the rest of the world's population lives "in zones of turmoil".

Meena (2013: 566) writes that there has come a new understanding of regions as being formed at "the interface between global economic and technological forces and national realities", an effect of globalisation which has created new kinds of "spatial patterns in the world system". If BRICS is to be understood as a new "region" it would have to be in this sense because the reality of the forum is precisely that it is spread over four continents. And if BRICS is a region, does it make sense in geostrategic terms? Meena (2013: 567) uses the term "strategic constructions". Meena's thesis corresponds closely to the constructivist notion that *"Anarchy is what states make of it"*, (this being the title of a well-known article by Alexander Wendt: (1992: 391). See in particular the paragraph at pages 394-395). Therefore, it could be said that the BRICS countries have fashioned their own "anarchy" by forming a new "BRICS region". As Nolte (2010: 881) expresses it, the first BRICS presidential-

level summit in 2009 made “constructivist colleagues in International Relations (IR) theory feel reaffirmed”. To begin with, Meena (2013: 568-569) notes that “space as an absolute is understood as a geometrical system of organisation ... in which people and objects are located and move through. Here, space is understood as natural, given, essential, and measurable”. It follows that “the BRICS countries individually constitute absolute space on the earth’s surface”. But then there is so-called “relative” space, according to Meena (2013: 571) which is not dependant on the fixed geometries of absolute space but rather on the perspective of the observer. In effect, the theory here is that space is not just physical or the exclusive domain of the geographer. Instead, what gives meaning to geographical factors, what makes them important, is “the way that they exist in our minds”, as Sholvin (2014: 26) puts it. Seen in this way space is no longer only physical or the exclusive domain of the geographer. For example, as Meena (2013: 571) points out: “global north” and “global south” do not mean the same thing for the geographer or for the trade negotiator or economist.

Meena (2013: 573) considers BRICS to be an example of the “social construction of space” constructed to offer, *inter alia*, an alternate paradigm to the Western dominance of international economic relations, meaning this strategy has been designed “in relation to that of the ‘West’”. As Anthony *et al*. (2015a: 2) write, the rise of BRICS is in part a response to what Beijing views as the domination of “the international stage ... by Europe and the US”. Referring to the human phenomena of “spatial consciousness” and “geographical imagination”, Meena (2013: 577-578) describes the BRICS as such a “geographical imagination where the constituent states have been able to identify / recognise the relationship among them and they have been able to forge a group based on certain common characteristics and features. This recognition of commonalities, in turn, creates the common ground for the members to forge a group and helps to distinguish it from similar entities, in this case, the West”. The concept of identity which here appears is a key constructivist element.

Indeed, with regard to identity, Meena’s focus on “commonalities” and the forging of a “group” overlaps with the discussion by Brűtsch and Papa (2013: 306-307) where in the course of “coordinated bargaining” the effort to form a “community”, in

contradistinction to a "coalition", "*can* change actors' perceptions of their partners, of themselves, and of the nature of their endeavour ... [This may] 'engender collective identities' that transform coalitions into 'imagined' communities. To make this happen, states must re-invest part of their cooperation gains in the creation of a 'friendly' environment and shared institutions that can foster 'mutual trust and responsiveness'. More importantly, the putative members of an 'imagined' community must be prepared to include each other in their decision-making processes, to revisit criteria to distinguish friends and foes, to embark in collective enterprises and to address common challenges on the basis of a shared normative discourse". And Scholvin (2014: 16), sounding a constructivist note, disputes why common borders should be a "defining feature of regionness" when it is a "fact" that "regional powers create their spheres of influence by tying other states economically and politically to them".

Scholvin refers to the intellectual contribution of Richard Hartshorne who believed that geography was more than simply a physical science because the influence of people on the landscape had to be taken into account in order to arrive at a useful explanation of the nature of a place, region, or geographic feature (Van Otten and Bellafiore: 2016). As Scholvin (2014: 42-43) explains, Hartshorne put forward four defining features of functional or sustainable political units and it is the third and fourth criteria that are of particular interest and value for the purpose of determining whether BRICS is indeed a region. The third requirement is that "all subunits must be bound together by an agreed standard of what is desirable vis-à-vis societal organisation. Hartshorne termed this standard 'homogeneity'". This related mainly to cultural and social values but also depended on "overcoming spatiomaterial disparities" such as different levels of economic development. To maintain "functionality", states must achieve a minimum degree of ideational and material uniformity (Scholvin (2014: 42).

Hartshorne's fourth requirement is that of "contiguity", the degree to which the subunits are tied together by centripetal forces. In addition to contiguity there should be "coherence" which relates to "the direct integration of every subunit into the whole ... If either coherence or contiguity is low, subunits will form links with areas lying beyond the borders of the whole". Crucially all of this finds application at the level of

international alliances "whose adherents form a contiguous system of states, or a political unit" and they can be analysed on the basis of coherence and contiguity (Scholvin: 2014: 43). Indicators for contiguity include physical barriers which tear a unit apart, and communications and transport which pull a unit together (Scholvin: 2014: 44). Importantly, as Scholvin (2014: 44-45) reports, there should also be "grand visions" or ideational factors, meaning a *"raison d'être"* or "shared concept", as these provide a "unifying concept" which can "ideationally bind together all subunits ... [which] should [then] be expected to merge. Being a political idea, a *raison d'être* is the starting point for the making of geopolitics. Political ideas lead to political decisions and political action. The latter often has material expressions in geographical space – indeed, it forms geographical space".

## 2.7 Heartland and Rimland – BRICS and the return of Classical Geopolitics

Constructivism represents a considerable movement away – or distancing – from Classical Geopolitics. Scholvin (2014: 27) reports that "many adherents of Critical Geopolitics see nothing except for ideology in Geopolitics". Yet, to the point made by the same author (2014: 4) that geographical factors, though "necessary" in explaining "many social phenomena", are "insufficient" by themselves in explaining occurrences, Kaplan (2012) responds that "before geography can be overcome, it must be respected". And Kaplan adds the following explanations: "The Carpathian Mountains still separate Central Europe from the Balkans, helping to create two vastly different patterns of development, and the Himalayas still stand between India and China ... Technology has collapsed distance, but it has hardly negated geography". Kaplan elaborates further that technology has rather "increased the preciousness of disputed territory". He cites the Yale scholar Paul Bracken who observes that "the 'finite size of the earth' is now itself a force for instability: The Eurasian land mass has become a string of overlapping missile ranges". To further make his point Kaplan asks the following rhetorical question: "Why does President Vladimir Putin covet buffer zones in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, just as the czars and commissars did before him? Because Russia still constitutes a vast, continental space that is unprotected by mountains and rivers. Putin's neo-imperialism is the expression of a deep geographical insecurity". Kaplan insists that "more than ideology or domestic politics, what fundamentally defines a state is its

place on the globe. Maps capture the key facts of history, culture and natural resources".

Notwithstanding his constructivist approach to space and regions, Meena startles the reader by falling back on those most classical of geopolitical theories, namely the Heartland Theory of the British geographer Sir Halford Mackinder and its remodelled version, the Rimland Theory of the Dutch-American geostrategist Nicholas Spykman. Meena (2013: 580) justifies this on the basis that because of their geographical location, the BRICS countries as "BRICS have a global reach" – or as Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov put it: "a truly global dimension" (Brűtsch and Papa: 2013: 303) – and so, argues Meena, the forum "comfortably dovetails with the traditional geopolitical theories". Unfortunately, however, Meena's interpretation, wittingly or unwittingly, suggests quite the opposite result of that intended by the Heartland-Rimland theorists which was how to avoid world domination by the rulers of the Eurasian landmass. Indeed, as Thakur (2014: 1797) understands it, the BRICS "grouping offers both China and Russia a forum for creating a buffer zone between themselves and the West and for drawing influential nonaligned countries into their orbit".

Meena's "dovetailing" BRICS with the Heartland and Rimland theories necessitates an inquiry into what geopolitics is and what is meant by the two mentioned theories. Du Plessis (2001: 3) writes that geopolitics "examines the relationship between political actors, their spatial environment and their international behaviour". Bottelier (2011: 6) adds that it is no coincidence that there were "manifest similarities" between the Cold War United States strategy of containment and geopolitics. Paul Kennedy puts economic and military power rather than geography at the centre of his analysis to which Bottelier (2011: 20) comments that productivity and manpower are also central to geopolitical theories meaning relative economic power also matters (which Mackinder recognised).

Bottelier (2011: 27-34) writes that in about 1890, American Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan theorised that access to and domination over the world seas had been the mainspring of global power throughout the preceding five hundred years. The British geographer Sir Halford Mackinder instead insisted that "land power would come to

dominate the Earth". In the early 20th Century, the Heartland countries saw their power capacity increase through modern communications, including railways, which made hitherto landlocked resources accessible. (A contemporary version of this is China's "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) project which is discussed further on in this study). Mackinder believed the continental powers, shielded by their landmass, but able to develop stronger armies and navies, would end up dominating the world. According to Bottelier (2011: 28) Mackinder assumed that there would be "a conflict between sea-based power and land-based power … His theory became known as the Heartland Theory, because the most important geopolitical area was called the Heartland ... a vast area covering the northern interior of Eurasia. Adjacent to the Heartland were the most densely populated and economically productive areas in the world (the Inner Crescent)". Mackinder divided the world into three zones: Heartland, which is the centre of the Eurasian landmass; the Inner Crescent, which is literally the rim of Eurasia; and the Outer Crescent, which is made up of the larger Eurasian islands, Africa, the Americas and Australia. Scholvin (2014: 19) explains that, according to Mackinder, whoever controlled the Heartland could dominate the Inner Crescent, and from there, the world. The sea powers, constituting the Outer Crescent and relying on naval power to protect their economies and trading routes, would be unable to stop the Heartland power once it controlled the Inner Crescent. This was a threat that needed to be contained. As may be obvious, the Heartland power for the entirety of the 20th Century was Russia.

Spykman "took an intermediate position in between Mahan and Mackinder. While adopting Mackinder's geographical categorisation of Heartland, Inner Crescent, and Outer Crescent, he argued that it is the second region (which he called the 'Rimland') that is geopolitically the most important". The first and third regions he respectively called the Heartland and the Maritime World. Rimland was the most important "because that is where the world's foremost concentrations of population and productivity were (and are) located. The powers of the Rimland, Spykman maintained, have historically been the most dominant. Consequently, the Rimland has always striven to expand and gain control over both the Heartland as well as the Outer Crescent ... He was adamant that it was in the interests of the US not to let any other power dominate the Rimland. Spykman regarded the Soviet Union as being most capable of accomplishing that feat; thus it was the greatest possible

danger to American interests. If cooperation with the Soviets could not be maintained after the war, the only alternative was to put a halt to their expansion" (Bottelier: 2011: 33). Therefore, Spykman, believing in containment of the Heartland to secure the Maritime World, rephrased Mackinder's dictum: "Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia [and] who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world. The balance of power in Eurasia had to be preserved by the US to prevent one power from gaining control of the Heartland, maritime Europe and the Far East" (Scholvin: 2014: 21).

Fettweis (2003: 122) has written that it is a truism that the US government considers "that unbalanced power on the Eurasian landmass would still be a major threat to the United States ... It is a notion that has penetrated policy and theory to the highest levels". For example, the architect of containment, George Frost Kennan, concerned with denying the Soviet Union control of more than one centre of industrial and economic potential said that "restoring a 'Eurasian balance of power' should be of prime importance to the United States; denying one power domination of the 'Eurasian land mass' was vital" (Bottelier: 2011: 9). "The fear of a united Eurasia persists among post-Cold War geo-strategists" (Scott and Alcenat: 2008: 1-2). As seen for Spykman it was the Rimland that "was the key to global hegemony for locational reasons. [Consequently,] maritime powers, particularly the United States, had to contain their Heartlandic challengers by controlling the Rimland" (Scholvin: 2016: 15).

As Scholvin (2016: 15) further explains the Rimland theory had great impact as it "shaped world politics for half a century", still shapes US foreign policy today, "as the efforts to prevent China from dominating the East Asian and Southeast Asian Rimland suggest". The growing power of China and its increasingly aggressive initiatives in the China Seas have become hugely important focus areas for the United States. Central Asia remains important because of the constant search for energy and concerns about President Putin's occasional energy denial politics. The eastward expansion of the EU and of NATO also ties in with the Rimland theory. Central Europe is part of the West but Russia's occupation of the Crimea and destabilisation of Eastern Ukraine show that it is again looking to expand into the European Rimland.

With the world returning to traditional power politics (Laïdi: 2013), it is no doubt significant, as Scholvin (2016: 16) observes, that "today policy advisers ... are much closer to the classical branch of geopolitics". Geopolitical competition is prevalent in the European Rimland, in Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean with its "creeping militarisation" (Alden and Sidiropoulos: 2015: 9). The Indian Ocean has come to be considered part of a new geopolitical region, the Indo-Pacific, an area which is becoming the fulcrum of world politics. (According to the Australian *Defence White Paper*, the Indo-Pacific includes India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, China, the South China Sea, the United States and the extensive sea lines of communication connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Australian Government: 2016: 62 par. 2.94; 70 par. 3.9; 121 par. 5.17)). As Medcalf (2013) says "the accelerating economic and security connections between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean are creating a single strategic system" and "super-region". The "growing Indo-Pacific interconnectedness of many nations' economic and strategic interests ... [is indicated by] the fact that the Indian Ocean is now the world's busiest trade corridor, carrying two-thirds of the world's oil shipments and a third of its bulk cargo, mostly to or from East Asia" (Medcalf: 2012). Complicated by the BRICS connection, South Africa will not easily avoid the effects of the intense geostrategic competitions taking place in the Asian Rimland and off its shores

As Rumer and Stronski (2015) suggest, China's "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) giant project is challenging Russia's ambitions in Central Asia. India also views with considerable concern the geopolitical implications of OBOR – which is "arguably redrawing the continent's map" (Madan: 2016). Offshore, "the expansion of Chinese naval activism" (Alden and Sidiropoulos: 2015: 2) as seen through the maritime Silk Road Initiative and string of pearls strategy of refurbishing port facilities right up to Africa, is being countered by hard balancing on the part of India which in naval power terms is reaching "parity, and possibly superiority" with that of China (Kramnik: 2013). In addition to this "growing naval presence of emerging powers ... are the traditional players, the US, Britain and France" (Alden and Sidiropoulos: 2015: 3).

To return to Meena (2013: 580), he sees BRICS as a "geopolitical imagination which has the potential to be practised as a global geostrategic design". He says this because the BRICS "constituent countries span four continents. Russia is present in

both Europe and Asia and increasingly there is a movement that supports the idea of Eurasianism / Neo-Eurasianism after the leading geopolitical thinker Aleksandr Dugin". Meena says "the Heartland is purely Eurasian in its geographical expanse". But, like Mackinder and Spykman, he repeats that "China comprises the Rimland". India, "the third Asian component of the BRICS" is also part of the Rimland. As Meena (2013: 580) says: "This troika of Russia, China and India geographically dominate the largest continental landmass on earth, due to their respective size ranking 1st, 4th and 7th in terms of their areal expanse in square kilometres ... [and their] military capabilities [sufficient] to dominate the entire Eurasian landmass".

To say the least, it is doubtful that Mackinder and Spykman would have interpreted the BRICS-Eurasian link as a form of South-South cooperation. Instead, they would have seen it for what it is likely to be perceived as by policymakers in Beijing and Moscow, namely a platform for shifting the balance of power to the sovereignist and statist East. If there is any merit to Heartland and Rimland then BRICS is necessarily associated with attempts by the two leading Eurasian great powers to assert global leadership if not actual world domination. Although historic rivalries between China and Russia may yet resurface, adherents of the liberal international order have at present much to be concerned about. Such concerns can only be exacerbated by the connection which Meena makes between Russia, and by implication BRICS, with "Eurasianism" and "Neo-Eurasianism". As Meena mentions the name of Aleksandr Dugin, who is said to be close to Putin, the focus should really be on Neo-Eurasianism which is a "theory", if that word can be used, promoting Russian expansionism and imperialism. (See the discussions of Dugin's views by Barbashin and Thoburn (2014) and Beiner (2015)). And so here become very real the concerns expressed, also with regard to Russia's BRICS policies, by Thakur, Laïdi, Scott, Alcenat and Fettweis.

## 2.8 Conclusion

This chapter already gives an appreciation of what BRICS is. Clearly it is not a formal international organisation or IGO. As described, BRIC (later BRICS) was established to further the national interests of Russia. But Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2013a) also interpreted BRICS as an instrument for serving the national

interests of all the five members. The Minister went further, describing BRICS as reflecting a "common vision" of the future. Consequently, alliance theory was examined. Whether the forum is or is not an alliance is discussed later in this study (see more particularly subchapter 5.2.1, below) but the suggestion by Besada and Tok (2014: 77) that BRICS is "an alliance among rivals" was noted. A pointer to the likely direction of the discussion is given with the references to bandwagoning and piggybacking. BRICS was found to be the very epitome of club diplomacy through its pronounced state-centric nature to the extent that the question was asked whether BRICS was an alternative rather than a complement to multilateral diplomacy.

Constructivism was discussed with reference as to whether BRICS is in fact a "region" but again the relevant theoretical framework is applied later in this study to answer this question. (See at subchapter 4.8, below). The relevance of the geopolitical theories of Heartland and Rimland was raised in view of the BRICS forum's global reach. Again, a hint of the discussion later in the study is given with the reference to the assertion by Kaplan (2012) that although "technology has collapsed distance", geography must still be respected. Regarding the value of the Heartland-Rimland theories it is suggested that the motivation behinds BRICS rather stands contrary to the Cold War strategy of containment with which these theories are historically linked. Looked at in the light of the geopolitical theories, the implications of BRICS internationally are discussed, *inter alia*, at subchapter 4.9, below, and chapter 5 specifically deals with the implications for South Africa.

# Chapter 3: BRICS and South Africa: accession, foreign policy rationale and forum diplomacy as a blend of innovation and atavism

## 3.1 Introduction: in part inspired by the Spirit of Bandung South Africa joins BRICS

As seen du Plessis (2006: 124-125) describes diplomacy as an instrument "with which to maximise the national interest", and mention was also made of the reflection by Cooper and Farooq (2015: 1) that club diplomacy of which BRICS is a type, serves to elevate and reinforce "issues of common interest". To this Olivier (2013a: 408) makes the point that by attaching itself to the "substantial individual and united power" of the four other BRIC countries this might potentially allow South Africa to "play in a world league where other countries of similar [middle power] category simply cannot". This is the ideal situation and no doubt reflects the outlook of the South African government. However, it is suggested that to play successfully in this game it is necessary for policymakers to retain an objective appreciation of international politics. Furthermore, Olivier (2013a: 408) warns that if South Africa is to make a success of its BRICS membership – and it might be added not create too many (unnecessary) antagonisms among the country's traditional trading partners: "Much will depend on [the country's] future economic growth path and the quality and thrust of South Africa's diplomacy – [and on] how the country interprets and exercises its membership and role and how the country shapes as a stable, progressive democracy".

Unfortunately, it appears from the pronouncements and statements of policymakers that South Africa's decision to join BRICS was based to a large extent on optimistic assessments and assumptions about the direction of international politics. This interpretation is reinforced when notice is taken of the pronounced ideological outlook of the government and of the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC). Illustrative of this outlook is the foreign relations section of the ANC's National General Council (NGC) *2015 Discussion Documents*, titled *A Better Africa in a Better and Just World*, and which Pham (2015) describes as a reaffirmation by the ANC of its "ideological roots" and as couched "in intemperate language that even Chinese regime mouthpieces do not even use nowadays". Illustrative of the

ideological lenses through which the government looked at BRIC is the following explanation by former International Relations and Cooperation Deputy Minister Ebrahim (2011a) as to why the decision was taken to join the forum: “Drawing from the important history of the origins of South-South cooperation laid down in 1955 at the Bandung Conference, as well as with the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, the Government of South Africa recognised that we have to be part of the forward march of history”. Apart from the curious juxtaposition of the rather atavistic reference to Bandung and the mention of history moving forward, it rather appears that Deputy Minister Ebrahim had a conception of a global South that by 2011 no longer existed.

### 3.2 By the time South Africa joined BRICS the Spirit of Bandung was very faint and much of Asia had moved to the North

It is indeed so that the Bandung Conference (18-24 April 1955), which presaged what became the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), had as its purpose the mobilisation of “the forces of Asia and Africa to promote peace” (Bunting: 1975). Put another way “the conference aimed at creating a collective consciousness and a common platform based on the nature of the existing international political economy” (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2010). The strategy of the attending “militant Afro-Asian states”, as Matthew Quest (undated) calls them, “was to strengthen their independence from Western imperialism … This strategic bloc … was supposed to be independent from the superpowers”. Even as late as 1998, the NAM at its Durban Summit could still deem it appropriate to assert that it embodied “the aspirations, the hopes and the combined yearnings of the peoples of the South to live in peace and security … our time has come” (GCIS: 1998). Yet, as Lumumba-Kasongo (2010) notes, “the Bandung Conference could not be intended to produce a consensual political ideology, which would have been incorporated into the national party politics of any nation-state” precisely in view, even then, of “the diverse voices of the participants and the advocates of the conference’s ideals”.

By 2010, the year South Africa was invited to join BRICS – fifty-five years after Bandung – the world had completely changed. For one, the Afro-Asian group assembled at Bandung had never succeeded “in offering an alternative model

shaped by peace and development possibilities ... and half a century after the process of independence started, African countries are still struggling amidst old and new development challenges, while their Asian counterparts have evolved into regional or world authorities" (Assie-Lumumba: 2015). Even the launching of the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP) in 2005 has not revived in any viable manner the Spirit of Bandung. For another, by 2010 also the supposed independence from the superpowers had become a very relative concept. If Russia is a declining or former superpower it is still a major power and China is a major power on the rise with ambitions of global influence and eventual superpower status. On this metric it is not evident how BRICS can be a "continuator" of the so-called Spirit of Bandung. As the Indonesian social worker and priest Josef Purnama Widyatmadja (2005) has written in *The Jakarta Post*: "Fifty years after the Bandung conference … Asian and African leaders seem to have lost their enthusiasm to fight for their aspirations". And indeed, Bandung's host country, Indonesia has in recent years maintained a particularly friendly attitude towards the United States and a media report said to be based on Pew data put "Indonesian approval of the United States" at about 70% after the election of President Obama and this approval "remained well above 50% throughout Obama's presidency" (Emont: 2016). Further, according to Dewi Fortuna Anwar, Deputy Secretary for Political Affairs to the Vice President of Indonesia, Indonesia's continued economic growth is dependent on regional stability which implies reliance "on the US nuclear umbrella", without which Asian countries would engage in an arms race to protect themselves (Emont: 2016). But foreign policy realist thinking had dissipated Bandung's spirit long before 2010. Already in 1993 Asian countries were very much locked into balance of power politics. As Singapore Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng said on 26 July 1993:

> "Peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific depend not only on whether the United States continues to lead as she has in the past. It also depends on how America settles her relationships with other major powers – Russia, China, and Japan" (Emmers: 2001:198-199).

It is easily forgotten how soon after the initiation of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms that "Beijing's assertiveness in foreign policy … led to a sense of insecurity and vulnerability among other regional states" in Asia-Pacific (Emmers: 2001: 204).

Since then, the situation has substantially deteriorated and as Kim Ghattas (2013: 184-187) writes one result was the rise in goodwill toward the United States. "Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and others were looking for help and for strength in numbers, and the United States saw an opportunity to push back China … Suddenly, China the rising Asian looked very lonely. Though it shared borders with fourteen countries, when it looked around, China saw no real allies, no one it really shared values with, no one it could count on. China was standing in a crowded room and was utterly lonely". Indeed, matters keep getting worse and as *The Economist* (2014) reports:

> China's position has hardened distinctly since the accession of President Xi Jinping: "Recent moves to dominate the seas within the 'first island chain' that runs from Okinawa through Taiwan to the Spratlys … have alienated almost all the country's neighbours. 'It would be hard to construct a foreign policy better designed to undermine China's long-term interests'".

In 2010 the then World Bank President, Robert Zoellick, succinctly summed up how the world had changed since Bandung and since the end of the Cold War: "If 1989 saw the end of the 'Second World' with Communism's demise, then 2009 saw the end of what was known as the 'Third World'. We are now in a new, fast evolving multipolar world economy – in which some developing countries are emerging as economic powers; others are moving towards additional poles of growth; and some are struggling to attain their potential within this new system – where North and South, East and West, are now points on a compass, not economic destinies" (Singh and Dube: 2013a). In 2011 the Department of International Relations and Cooperation itself cautioned through its *White Paper* (2011: 19) that the cohesion and solidarity of the South "may be eroded as certain key developing countries progress towards becoming developed countries" with the result that they now stand apart "from the rest of the developing world". Yet, in 2011, some South African policymakers still appeared to overestimate the effect of the Spirit of Bandung.

Although in 2011 it was observable that wealth and consequently various forms of power were moving from the West to the East, "with new players in the game diffusing economic and political power" and although "the world is firmly in the grip of

a multipolar order", Singh and Dube (2013a) make the point that "the power is not yet evenly distributed among the old players and the new entrants ... [indeed] the world is still more in the 'shifting' process". And there is no unanimity that the West and the United States are somehow in a "steep decline", a proposition rejected by Michael Cox (2012: 369). At the same time India's relationships with the United States and Germany were described by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as "transformational" (Bagchi: 2013) and the United States and Vietnam were moving towards strategic partnership. As will be discussed, the South African government has a view of BRICS which is not shared by Brasilia or New Delhi, but Pretoria's outlook appears to be increasingly aligned with that of Beijing and Moscow. Thus very recently President Jacob Zuma saw fit to describe BRICS as "a small group but very powerful" that "had interfered with the global balance of forces" with "the five countries" constituting "a threat to western countries" (Khoza: 2016).

## 3.3 The motivations provided by the South African government for its adhesion to BRICS

Motivations advanced by the government range from the potential political-diplomatic advantages and the importance of reinforcing multilateralism, furthering the objectives of the government's African Agenda and the economic benefits to South Africa. Ideological points frequently overlap with the political and diplomatic aspects so it is not always possible to separate them.

### 3.3.1 The political and diplomatic advantages of BRICS membership and of multilateralism

On 10 March 2013 Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2013a) set out five "factors" which made "BRICS timely and historic" and justified South Africa's accession: The shared history "of struggle against colonialism and underdevelopment, in the spirit of Bandung" of the BRICS countries; Their "common challenges as developing nations", which in South Africa are "the triple challenges of inequality, poverty and unemployment"; The "shared interests" in the definition of their respective national interests and their "common vision of the world of the future"; That "each of the BRICS countries works for a true partnership with Africa"; And finally, that "bilateral

relations among BRICS countries are on the rise" politically and economically. "We are frank and open to each other".

Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2012c) sees the BRICS as "becoming an increasingly important formation of like-minded countries" which again evokes the club diplomacy aspect of the forum. More specifically the BRICS association was now South Africa's principal platform for relations with the global South which was now presented as South Africa's most important foreign policy focus area and alliance. Indeed, the South African Revenue Service (SARS) appears to be paying lip service to this view by publishing combined import / export figures for the BRICS bloc as though it were a unity whether economic or otherwise. Indeed, in the view of Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2012a) the future shape of a world becoming multi-plural or multipolar would depend on how "the global powers of the South ... assert their new found role and how this will balance with traditional powers". However, pessimism also sometimes permeates the current government's discourse. The Minister is, for example, concerned that international relations might revert to the Cold War "where we were forced to choose between power blocs" (Nkoana-Mashabane: 2014a). Former Deputy Minister Ebrahim (2014) saw the world entering "a potentially turbulent period as the era of western primacy comes to an end, and new powers rise and compete over status and interests". But Deputy Minister Ebrahim (2011b) went further in this regard and spoke about "an African leadership collective ... [standing] together even against powerful forces (our former colonisers) in order to ensure that we as Africans, indeed become the midwives of our own destiny". As he elaborated, he clearly meant the "Western ... dominant imperialist powers", the same "powerful states [that] could unilaterally by force of arms begin a process of regime change, if it suits their geopolitical interests". The Deputy Minister even applied Thucydides' maxim to these countries: "The strong do as they wish, while the weak suffer what they must"! (Ebrahim: 2011b). The challenge, therefore, was "to transform global politics from a power-based hierarchy to a rules-based system of international society" (Ebrahim: 2012).

For Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2010a) South Africa's "partners of the North" in the past "largely" viewed international relations as being between "competitors". International relations were cast "in adversarial terms and as a zero-sum game".

However, the "rise of emerging powers" was bringing an increased "sense of optimism amongst developing countries". The (then) BRIC, were "forming new alliances with nations extending from Asia and Africa and Latin America". The BRIC together with "the progressive trend" in Latin America have seriously challenged the "neo-liberal development model and how natural resources of the South have hitherto been exploited to the detriment of our countries and people". The BRICS countries were "the catalysts and drivers" of a shift towards a "multipolar system" away from "the inequalities and power imbalance that characterise our global system" (Nkoana-Mashabane: 2013a).

### 3.3.2 The benefits to South Africa of accession to BRICS

At a *New Age* business briefing on South Africa's role in BRICS, Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2012b), citing President Jacob Zuma, said that South Africa's participation in BRICS was "designed to help us achieve inclusive growth, sustainable development and a prosperous South Africa". Addressing SAIIA, Deputy Minister Ebrahim (2013a) saw the value of South Africa's BRICS membership in largely symbolic terms as augmenting the country's diplomatic prestige and as recognition of its global role: "South Africa's membership has contributed to further expand BRICS' geographic reach, representivity and inclusiveness. South Africa's membership of BRICS recognises South Africa's systemically important economic position". Deputy Minister Fransman (2012) demonstrated a particularly vibrant view when he said that: "South Africa's BRICS membership has a lot to offer. It is in our national interests as it has positive spin-offs to our economy and job creation drive as well as to our foreign policy on Africa – Consolidation of the African Agenda towards regeneration of the African continent". The Deputy Minister was so bold as to declare that:

> "When the sun sets on Western economies, it shines bright on BRICS countries. It is the dawn of a bright new BRICS formation".

In a statement prior to the 2013 Durban BRICS Summit, Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2013b) said that through South Africa's "participation in the BRICS, we endeavour to further leverage economic opportunities for our own development

agenda, as well as that of the African continent. South Africa's membership of BRICS has delivered tangible economic dividends". Indeed, South Africa was now a "proud" member "of an emerging group that represents 42,6% of the world's population, 18% of global trade, attracts 53% of foreign capital, accounts for 20% of global GDP and generated 61% of economic growth in the world economy and has an estimated US$ 4 trillion foreign reserves base. [South Africa's] trade with BRICS countries increased from R297 billion (2012) to R381 billion (2013) – 20% of total South African trade" (Nkoana-Mashabane: 2014b).

### 3.3.3 The benefits to Africa of South Africa's accession to BRICS

Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2011a) said during a media briefing, held on 5 April 2011, that South Africa went into BRICS as "an integral part of this Continent of Africa. So wherever South Africa finds itself in a forum or a minilateralist where other African countries are not represented, we do not speak for South Africa alone but also for all other African countries. We believe we bring into BRICS not only South Africa but a larger African market of a billion people". On 18 April 2011, also at a media briefing, Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2011b) reported that at the Third BRICS Summit, held in China on 14 April 2011, a commitment was made "to supporting infrastructure development in Africa and the continent's industrialisation, within the NEPAD framework". Deputy Minister Fransman (2011) has also asserted that with South Africa's entry into BRICS: "Our African sister-countries will also be expecting us to craft more vigorous trade and investment programmes that ensure that the voice of the continent is heard in the broader international platforms. We believe BRICS presents South Africa and Africa with an opportunity to work closely together on issues pertaining to peace and security, including future coordination on issues on the table of the UN Security Council". Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2012b) has commented that it was indeed South Africa's "objective to fulfil Africa's remarkable potential [which was] at the forefront of our political and economic diplomacy". The importance of the Africa strategy in South Africa's BRICS membership was highlighted by the Minister when she indicated that "at present, [African] intraregional trade comprises less than 20% of total trade and the bulk of that trade takes place between South Africa and the other 14 SADC member states".

## 3.4 A summing up of the role of ideological considerations in South African foreign policymaking with particular reference to BRICS

Reference has been made to the ideological lenses through which South African policymakers approach BRICS. This is particularly pronounced within ANC and Luthuli House (official seat of the governing party) circles but may also explain government assessments and assumptions about international politics which at times appear rather optimistic and hopeful. For example, Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2012b) has said that "South Africa and BRIC(S) countries ... dream and work to realise a more equitable global political and economic system. This [BRICS] is the right platform for such growth prospects".

Governments and diplomats – at least in the industrialised and Western world – are traditionally coy about the influence of ideology on their world visions. By way of illustration both the *National Security Strategy* documents of the United States (2010: 9; and 37) and of the United Kingdom (2010: 16; 25; 28; and 37) governments only mention ideology with reference to extremism and foreign threats. This does not mean that ideology has been absent from the foreign policies of the United States or of other countries. As already seen geopolitics – which in US foreign policy is closely associated with Kennan's containment strategy – is criticised for its ideological content by, *inter alia*, Critical Geo-politicians. According to Sylvan and Majeski (2008: 3) the "phenomena" supposedly exemplified by ideology are: "A coherent assemblage of beliefs making sense of and guiding responses to otherwise disparate phenomena; a simplifying perspective, often based on recurring dichotomies, with deep historical roots in the dominant political culture; a semi-mythological, and often downright false, set of understandings about the world which is at odds with a rational and reality-based approach to problems". The two above authors here give a reason why ideology is frequently frowned upon and that is because ideological positions are frequently elevated above rational arguments, meaning that ideological tenets are very difficult to dislodge or counter no matter how much contrary evidence is submitted. As the *Religions and Ideologies* website puts it: "If counter arguments and contrary evidence lead in all cases to no, or practically no, revision of a theory or view, then the theory or view is likely to be ideological".

South African policymakers on the other hand appear to show no compunction in openly discussing their avowedly ideological influences. Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2010b) puts it as follows: “We are not alone on this continent or in the world – we are part of the Pan-Africanist and internationalist movement for a better life ... Our ideological orientation must help us respond to challenges before us and provide answers”. The Minister adds the qualification that “ideological sharpness”, as well as “organisational strength ... high-quality leadership, and sound programmes of action” still need “the support of our masses” and the objective is “to accede to the state” and “to transform our countries profoundly”, the political affiliation being the “progressive and Left forces in Africa”. The hopeful dreaming referred to above by Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2010b) relates very much to this discussion about ideology. South African foreign policy is and has been an area of political contestation at least since the second administration of President Thabo Mbeki but controversy has sharpened under President Jacob Zuma. Areas of contestation include relations with China and the relatively recent but significant rapprochement with Russia and in the latter regard the (possible) envisaged nuclear energy agreement with ROSATOM is a highly controversial element of the Pretoria-Moscow relationship and one which is currently hotly debated by South African political parties, civil society and the media. It has already been noted in this study that Pretoria’s outlook appears to be increasingly aligned with that of Beijing and Moscow and that there is a “conviction that the global future lies ‘in the East’” (Marthoz: 2012: 3). This should be seen against the background that, according to Nathan (2008: 4), from the outset South African foreign policy has had: an “anti-imperialist character ... Those who are surprised by Pretoria’s apparent appeasement of dictatorial regimes fail to grasp the history and ideology of the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC) ... They ignore the ANC’s history as a liberation movement with a Marxist-Leninist orientation, backed by the Soviet Union, most at home in the Non-Aligned Movement, supportive of other liberation struggles and antagonistic towards Western powers that buttressed the apartheid regime”.

In conclusion Nathan (2008: 12) argued that: “The anti-imperialist position constitutes an ideology in the sense of comprising a worldview and set of fixed ideas and doctrines that form the basis for political thought and action. Consequently, it provides the lens through which human rights and other democratic tenets are

viewed, it determines priorities when government is confronted by competing principles and pressures, and it elevates the importance of South-South solidarity. A further consequence is that specific political crises ... are addressed not on their own merits but in terms of the broader power dynamics between the North and the South ... [Decisions are] thus subordinated in some cases to the struggle against the North's domination and perceived abuse of international forums. In short, South Africa's foreign policy is over-determined by its anti-imperialist paradigm".

Yet, in spite of this ideological baggage, President Mbeki attached importance to maintaining strong and effective links with the global North in general. It is less certain that this is still the situation with the Zuma Administration. According to Habib (2011) President Mbeki's foreign policy reflected a mix of principle and pragmatism and although he took as his starting point the need to reform the global order, he recognised that this would require understanding the power relations within the international system and engaging closely with all relevant international actors. Therefore, when "Mbeki worked to reform Africa's institutional architecture" he and former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo played a central role in selling the envisaged reforms "to the international community including the G8, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)".

The difference in tone between Presidents Mbeki and Zuma is marked when reading their speeches. Davies (2012) suggests that "Thabo Mbeki was always in his element when engaging with the developed world; Jacob Zuma is more comfortable associating with developing nations". It is evident that there is a personal element in President Zuma's approach to policy which reflects his deep conservatism and whose vision is not cast "in a Western paradigm", as Johnson (2015: 36) depicts it. For instance, the *Mail & Guardian* on 5 December 2014 reported President Zuma saying to students at Tsinghua University, during a visit to Beijing, that "China and South Africa relate to each other like brothers and sisters, unlike in Europe where African countries are treated as 'a former subject' ... China's growing influence in Africa would allow the continent to free itself from 'colonial shackles' ... 'The emergence of China as a power among others gives or offers an opportunity to African countries to be able to free themselves from the shackles that are really colonially designed'". According to the AFP-sourced report, Zuma also said "in

African countries' relations with 'Europe in particular, you are regarded as either a former subject or a second and third class kind of a person'. But 'the relationship between China and African countries, particularly South Africa, is different', he said. 'We relate as brothers and sisters to do business together, not because one is a poor cousin'". In Zuma's view if "we", meaning no doubt South Africa as well as Africa, and China "work together, we in a sense represent a different world than the world that has been dominated by the North".

It is suggested the above ideological convictions as well as the personal elements provide an explanation why "it is in the BRICS as a political forum that South Africa finds its place" (Alden and Schoeman: 2013: 115). For as constructivists argue there is a vital connection between identity and the ideational element. This also explains the perceptible differences in tone between the foreign policies of Presidents Mbeki and Zuma. As for BRICS' political role, it has been said that for both the South African government and the other four BRIC countries economics counted for less than the principal motivation for South Africa's inclusion which was political (Gauteng Province: 2013: 18) and as Olivier (2013a: 408) indicates, through BRICS South Africa can potentially "play in a world league where other countries of similar [middle power] category simply cannot". Now this primary political (or politico-diplomatic) motive for accession to BRICS relates closely to the South African government's – and in particular the ANC's – vision of the world, in other words the ideological element. In this regard the already cited reference by Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2010b) to "ideological sharpness" as one of the elements in policy formation comes to mind and it is worth noting that the former American diplomat Stefan Halper and the former British diplomat Jonathan Clarke, both now scholars at Cambridge and the Cato Institute respectively, cite the American Neo-Conservative Daniel Bell's comment that "being ideological you have prefabricated ideas". And so it was, as the two authors point out, that the Neo-Cons showed disdain for "conventional diplomatic agencies such as the State Department" as well as for "conventional country-specific, realist, and pragmatic analysis" (Halper and Clarke: 2004: 205 and 11).

Part of the vision encapsulated by government policymakers is that "we are at the brink of a world envisaged in the Freedom Charter" (Nkoana-Mashabane: 2010a), and that South Africa has a foreign policy with "an ideological outlook and value

system [that] is informed by: [*inter alia*] the spirit of internationalism" (Nkoana-Mashabane: 2011a). The Minister has evoked the "spirit of internationalism" in at least four speeches, Deputy Minister Fransman has raised it in at least two speeches and Deputy Minister Ebrahim in at least three speeches including on 19 March 2010 when he described Cuba's military intervention in Southern Africa has having been in pursuit of the "cause of internationalism" and undertaken "without expecting anything in return" (Ebrahim: 2010). (In China Fidel Castro is linked to the spirit of internationalism, see Khoo: 2016). Although internationalism is a political principle which overlaps with liberalism and liberal internationalism which are international relations theories advocating "cooperative relations among states ... [and] respect for the rule of law and stable institutions" – such as the United Nations – "which could provide a semblance of international order conducive to peace and security" (Haynes *et al*.: 2011: 134), the understanding by the ANC (2015: 159 par. 5; 161, par. 21) of internationalism is very much linked to the "revolutionary principles of internationalism and solidarity" and as to whether these "principles" can be related "to achieve the fundamental objectives of our national democratic revolution [NDR]"? The latter conceptions are highly contested issues in South African politics and some regard the NDR as being at odds with the South African Constitution and democracy. Matthee (2015: 27, citing Anthea Jeffery of the South African Institute of Race Relations) writes that "as a result of the NDR framework, the ANC sees itself as a national liberation movement responsible for implementing the NDR and uniquely entitled to rule".

From the perspective of this study what is important is that ideologies by definition are not susceptible to evolve in the face of "counter arguments and contrary evidence", and therefore revision is unlikely (*Religions and Ideologies* website). But as Sidiropoulos (2012) warns "global values are in flux" and in such a context "strategic partnerships that cross traditional divides are essential tools in countries' foreign policies". Not only does this imply an open inquiring mind free of ideological preferences or prejudgments but effective diplomacy should also be focused on an awareness of the facts on the ground. As Roskin (1994: 6) explains "the diplomat's work is in finding and developing complementary interests so that two or more countries can work together" and he refers to this as "diplomatic spadework". The reality of international relations is one of constant challenges and these cannot be

successfully addressed or responded to on the basis of "ideological orientation" which is unlikely to "provide answers", and this contrary to the stated belief of Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2010b). There is no substitute for the cogent foreign policy analysis of events and this is where the professional diplomat must come in, if necessary, assisted by a non-governmental expert or scholar.

But another problem with ideology, and there is some evidence of this in South African foreign policymaking, is that of rigidity as well as reluctance to take analysis beyond certain points. For example, Kornegay and Bohler-Muller (2013: 5) refer to the Durban BRICS Summit Academic Forum and regret that "certain topics … [were] considered to be 'off the table', but that should in fact be open to free and honest debate, such as BRICS-IBSA relations and geopolitical-security issues animating the RIC [Russia, India, China] 'triangle' within BRICS". In addition to their concern about these "off the table" topics, the two authors also express the concern that there is "ambivalence" on the part of the government "about engaging its foreign affairs stakeholders outside its domain". For good measure Kornegay and Bohler-Muller (2013: 6) tackle the notion that the global future lies "in the East". As they contend, this "may be much too facile ... to stand the test of time".

There is also another potentially fundamental danger with ideology or too much ideology in foreign policy – and the calamitous spectacle of Iraq after the 2003 invasion stands before us – and that is righteousness. The belief that one is endowed with this quality can result in the related belief that one is "uniquely entitled to rule", as Jeffery suggests. To cite former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the "most fundamental problem of politics ... is not the control of wickedness but the limitation of righteousness ... Kissinger suggested that nothing is more dangerous than people convinced of their moral superiority, since they deny their political opponents that very attribute" (Kaplan: 1999).

## 3.5 Conclusion: risk-taking in South African foreign policy, South Africa's decision to join BRICS and its impact on global order and on Africa

Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2012a) has suggested that in the light of the "problems facing the world", it is necessary to take "risk" in foreign policy. Indeed, "since 1994,

South Africa has had to find itself and assert and defend its interests in the changing global context and shifting international balance of forces". The Minister gives the following explanation: "South Africa potentially faces as much threat as any other nation. Under such volatile and potentially destabilising conditions, it is tempting for nations to become conservative in outlook, and put energy into foreign policy projects that shows little risk. This is something that ought to be avoided if the international community is to confront problems facing the world".

Presumably the Minister's acceptance of taking risks in foreign policy might be taken as one justification for South Africa's decision to enter the BRICS forum. At the outset it can be said that, whether or not it was judicious, South Africa's drive to belong to BRICS or for that matter to any other collective of states, association, bloc, club, grouping or alliance could be seen as a perfectly normal manifestation of the exercise of diplomacy. As noted earlier in this study, according to Dwivedi (2012: 224) "alliances play a central role in international relations because they are seen to be an integral part of statecraft". In particular, grouping together in minilateral clubs has become a characteristic of many middle powers. Indeed, alliance making should be an imperative for any nation or state.

An important reason for this is the unstable even dangerous nature of contemporary international politics. It is nowadays a commonplace assertion that wealth and power are moving from West to East, in effect that a power transition is underway from West to East, specifically from the United States to China. As Cilliers (2016) writes "global power is shifting … We are most likely coming to an end of more than two centuries of Western hegemony as power and influence move eastward". Examining this assertion in any detail is beyond the scope of the present study except to suggest that what might be at issue would clearly be long-term trends – and it might be foolhardy for South Africa, for example, to base short to medium term policy decisions on possibly far-off scenarios, as Cilliers also cautions, and secondly, there is no unanimity among scholars that "there is an irresistible 'power shift' in the making and that the West and the United States are in steep decline", an idea Michael Cox (2012: 369) for one questions. What is undeniable is that "international relations are always in flux", and that great power status also fluctuates "due to changes in national power", as David Lai (2011: 6) contends. Inescapably therefore

international systems are far from stable. Clearly, the early decades of the 21st Century are times of stress and change due to a myriad of reasons (such as terrorism, the global economic crisis, climate change, the rise of China and other emerging economies, and a greater frequency of inter-state division and brinkmanship). And "whenever the entities constituting the international system change their character, a period of turmoil inevitably follows", as Kissinger (1994: 806) has written. Richard Haass (2008: 52), paraphrasing Hedley Bull, comments that "global politics at any point is a mixture of anarchy and society". Therefore, it is also a question of balance. However, "order will not just emerge". Nevertheless, "a great deal can and should be done to shape a nonpolar world", which is what Haass believes the world is becoming but his point could also be applied to a multipolar system which description likely better describes the current situation. (According to Stuenkel (2010) whether the world is unipolar, multipolar, or nonpolar really "depends whom you ask", although he leans on the side of multipolarity particularly at the economic level but with the United States still experiencing unipolarity at the military level).

Is the "risk" in joining BRICS then South Africa's contribution to bringing and securing order in the world? Or is the intention more narrow and focused on national interest as perceived by the current South African government? In this regard Elizabeth Sidiropoulos (2012) asks a very pertinent question: "How should South Africa engage with established and emerging powers to build effective cooperation"? To answer this it is worth looking again at the government's motivations for joining BRICS.

What springs to mind is that the motivations offered by South African policymakers for joining BRICS could very well have been set out as motivations for not joining BRICS. At the same time these motivations betray a very optimistic outlook on international relations, for example Russia and China are not at all portrayed as the practitioners of *realpolitik* that their conduct reveals them to be whether in Ukraine or Syria in the case of the former, or the South China Sea in the case of the latter. Russo-Chinese competition in Central Asia and the fraught relations between China and India are ignored. In this context relating BRICS to the "spirit of Bandung" and to a "common vision of the world of the future" (Nkoana-Mashabane: 2013a) would

seem to be misplaced. To characterise the five BRICS countries as “like-minded” (Nkoana-Mashabane: 2012c) would also seem to be a superficial assessment to say the least. It is not clear how South Africa’s best interests will be served by its enthusiastic immersion in what it perceives to be a “balance with traditional powers” (Nkoana-Mashabane: 2012a). Such immersion is all the more questionable when South Africa declares that the way to preserve stability is not for states to act unilaterally or by military means, particularly bearing in mind the aggressive foreign policy conduct of Russia and China. The country’s supposed hesitation in belonging to power blocs rests uneasily with its ever closer ties to Russia and China. Deputy Minister Ebrahim (2013a) has said BRICS membership enhances South Africa’s global role. However, the record rather indicates South Africa’s retreat from an own or original global role in favour of a copycat global role or as Olivier (2013a: 408) would say one of “piggybacking”. Examples of this include South Africa’s announced intention to resign from the International Criminal Court and the country’s silence regarding human rights violations by Russia and China as well as its “lack of leadership on human rights in Africa” (Cilliers: 2016). This withdrawal, which also translates as South Africa’s self-effacement before Russia and China, renders the assertion that BRICS makes it possible for South Africa and Africa to collaborate more effectively on issues of peace and security in the UN Security Council appear quite unlikely.

Finally, whether South Africa’s BRICS membership is good for Africa is not a proposition that can easily be demonstrated. The commercial penetration of Africa by China and India cannot be attributed to BRICS and as Fakir (2014) points out “non-BRICS states”, for example, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea and Turkey are also entering African markets principally in pursuit of natural resources, markets and fertile land. He uses the expression “a new scramble”, in effect a new “Scramble for Africa” over which South Africa can hardly have any control. Carmody (2013: 47) expresses the view – but this is also apparent throughout this study – that “the ‘power’ of the South African state is increasingly intertwined with and infused with that of the Chinese state”. He adds that the same goes for “transnational capital”. The image portrayed then is very much one of a repeat of the colonial era core-periphery relationship and South Africa itself is increasingly at risk in this regard. (The Africa dimension of BRICS is discussed in more detail at subchapter 4.6,

below). Meanwhile, it can already be suggested that the primacy South Africa accords to its BRICS and "Look East" diplomacy is particularly unhelpful in the African context.

In the above context South Africa seems little equipped to promote an equitable rules-based community whether in Africa or globally (the role Ambassador Anil Sooklal (2014) sees for the country in BRICS) and it is difficult to see how the BRICS dimension might improve the situation. The contrary would rather seem to be the case. Mention was made of South Africa's retreat from an own or original global role and Cilliers (2016) laments the passing of the moral authority brought to South Africa by former President Nelson Mandela through his foreign policy focus on human rights and the rule of law. Instead, this has been replaced by a "piggybacking" foreign policy with South Africa expressing a world view closely approximating that of Russia and China – what Fakir (2014) describes as "following Chinese and Russian footsteps". As Cilliers (2016) puts it, South Africa has been "selling [its] future for a BRIC" while constantly "railing" against the United States and the West – which has the effect of undercutting those who traditionally invest in South Africa. Furthermore, the South African "presidency seems intent on paying for its BRICS membership with a nuclear energy procurement deal from ... [Russia], possibly also including China into the mix", as already noted a deal highly contested by South African civil society.

Once again South Africa's claim that its BRICS membership is "the holding anchor" of South Africa's South-South relations **(**Nkoana-Mashabane: 2012c) and effectively of the country's diplomacy in general would seem to be a good illustration of a foreign policy based on ideological grounds as well as on an extremely optimistic view of international relations and of how BRICS fits into the patterns of contemporary world politics. If as Haass (2008: 52) says "balance" is required to steer global politics from "anarchy" to "society" and "order" it is not clear how BRICS – notwithstanding intra-BRICS cooperation – can serve as the adequate vehicle to achieve this. Adopting a blindfolded approach to the destabilisation perpetrated by some BRICS members and to the very real existential rivalries between at least three of the BRICS members and between those three and certain non-BRICS countries is not "balance".

Therefore, the effectiveness of the BRICS-"Look East" strategy – and of leveraging China's power and influence in Africa, if that is indeed also an official strategy – can be very much doubted in view of the current weakness of the South African economy which impacts negatively on South Africa's image as a "growth pole" (Cilliers: 2016) and, at the political-diplomatic level, South Africa's reticence about speaking out on human rights violations. In other words, replacing a Mandela foreign policy with "quiescence". In the final analysis Carmody (2013: 70) warns that whereas China saw South Africa's accession to BRICS as very much in Beijing's interest in order to better understand Africa and to become "an even bigger player" on the continent, South Africa on the other hand "is now not so much a competitor with China on the continent as a junior partner or 'client state'". As Bradley (2016: 6) points out, the worry is whether the ANC, in effect South Africa, "is willing to stand up to China on the international stage or whether it prioritises investment over political sovereignty". Quiescence and self-effacement on the part of South Africa, as well as some other African states, make it that much easier for China to "support authoritarian regimes, hinder economic development, promote conflict and allow human rights abuses" thereby often undermining "efforts to promote regional peace and democratisation" (Shelton and Kabemba: 2012: 18). Soko and Qobo (2016: 83) give an example of this. Between 2003 and 2006, China's lack of Western style conditionalities, in addition to lower prices, resulted in Chinese arms exports to Africa becoming the third largest of all countries.

Even if becoming part of BRICS was a necessary risk "to confront problems facing the world", as Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2012a) would no doubt have it, the cost effectiveness of this to South Africa is far from evident particularly when seen from the vantage point of South Africa's place in the international community. As it is South Africa cannot escape another choice consequent upon its role in BRICS. For as Fakir (2014) rightly observes, South Africa has indeed "reached a crossroads now that it sits at the BRICS table: South Africa can either truly be a part of Africa, or it can fall in danger of being part of the scramble for Africa".

# Chapter 4: BRICS and South Africa: a critique of BRICS club diplomacy and South Africa's geopolitical repositioning

## 4.1 Introduction:

Using the example of India's reasoning behind its BRICS membership, the opening of this chapter sets out the value of foreign policy analysis as opposed to decision-making based on ideology and risk-taking. Consequently, and bearing in mind the discussion in Chapter 3 regarding the weaknesses of South Africa's BRICS-"Look East" strategy particularly in the African continental context, the practice of BRICS as a form of club diplomacy is examined. Although in general club diplomacy may have some advantages, the BRICS format particularly with its lack of institutionality places South Africa, as the weakest member, at a disadvantage particularly in relation to the two powerful and authoritarian Eurasian members and this reinforces South Africa's tendency as a weaker state to bandwagon with the stronger states. Russia and China as well as India are making use of the BRICS forum as a vehicle to primarily advance their national interests. Associated risks in this regard for South Africa are that its BRICS membership augments the allure of state capitalism and that it increasingly draws the country away from its Mandela-era normative foreign policy. This chapter also warns that South Africa should be cautious about what it can expect from its BRICS diplomacy particularly in view of its misplaced optimism over BRICS' potential contribution to global governance. South Africa's vision of the BRICS as a mechanism for "decoupling" from the West has simply got nowhere. Serious differences continue to mar relations between Brazil and India on the one hand and Russia, China and South Africa on the other hand. Worse, the geopolitical differences and rivalries among the three Eurasian powers can only be described as existential. Finally, in an era of increasing interstate rivalry and instability in the international system, South Africa may want to ask itself if it really does want to be perceived as aligning itself with the geopolitical designs of Russia and China.

## 4.2 Risks and foreign policy analysis behind BRICS membership

As seen, Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2012a) advocates the necessity of taking "risk" in foreign policy. BRICS membership, specifically the ideology-driven primacy

among foreign policy objectives accorded by policymakers to that membership, would appear to be such a risk. As suggested earlier, adhesion to the forum does not come cost-free. This discussion relates to foreign policy analysis which is beyond the scope of this study. However, a few cautionary observations might be useful. It is now trite to comment that the world is an increasingly dangerous place and the prognosis for the future is negative (United States National Intelligence Council: 2008: vi). Referring to the impact of globalisation on foreign policymaking former French President Jacques Chirac (1998) once said that "there is no effective foreign policy without a good understanding of all the forces, of all the currents which, together form the personality of a people, the identity of a nation and which also effectively explains major developments on the international scene".

Explicitly stated by President Chirac is the need to understand one's own country and its people as well as other countries and peoples. Former US Secretary of State George Schultz (1998) also spoke of the importance to "good diplomacy" – and therefore of evidence-based foreign policy – of "accurate, relevant information ... There is no substitute for 'touch *and* feel' in these processes. The diplomat on the spot – respected, well connected, and linguistically comfortable – makes essential contributions". Essential, therefore is the "diplomatic spadework" Roskin (1994: 6) speaks of (referring to diplomatic investigation and reporting from post of accreditation). It seems reasonable to suggest that policymakers are more likely to err should they base foreign policy choices on ideological grounds particularly as *ab initio* the diplomat and the decision maker face a major obstacle which is what Kissinger (1973: 328-329) refers to as the "incommensurability between a nation's domestic and its international experience". Therefore, "a nation's domestic experience will tend to inhibit its comprehension of foreign affairs". In this sense it is interesting to learn how South Africa's approach to BRICS differs from that of India.

Former Indian Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal (2013) notes that "the perceived anti-West orientation of BRICS is troubling for some" but this is also the mystery of BRICS as New Delhi has become a close strategic partner and ally of Washington including in the military and naval spheres and currently there are very strong convergences taking place between India and Japan, moves very clearly inspired by China's new and more muscular foreign policy. On the other hand, Sibal does see

BRICS as having its uses as a platform from which its member states can call for changes to the "West-dominated international system in which their voice is not sufficiently heard". But Sibal, a highly experienced diplomat, holds the view that it is possible for India, Brazil and South Africa to pursue foreign policy goals through BRICS without "slipping into any futile anti-westernism". He does concede that "the Russians pushed for [the] creation" of BRICS, expresses dissatisfaction at the *eThekwini Declaration's* noncommittal and "patronising formulation [which] was not needed by India" concerning its status and that of Brazil and South Africa in an enlarged UN Security Council and also ponders the question whether India should "be in a grouping that provides space to China to expand its influence internationally, eventually at our expense"? The former Foreign Secretary sums up his analysis by describing India's BRICS membership as "part of our sensible policy of playing on all chess boards with prudence, calibration and no ideological bias".

Secretary Sibal's "chess boards" analysis is supported by Professor Salma Bava's take on Indian foreign policy which sees an "omnidirectional" combination of non-alignment as a normative principle of continuity underpinning "a strategic pragmatism governing relations with traditional powers and emerging powers alike in New Delhi's approach to coalition-building", (cited in Kornegay and Masters: 2011: 18-19). Laïdi (2012: 623-4), for another, has little doubt that if China was not part of BRICS "India would not invest much in it". India's approach to BRICS, as interpreted by Sibal, Bava and Laïdi indicates dexterity and flexibility in foreign policymaking . Regarding South Africa's assertion that BRICS is a viable "platform to raise the African voice" and to "champion ... the 'African Agenda'", Bohler-Muller (2012: 9) questions whether "this is the most effective mechanism for achieving this particular aim. [For] each BRICS member country has its own regional agenda and economic and geopolitical interests to protect". Furthermore, Qobo (2010), who saw the then BRIC forum as projecting "itself as an exclusive club, something that may likely entrench the differences between itself and the poorer developing countries", questioned why South Africa would want "to participate in such a group, and risk diluting its normative character and the unique role it plays as a bridge-builder between the North and the South"?

India, with its expertise at playing on "all chess boards", has the luxury of seeing in BRICS "clear strategic advantages of membership" notwithstanding its "negative feature", Secretary Sibal's reference to the possibility of China gaining an advantage in the triangular relationship between Russia, India and China. But the reality is that India, unlike South Africa, is a major power. Therefore, should a *"BRICS' Bust-Up"* come to pass (US National Intelligence Council: 2008: 4 and 76) or should the association simply dissolve, as IBSA appears to be in danger of doing, this would possibly be a setback particularly for Russia and China in view of their respective great power strategies, but it would make very little difference to India. However, this would represent a significant knock to South Africa's prestige.

### 4.3 An "alliance among rivals" or the pitfalls of BRICS club diplomacy

As discussed earlier, club diplomacy can hold certain advantages for club members and an example of this is the rapidity with which the NDB was institutionalised. As Cooper and Farooq (2015: 10) write: "the informal club model has provided a good fit for the BRICS". At the same time the specific benefit that these authors mention namely that of downplaying "contentious issues" can detract from BRICS' effectiveness in addressing issues of global governance. Similarly, while club culture informality has been beneficial to the functioning of BRICS as an entity this does not necessarily always translate as beneficial to the interests of an essentially weaker member or partner like South Africa. This weakness manifests itself, for example, when South Africa has to address the "broad differences in strategic interests" of its stronger partners without the assistance of an "institutional capacity to navigate those differences" (Cooper and Farooq: 2015: 1). It is at such times that this lack of institutionality of the BRICS forum places South Africa at a disadvantage. Instead, as Notshulwana (2012: 3) explains, it advantages Russia, India and China. For Utzig (2014: 20) in the first instance it is the fact that each of the BRICS prioritises, or claims to prioritise, its own national interests that in part explains the "non-institutionalised form" of the BRICS forum. This situation places South Africa in a delicate position for although it claims to be Africa's "regional power" and "gateway" (Notshulwana: 2012: 9), the "champion of African development" and of "Africa's interests abroad", in addition to claiming status as a "global player" (Alden and Schoeman: 2013: 111 and 116), the hard reality is that interstate relations of any

kind (apart, arguably, from NDB-CRA matters), whether between South Africa and any one its four BRICS partners or between the latter and other African states, are conducted at the bilateral level therefore outside of any protecting "overarching" or "institutional framework" (Notshulwana: 2012: 3). In this context South Africa's diplomatic manoeuvrability as regional power and guardian of "Africa's interests" is constrained by its perceived need to remain on a good footing with its BRICS partners in order to avoid shipwrecking the forum.

Notshulwana (2012: 8-9) lapses into pessimism when he cites Stephen Walt – who as seen above defines bandwagoning as "alignment with the source of danger" – and appears to accept the view that "relatively weaker states such as South Africa are 'somewhat more likely to bandwagon than strong states are. Because weak states can do little to affect the outcome of contest and may suffer grievously in the process, they must choose the side that is likely to win'". This is ironic for as Qobo and Dube (2012: 14) observe, South Africa's commitment to multilateralism after the country's transition to democracy had a "defensive" element which was precisely "that multilateralism provides the space within which smaller countries' interests can be protected".

Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2013a) might see the BRICS countries as "driven by shared interests", and hold the belief that the BRICS leaders are "frank and open to each other", but many scholars agree that the two most powerful members, Russia and China, use BRICS as a vehicle to advance their own geopolitical interests and there is little South Africa can do about this. This is also the view of Cheng (2013) who adds that "Russia's BRICS diplomacy cleverly leverages China's power to help lift the status of all participating countries, particularly Russia, in the global rebalancing". The views of these scholars are supported by President Zuma who readily concedes that BRICS as a powerful group is "a threat to western countries" and consequently "Western countries 'did not like BRICS' ... [and] 'they want to dismantle'" it (Khoza: 2016). The President further admitted that "South Africa was not liked globally because it was independent and chose to join the BRICS group". Unconcerned over this imputed hostility, what was important for the President was "that the relationship between these [BRICS] countries is growing". Like his Minister, the President's assessment of BRICS is rather rosy given the contemporary

international situation. It would appear, therefore, that South Africa is unlikely to heed the recommendation by Olivier (2013a: 409) that it display "foreign policy leadership and independence" vis-à-vis its "much stronger" BRICS partners. Indeed, as Qobo and Dube (2015: 1 and 6) point out, "it is possible that South Africa will rely more closely on BRICS than on the G20", this for reasons of "South-South solidarity" and also because of the role "ideology" and "anti-Western rhetoric" now play in South Africa's "choice of groupings and bilateral relations". There is a price to this which is that political and economic relations with the West "are no longer as cosy as they were" previously.

Meanwhile, with specific reference to the NDB but it can also be applied to BRICS in general, Abdenur (2014: 97) writes that although China had no need for the NDB to be established as a funding source for its development cooperation portfolio, it saw that political benefits could be gained from the new facility. As Abdenur (2014: 87) reports, some scholars see the BRICS offering "state intervention", China's model for the last thirty years, as the appropriate path to development while other scholars suspect the promotion of "questionable" aid and lending practices and Abdenur cites the former Venezuelan Trade and Industry Minister and former Executive Director of the World Bank, Moisés Naím's term "rogue aid". The NDB has already come in for criticism over its reported lack of transparency and some of its early loans have been derided as having been granted "in violation of internationally accepted and adopted principles of human rights, transparency and accountability" (Nyembe: 2016).

Abdenur (2014: 90-91) gives as further motivation for China's promotion of BRICS, in addition to geopolitically countering US hegemony, the desire to "deepen ties with other rising powers – a particularly important goal given the global reach of Chinese interests. The desire to strengthen alignments and relations with such states helps to explain China's concerted efforts to bring South Africa into" BRICS. The latter also reflects China's strong interests in Africa and its perception of South Africa as a "gateway" to Africa. But, specifically also, according to Abdenur (2014: 91), by "boosting the BRICS", with the inclusion of South Africa, China has "been able to deflate the IBSA" with its "common identity" of three "diverse, democratic rising powers". This analysis coincides with that of Al Doyaili *et al*. (2013: 305) who view the "evolving BRICS process" as watering down the liberal democratic "strategic

glue" of IBSA and augmenting "the allure of statist solutions". These authors are concerned "that there is a risk that 'state capitalism' ... will become the prevailing ethos and that the 'democracy advantage' IBSA holds will consequently be eroded". Specifically, they fear that: "This potentially dominant political paradigm could influence South Africa in particular, as a new democracy, in ways that committed democrats might find alarming", and Qobo and Dube (2012: 20) comment that "the BRICS countries should avoid using the [NDB] bank as a Trojan horse for creating advantages exclusively for SOEs" (state owned enterprises).

In sum, the BRICS forum reflects sovereignist and authoritarian governance visions and Hengari (2014: 6) sees South Africa being drawn away from the "normative framing" of its external relations. *The EU and Human Rights at the UN: 2011 Review*, for example, described South Africa's then non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council as giving "Moscow an African ally to legitimise its position" (Gowan and Brantner: 2011: 7). That China has enjoyed success in its efforts to deepen ties with rising powers and countries of the global South is evidenced by the support it has marshalled over the last decade and a half in building up coalitions in support of its positions on human rights and South Africa very much features in this process. According to Halper (2010), South Africa, along with such states as Brazil, Kazakhstan, Nigeria and Venezuela, has played a "key role ... in China's international diplomatic game". *The EU and Human Rights at the UN: 2010 Review* lists 34 countries as forming part of the "Axis of Sovereignty", meaning they vote "with the EU less than 25% of the time". 58 countries, including South Africa, are listed as "trending towards the Axis of Sovereignty (voting with the EU less than 35% of the time)", (Gowan and Brantner: 2010: 4).

China is considered to be the "potential" leader of BRICS, at least this appears to be a view held in Russia (Cheng: 2013) and the People's Republic is certainly the most powerful of the five states. This in itself should be enough to induce caution on the part of policymakers of a middle power like South Africa, a country which only a few years ago was described by Deon Geldenhuys as having taken on the "role of an international norm entrepreneur" (Marthoz: 2012: 8). Although multilateralism, global cooperation and human rights-orientated values today appear to be under threat from many quarters, the potential impact on all of this by a China-led BRICS should

certainly not be underestimated. Halper (2010) offers the following rather biting assessment: China's "market-authoritarian example is fast winning adherents around the world – while marginalising the values that have informed Western progress for 300 years".

South Africa should also be cautious about what it can expect in return for its BRICS-diplomacy. As Qobo and Dube (2012: 5) observe South Africa does expect rather a lot viewing the BRICS – and the G20 – as platforms that will "enhance its global profile as a leading power in Africa, and as a middle power that has an important contribution to play in advancing developing countries' – especially Africa's – interests in multilateral processes". In addition, South Africa is drawn to BRICS for "reasons of prestige", as well as by "the *promise* of gaining international trade and investment opportunities" – and the hope that membership will augment its voice on issues of "global governance". However, the two authors warn that "the value of such benefits are questionable if they are contested only through club diplomacy". Laïdi (2012: 625) also warns that there are more fundamental reasons why South Africa should be cautious: "These [BRICS] countries part ways as soon as power games place them in competition with one another ... In the end, 'the differences among the BRICS largely exceed their areas of convergence'". Taking Laïdi's views into account (which are shared by many scholars, for example, Qobo and Dube (2012: 20-21) and Tsheola (2014: 188)), it should also be added that the BRICS compares unfavourably with the oldest continuing "club" (outside of the UN Security Council), the G7. According to Qobo and Dube (2012: 20-21) the fundamental weakness of the BRICS forum is its lack of collective identity whereas the G7 "can easily find strong grounds for agreement, evolve a common agenda, and rally behind it in other international forums". Cooper (2015: 4) is concerned whether "the benefits of engaging with BRICS" will not be offset by "detrimental economic or reputational damage" to South Africa. In sum, though Brütsch and Papa (2013: 300) might refer to BRICS as "the developing world's most coveted club", Kornegay and Masters still suggest that South Africa needs to inquire where its priorities of engagement should lie in terms of its commitments to groupings such as the above mentioned "and what are the complementarities among them"? Finally, a "coalition" like BRICS is "to be distinguished from more solidly based alliances and ... [is] limited in ... [its] multilateral character" (Kornegay and Masters: 2011: 17 and 22).

## 4.4 BRICS and global governance: misplaced optimism

BRICS is ostensibly about global governance (Stuenkel: 2015a: 6; Nkoana-Mashabane: 2012c). Indeed, Stuenkel (2015a: ix) goes so far as to contend that the advent of the forum "is one of the defining developments in international politics of the first decade of the 21st Century". In the author's view that and the creation of the G20 was "the most significant innovation in global governance in almost two decades". This would appear to be hyperbole. It is arguable how much impact the BRICS forum of five states as a collectivity has had on global governance. As Pant (2013: 102) remarks "the rest of the world remains unconvinced about the ability of the BRICS to shape the global order". It is, therefore, open to doubt whether BRICS membership can be an effective platform for advancing South Africa's declared intention to reform global governance (see Pant: 2013: 95). It is also debateable how seriously the BRICS forum has been taken by such globally prominent actors as President Barack Obama, for example, who throughout his Administration appeared completely unfazed by the rise of the BRICS. This is clear from his visits to New Delhi in November 2010 and to Pretoria in June 2013. In the former capital the President said: "The United States not only welcomes India as a rising global power, we fervently support it" (Wilson and Wax: 2010). In the latter capital the President said: "As one of the BRICS, South Africa's growth reflects the new realities of a global economy. And we welcome that; we don't simply recognise it. That's one of the reasons why I institutionalised the G20 – because it reflects the reality of today's world and today's economy, and the need for this continent to be represented in any discussions about the direction of the world economy" (The White House: 2013). In these circumstances it is not surprising that the leader who promised India assistance in its bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council was not the President of China or the President of Russia but President Obama, as reported by Wilson and Wax (2010).

### 4.4.1 Trade negotiations

The BRICS countries – more specifically the BICS as Russia only became a full member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2012 – were active in trade negotiations long before the formation of the forum in 2009. Indeed, as early as 2003

Brazil, India and China (BIC) took on a leadership position when they combined to reject the US and EU's agriculture proposals. With Brazil coordinating these three countries formed the G20 Agriculture group which objected to the agricultural policies of those developed countries with high tariffs, numerous tariff quotas and export subsidies which were viewed as distorting. But the agricultural sector also saw clear differences among the BICS and China and India joined the G33 which advocated special safeguards for agriculture whereas Brazil advocated the full liberalisation of the agricultural sector, including ending subsidies and non-tariff barriers (NTBs). South Africa also pursued the liberalisation of agricultural trade but in practice blocked imports particularly from its neighbours by means of NTBs (Nel and Taylor: 2013: 1091-1092). Thorstensen *et al.* (2014: 80) describe India as the country that from 1995 to 2010 initiated the most anti-dumping measures against China ("144 investigations and one hundred and fourteen measures"). In January 2012 the three IBSA countries issued a joint statement against the negotiation of plurilateral agreements, touted by some countries as a substitute for the Doha Round now at an impasse, as injurious to the WTO principles of inclusiveness and multilateralism. In spite of this China signalled its desire to sign up for the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA), a potentially major plurilateral agreement to liberalise services markets (Draper and Qobo: 2014: 4). Although Thorstensen *et al.* (2014: 74) regard the BRICS has having become "an interest group with significant power within the multilateral trade system", significant differences over international trade exist within the forum. Lastly, in these trade negotiations it is surely more accurate to speak of five different countries which at different times may or may not be allies in WTO context.

### 4.4.2 The BRICS and the G20

South Africa's membership of the G20 predates its entry into BRICS and it is arguable that its performance as an individual G20 member has been more impressive than its performance as part of the BRICS bloc within the G20. As Qobo and Dube (2015: 4) note South Africa has served as co-chair, with France and South Korea, of the Development Working Group and played a role in shaping the G20's development framework. In the view of Qobo and Dube (2012: 5) "South Africa's participation in the G20 has clearly helped sustain the country's international profile

as a global actor and a voice to be reckoned with in the developing world". Yet, the authors' critique is that while South Africa has pursued "an African agenda" it has "not developed a clear sense of its own interests linked to its domestic development framework ... So, in the absence of this, the value of South Africa's participation and effectiveness in the G20 for its own benefit will always be questioned" and the authors' interpretation is that South Africa will rely more closely on the BRICS.

The performance of the BRICS within the G20 has not been particularly impressive. As Qobo and Dube (2012: 20-21) point out a weakness of BRICS is its lack of collective identity. With coordination not going beyond "consulting and exchanging views", the BRICS fail to make "a solid bloc" in the G20. An exception to this was the joint stand taken by the BRICS over the Russian invasion of Ukraine but which did not necessarily serve South Africa's best interests. This lack of standing together also prevents the BRICS from actively setting the agenda in the G20. Likewise, Singh and Dube (2013b) also identify a lack of BRICS cohesion with the result that the G7 retain control over the global economic agenda. As before, the G20 Brisbane Summit (15-16 November 2014) revealed a lack of common ground among the BRICS who "neither exhibited a common agenda nor presented any joint proposal" (Degaut: 2015: 10). It was apparent from a DIRCO Media Note (2016) that at the G20 Hangzhou Summit (4 September 2016) the BRICS had nothing new to discuss and the Note does not refer to any original proposals. Among the generalities was an affirmation of the importance of "a just and equitable international order based on international law" which was rather disingenuous in view of China's repeated violations of international law in the South China Sea and Russia's actions in the Crimea and Ukraine. South Africans who noticed would probably have been amused by the references to corruption and "ill-gotten wealth". Singh and Dube (2013b) concede that "the BRICS has had a few wins in the G20, but this has been together with other emerging economies, and there is no exclusivity to their achievements".

### 4.4.3 BRICS summitry as a form of global governance

BRICS is chiefly known for its annual summits which thus far, with the recent exception of the NDB and the CRA, have been considered the only permanent or tangible structures of what is supposed to be or was an informal association or club.

But over the years as intra-BRICS cooperation has mushroomed from exchanges between academics and businesspersons to inter-Treasury consultations, from tax policy to various attempts at trade facilitation, from discussions on sustainable development to almost any subject under the sun as is witnessed by the extraordinarily lengthy BRICS summit declarations, the number of BRICS-related bodies, councils, workshops, committees and so on has also mushroomed. In this sense it is being said that the BRICS forum is being (increasingly) "institutionalised" although none of these bodies have any executive or directorial authority or influence over the core of BRICS cooperation which is the cycle of annual summits at head of state / government level. Yet, in a sense the whole organisation is becoming almost unwieldy and needs systemisation, a task clearly beyond the capacity of the five heads of state / government. So while theoretically and in terms of political reality still an informal "club", where is the BRICS headed? Prinsloo (2016) warns the BRICS to be wary of creating a Brussels-like organisational monstrosity, although he does suggest that "institutionalisation of cooperation is certainly the way forward". Even so, just as Qobo (2010) wondered whether South Africa would "be able to endure the resource overstretch" resulting from participating in BRICS, so does Prinsloo observe that "objections from member countries already highlight that the countless working groups, technical committees, forums, taskforces, high level expert committees, common agendas and principles and official meetings are a strain on members". Meanwhile, "diplomats from several countries privately affirm that several of the meetings lack substance and create an inflated sense of the breadth of intra-BRICS cooperation" (Stuenkel: 2016).

Prior to the BRICS Goa Summit of 15-16 October 2016 Prime Minister Modi pushed for the further institutionalisation of BRICS and some of this was reflected in the BRICS Ufa Summit Declaration of 9 July 2015 which referred to the creation of a trade cooperation discussion platform, the establishment of an annual BRICS Export Credit Agencies Forum, noted "the important role played by the BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism", and welcomed the signing of the BRICS Inter-Central Bank Agreement (Toronto: 2015). However, Prime Minister Modi's proposal for a "New Development Bank Institute" which would be "the ideational arm of the NDB and perhaps of the wider BRICS project itself", perhaps even a BRICS policy

formulator, as well as an “OECD-like think tank” for the emerging world (Saran and Rej: 2016), did not survive the Goa Summit.

The *Goa Declaration* with its lengthy and detailed references to multitudinous areas of cooperation as well as numerous reflections on international affairs, all set out in 110 paragraphs, was not dissimilar from previous summit declarations firstly in the incredibly wide-ranging menu of items which simply could not all have been adequately addressed in the time available and secondly in its glossing over the very real tensions between BRICS members such as over trade and security. Instead, the declaration emphasised “BRICS solidarity and cooperation” and also “inclusiveness and mutually beneficial cooperation” (Government of India: 2016: par. 2). Once again Russia and China refused to support the UN Security Council candidatures of Brazil, India and South Africa. (The relevant wording is exactly the same as that in paragraph 20 of the *eThekwini Declaration* of 2013). Prime Minister Modi sought but failed to obtain the forum’s support for India’s entry to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) – with India’s application opposed by Brazil and China but since 8 July 2016 supported by South Africa (Ebrahim: 2016) – and China’s mooted BRICS free trade agreement ran into opposition and was not mentioned. According to Stuenkel (2016) India hoped to use the summit to isolate Pakistan but also failed in this regard. Just before the summit Russia and Pakistan had participated in joint military exercises. Consequently, *The Times of India* blasted the *Goa Declaration*: “China bulldozed India’s security concerns as Russia looked the other way” (Parashar: 2016).

### 4.4.4 The BRICS lose their sheen as South Africa’s governance declines

The BRICS have lost much of their lustre since that first summit in 2009 at Yekaterinburg and Sharma (2012: 3) has commented that “no idea has done more to muddle thinking about the global economy than that of the BRICs”. He goes further and argues “that economic success is usually fleeting, that many emerging markets have been ‘emerging’ for the last half a century”, which is another way of saying that the rise of emerging nations as a group is a myth, that most emerging nations remain emerging nations. Sharma’s conclusion: “only countries with careful long-term policies, such as South Korea, can hope to sustain their upward journey” (BBC World Service: 2013). In these circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that the

*Bertelsmann Stiftung's* research into the governance capacities of the BRICS expresses doubt about what impact the BRICS might have on the international balance of power and the future global economic order. What is observable is that the BRICS countries face significant political, economic, social, environmental and demographic challenges. "Whether these nations are able to effectively face up to these challenges depends to a large degree on their ability to reform their political systems and on the quality of their governance". The study emphasises that economic growth is not enough to solve social problems. Each of the BRICS is confronted by the need for reform in key policy areas and governance structures (Azahaf and Schraad-Tischler: 2012: 108).

In 2012 the *Bertelsmann Stiftung* study concluded that "in terms of governance capacities, South Africa currently holds a middling position within the BRICS group". The implication being that it was difficult to assess whether South Africa had sufficient capability to reform in order to meet the country's political, economic and social challenges. For example, "in comparison to Brazil, Russia, India and China ... South Africa ... [showed] the worst policy performance in terms of labour market and education policy" (Azahaf and Schraad-Tischler: 2012: 114-115). In 2017 the study's evaluation would no doubt have been even more damning bearing in mind the ongoing atmosphere of crisis surrounding the South African Presidency. In its traditional annual *Cabinet Report Card* the *Mail & Guardian* (2016a) described President Zuma's performance as "governance by farce, at the highest level, and with terrible repercussions". Further illustrating these concerns is the OECD's league table of education systems drawn up in 2015 wherein South Africa ranks 75$^{th}$ out of 76 countries (Chambers: 2017). Bond (2017) reflects extreme pessimism both about BRICS and its member states:

> "Thanks to blatant corruption, presidential delegitimisation has reached unprecedented levels in both Brazil and South Africa; ruling-party degeneracy in India also included an extraordinary bout of local currency mismanagement; and sudden new foreign-policy divergences may wreak havoc between China and Russia. The BRICS bloc's relations could well destabilise to the break point".

If Bond is correct then, to paraphrase Olivier (2013a: 413), South Africa may have erred if it believes that a seat at the BRICS table will enable it to play at a world league level or to make much further meaningful contribution to global governance.

## 4.5 South Africa's trade links with the industrialised North, the BRICs and the global South

### 4.5.1 The South African government's vision of BRICS as a platform for "decoupling" or "de-linking" from the West

As noted at the beginning of this study, a focus of South Africa's in joining the BRICS was to attempt a decoupling from the West and to turn instead to the economies of the other four members of the forum. For example, in 2013 President Zuma, who is reported by Brooks Spector (2013) to have "extolled the Chinese way of doing business with Africa – in contrast to the West", was also reported as saying that Western businesses and governments "must learn to eschew warning Africa against any embrace of China". According to Brooks Spector, the President added that the Western private sector must change the way it does business with Africa if it wants "to regain Africa". Also, according to Brooks Spector, President Zuma said that if Western interests "treat Africa as a former colony ... then people will go to new partners who are going to treat them differently". Previously already, in May 2012, Gwede Mantashe, who as ANC Secretary-General has considerable influence on ANC and therefore government policymaking, had been so bold as to say:

> "Western investors have to realise South Africa does not need their money since it can turn increasingly to fellow BRICS members India and China to fund its economic development" (Bezuidenhout and Claassen: 2013: 227).

Mantashe must have been quite unaware of international realities for the opposite to his wishful thinking had already been demonstrated by the time he spoke. As Gideon Rachman (2012) wrote: "declarations of 'decoupling' from the West were premature. The EU remains collectively the largest economy in the world. Recession there and slow growth in the US inevitably affect the BRICS ... for all the hopeful talk of 'decoupling', the BRICS are all affected by weak Western economies". Only a few

months after Mantashe spoke South African Reserve Bank Governor Gill Marcus (2013: 1) said it was “evident that there is no decoupling [from the advanced economies] of the emerging market economies”. As Neil Shearing of Capital Economics was reported as saying on 24 June 2012: “Decoupling is a bit of a myth: you either believe in globalisation ... greater trade and capital integration ... or you believe in decoupling” (Pidd and Stewart: 2012).

The failure to decouple is not only due to events in the West or the global North. It is also linked to developments in the BRICS countries and already in 2012 Rachman warned that “the BRICS are in trouble”. China’s slowing growth made it feel “more uncertain about its economic and political future than in many years”. In addition, “a slowing China has knock-on effects for the other BRICS ... Brazilian growth has dropped off particularly fast. It hit 7.5% in 2010” and in 2012 the Brazilian economy was headed for growth of less than 2%. India’s growth was at 9% before the global financial crisis but then dropped to just above 5%. “Russia, too, is in trouble”, reported Rachman. “The two pillars of the Putin system – an acquiescent middle class and a gusher of oil and gas money – are both looking wobbly” (Rachman: 2012). Two years later Rachman (2014) again reported that Brazil, Russia and South Africa were “floundering economically”. India had experienced “several years of disappointing economic growth”. China was “in the midst of difficult reforms”.

An unexpected event occurred during a three week period in June-July 2015 when the Shanghai stock exchange lost some 30% of its value. It took months for the exchange to recover and only after the Chinese government had resorted to extraordinary steps but which called into question China’s financial credibility. In 2016 China's economy grew by 6.7% compared to 6.9% in 2015. 2016 therefore saw China mark its slowest growth since 1990 and this was also a far cry from its double-digit growth from 2003 to 2007 (14.2% in 2007, 9.7% and 9.4% the following two years and a jump up again to 10.6% in 2010 followed by the current years of decline (BBC: 2017)). But as the BBC (2017) also reports the 2016 data came “after the leader of one Chinese province admitted GDP data was faked for several years”. This reinforced the suspicion by “many observers ... that the country's growth was actually much weaker than the official data suggests”.

The various problems affecting the BRICS countries call into question the merit of any "coupling" between them. According to Rachman (2012) these problems include weakening economies, "dysfunctional politics" and lack of "political harmony", the latter referring to "popular rage against corruption". All this "makes both politicians and investors nervous about potential instability".

### 4.5.2 *Noblesse oblige* or the limits of South-South solidarity (SSS)

BRICS is identified with the concept of South-South solidarity. The *Final Communiqué* of the Asian-African conference of Bandung (24 April 1955) declared that "nations should practise tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours and develop friendly cooperation" on the basis of principles such as the "promotion of mutual interests and cooperation". Such cooperation "would effectively contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security, while cooperation in the economic, social and cultural fields would help bring about the common prosperity and well-being of all" (CVCE).

Nel and Taylor (2013: 1091-1092) write that "South-South solidarity (SSS) implies a mutual attitude of affective empathy" and with SSS there is also implied "a special case of *noblesse oblige*". Unfortunately, as earlier seen in this study, Widyatmadja (2005) wrote that Asian and African leaders seemed to have lost their enthusiasm for their Bandung aspirations. And so, it turns out that the global South is not a particularly charitable or even fraternal place. Nel and Taylor report that "South-South trade now accounts for 37% of global trade … About 40% of all merchandise trade by developing states is South-South". Very disappointingly, however, are the "inconvenient realities", as Nel and Taylor put it. These include the fact that "South-South trade is largely made-up by trade by and within one region. Asia in 2010 was responsible for 80% of South-South exports, compared to 6% for Africa and 10% for the middle and low-income states of the Americas. While developing Asia trades largely with itself, most exports from Africa and the American developing states go to the developed North" (Nel and Taylor: 2013: 1094). Looking at BRICS specifically the picture does not really look any better and Singh (2016: 110) points out that although more than 17% of world trade is accounted by BRICS, intra-BRICS trade amounts to "just 12.12% of total BRICS trade with the world". What's more the

intensity of intra-BRICS trade of China, India and Russia decreased from 2001 to 2015. Just over two-thirds of tariffs faced by states of the global South originate in other developing states. India, for example, maintains tariffs at the high level of 33.3% on agricultural goods which principally impacts negatively on least developed countries (LDCs). SSS can indeed be very thin. None of the three IBSA countries is the most important trading partner of the other (Nel and Taylor: 2013: 1096).

The majority of South Africa's trade agreements are with economies of the North. Although formally 85% of intra-SADC trade is duty free (98% in SACU) South Africa actively and easily resorts to non-tariff barriers (NTBs) including against neighbouring states. As well as discouraging intra-regional (SADC) trade NTBs raise prices which most affects low-income households. "Incredibly, between January 2009 and June 2010, all NTBs reportedly imposed by South Africa were against other SADC members" (Nel and Taylor: 2013: 1102). The "pursuit of intra-IBSA solidarity has not prevented the outbreak of major trade disputes between" India, Brazil and South Africa "with the recent Brazil-South African 'chicken wars' [of 2012-2013] being emblematic". The authors refer to the "thinness" of South-South solidarity between the IBSA countries (Nel and Taylor: 2013: 1096). That South Africa persists in erecting trade barriers was made manifest once again on 15 December 2016 when the government "slapped a 'safeguard duty' of 13.9% on frozen chicken legs imported from the European Union (EU) to help the ailing local industry, despite a pending challenge by the EU and local poultry importers" (Fabricius: 2016). The upshot then, as reported by Visser (2013), is that "South Africa has adopted a new trade policy approach aimed at looking at its own interest first, despite a drive for more regional integration to sustain Africa's trade growth with the rest of the world". Thus, quite apart from poultry products, "importers of several products have been experiencing dramatic increases in tariffs from South Africa, as well as an increase in antidumping and safeguard measures aimed at protecting South African industries".

### 4.5.3 South Africa's trade relations with non-BRICS and BRICS countries

The European Union (EU) as a 28 member bloc remains South Africa's largest trading partner as well as largest foreign investor accounting for 72% of South

Africa's total foreign direct investment stock. "Over 2000 EU companies operate within South Africa creating over 350 000 jobs, and producing value added goods which are exported and which contribute substantially to skills development and job creation ... Total trade with the EU has increased from R325 billion in 2010 to R497 billion in 2014" (South African Embassy, Brussels). The EU-SADC Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), signed by Trade and Industry Minister, Dr Rob Davies, on 10 June 2016, "will see more South African agricultural products being exported to Europe ... The EPA provides improved market access opportunities for South African products, including a significant improvement in quota for wine and new market access for sugar and ethanol. Under the new agreement, South Africa's duty-free wine exports to the EU are expected to double. The Rules of Origin on clothing have also been simplified and will encourage South African clothing exports to the EU" (South African Government: 2016). Notwithstanding official encouragements and "BRICS Business Councils", from 2013 to 2015 South African exports to BRIC countries increased consistently only in respect of Brazil and India, but declined in respect of Russia (from 2014 to 2015) and declined significantly in respect of China from nearly R116 billion in 2013 down to nearly R94.8 billion in 2014 and to just over R92.5 billion in 2015, the drop being due to China's decreasing imports of commodities. On the other hand South Africa's imports from China increased consistently and considerably during the same period reaching a total of just over R199 billion in 2015 resulting in a bilateral trade deficit for South Africa of well over 50% (Easydata.com). According to Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davies the composition of bilateral trade with China "remains a concern" as "over 90% of South Africa's top 10 exports to China are in raw materials while 100% of [South Africa's] top 10 imports from China are manufactured products" (eNCA: 2014). South African exports to the EU steadily increased from R159.1 billion in 2013 to over R207.9 billion in 2015. The trade figures show an increasing deficit for South Africa with imports from the EU in 2015 totalling over R322.3 billion (Easydata.com).

According to Bezuidenhout and Claassen (2013: 237) "South Africa's trade with other BRICS economies is largely with China. Trade with India comes in a distant second place. BRICS as a whole accounts for 17.6% of South Africa's exports, with exports to China accounting for 12.86%". By comparison in 2011 the EU still commanded 21.4% of South Africa's exports. Intra-BRICS trade has not necessarily

proven to be a positive development for the non-China member countries. For example, the BBC's Justin Rowlatt reported in 2011 that a study had "found that more than 80% of Brazil's manufactured exports are being adversely affected by competition from China" (Rowlatt: 2011). Likewise, in South Africa concern has been expressed regarding imports from China particularly in those labour-intensive industrial sectors where there have been high levels of Chinese import penetration. For example, in the case of clothing products demands for the imposition of import quotas on Chinese imports were made in 2007 and 2008. Edwards and Jenkins (2013: 8) comment that "were it not for these quotas, the level and increase in import penetration in clothing may have been even higher". Not surprisingly, Barria (2016) reports that the reason Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa "cold-shouldered" China's proposal for a BRICS Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was precisely because of their fears that such an FTA "could lead to a surge in imports of Chinese goods into their territory – in turn, hurting local manufacturing".

Finally, it is important to look at the nature of economic and trading relations between countries and Bezuidenhout and Claassen (2013: 233-235) describe that of the EU and South Africa as "that of substantial bi-directional intra-industry trade in manufactured goods". As the authors explain "this highlights the advanced nature of the trade relationship between South Africa and the EU". The significance of this is that most developed countries engage largely in intra-industry trade while developing countries tend to engage in inter-industry trade. The fact is that unless an economy moves up the value chain it will be stuck in the rut of trading on commodities and that inevitably leads to diminishing returns in the medium to long term (Nel and Taylor: 2013: 1094). South Africa's exports to China and the other BRICS consist largely of minerals and resources, in effect inter-industry trade which creates low-skill jobs. The main pattern of South Africa's trade with the EU is intra-industry trade which requires skilled labour. This category of employment leads to increased economic growth and more equal wealth distribution, according to Bezuidenhout and Claassen (2013: 238-239). As such trade with the EU is much more to South Africa's advantage and economic prospects than trade with the BRICS.

Consequently, from the perspective of intra-BRICS trade and South Africa's trade relations with BRICS and non-BRICS countries, the BRICS forum does not really look like a happy unity.

### 4.6 South Africa's BRICS membership and Africa

As seen the benefits to Africa of South Africa's BRICS membership cannot easily be demonstrated and Fakir (2014) refers to what in effect is a new "Scramble for Africa" and the concern is that of a repeat of the colonial era core-periphery relationship. So, although Melber and Southall (2010: xx-xxi) point out that "the imperial imagery evoked is often sensationalist", they do concede that there are warnings "of the dangers of Africa becoming subject to a new phase of imperialism … of a new scramble reminiscent of the high-handed antics of the European imperial powers" towards the end of the 19th Century. The authors see a competition for raw materials and influence between the "established" Western powers and the rising powers of the "East and South". In this regard the authors draw attention to China's "challenge", really disregard, for the "codes of conduct", in other words norms and "aid conditionalities", prescribed and promoted by the Western powers. Carmody gives a long litany of what can only be described as China's exploitative practices in Africa usually with the collusion of African governments. For example, China benefits from not rehabilitating "'rogue' states as their ostracism by the West provides a competitive advantage to Chinese companies" (Carmody: 2013: 16). These practices include an extreme disregard for physical safety norms resulting in fatalities, the "casualisation of labour" which contributes to poor safety, "controversial" labour relations (no overtime pay, short contracts, no protective clothing, the trampling of labour laws but with government inspectors favouring "the Chinese not the local people", and even the shooting and killing of workers by "Chinese managers"). Carmody (2013: 35-37) refers to the "power imbalance between African and the Chinese government" but adds that "lack of political conditionality" suits African governments "very well". Besada and Tok (2014: 83) also refer to "widespread" criticism over human rights, governance and environmental concerns of Chinese companies operating in Algeria, Angola, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Shelton and Kabemba (2012: 20-21) also refer to "serious

governance challenges … and serious human rights abuses" by Chinese businesses in the DRC.

Sanusha Naidu (2010: 134-135) views Africa and the Indian Ocean Rim as the setting of intense "rivalry" between India and China and between India and Pakistan. India therefore very much fits into the "new African scramble debate". Naidu quotes an Indian minister criticising China for going out to "exploit the natural resources" unlike India which seeks to "add value". But Naidu has no compunction in stating that India "is in the hunt" to satisfy its own needs and where its interests are threatened "it will behave like a scrambler". Fioramonti (2012: 2) also describes "another scramble for the vast resources of" Africa with the result that the continent has once again become "heavily dependent on exporting its raw materials, with little (if any) achievements in terms of long-term sustainable development". Indeed, writing of Africa's "commodity dependence", Motsamai and Qobo (2012: 150-156) note the continent's high susceptibility to price fluctuations which deepens "Africa's economic vulnerability". Thus, "the proper foundations for Africa's beneficial integration into the global economy on its own terms" are not being created. On the contrary, that dependence results in a "high level of exposure to one market, China". For Cilliers (2016) South Africa has exchanged its BRICS membership for a licence to China "to de-industrialise the country". The proof of this is that by the middle of the 2000s, according to Carmody (2013: 67), "South Africa was exporting fewer advanced manufactured goods to China than it did in the early 1990s, while China, on the other hand, exported greater quantities of these to South Africa". As if this was not enough South Africa's exports to SADC countries have also been declining for the reason that South African firms are unable to compete with China's state-financed firms and Carmody cites the observation by Martyn Davies, Director of the Centre for Chinese Studies at Stellenbosch University, that "what is naturally South Africa's regional commercial space is fast becoming China's". For Carmody (2013: 48), although South Africa leveraged its African regional influence as part of its campaign to secure admission to the then BRIC – precisely Jim O'Neill's (2012) argument in favour of South Africa's membership provided it promoted "cross-border synergies" in trade and infrastructure development and thereby boost continent wide productivity – the country now "accommodates global and regional power interests on the continent". Who benefits from this, is it South Africa, Africa or external powers

and commercial interests? Carmody's (2013: 65) take is that South Africa has achieved, in Africa, "market access in exchange for political quiescence", the self-effacement mentioned earlier in this study.

On the positive side Carmody (2013: 70) asserts that South Africa "now leverages the power of the Chinese state and influence" in Africa and Bradley (2016: 3), noting "the pragmatic reality that South Africa needs Chinese investment and resources to drive its economic growth", refers also to China's invocation "as a model for development" by ANC officials in view of that country's "success in lifting its population out of poverty". Besada and Tok (2014: 83) report that "major Chinese companies such as ZTE and Huawei are investing and establishing their African headquarters in South Africa, and Beijing has located the African headquarters of the China-Africa Development Fund in Johannesburg". Shelton and Kabemba (2012: 17) hold that "Chinese investments in Africa clearly boost local economies and create new commercial opportunities in domestic markets" but at the same time they warn that China also poses "major challenges" for Africa. For example, Chinese steel-makers have purchased "mines or smelters in South Africa to ensure access to affordable raw materials". Yet, all beneficiation is effected in China. Thus, deprived of value adding processes, jobs in South Africa "remain limited and no transfer of skills or technology occurs" (Shelton and Kabemba: 2012: 21-22). The latter points constitute common threads in the literature concerning China in Africa. Bradley (2016: 5) asserts that Chinese investment has had a negative impact on unemployment in South Africa, particularly in the labour-intensive industries, and "appears to have had a limited impact on South Africa's overall economy".

## 4.7 Significant divergences distancing Brazil and India from Russia, China and South Africa

There are significant divergences between the five BRICS states and in particular between Brazil and India on the one hand and Russia, China and South Africa on the other hand. Lack of space in the present study precludes adequate treatment of these issues but a very brief schematic summary follows hereafter. Brazil has, for example, moved away from the BRICS-aligned position, to which South Africa subscribes, calling for a government-led Internet. Instead, Brazil has put its weight

behind the US-West-aligned multi-stakeholder system (Kaul: 2014). For Brazil the key goal was to repair its frayed ties with the United States (Stuenkel: 2015b). Although the three Eurasian BRICS countries are not above collectively contesting Western dominance, they part ways as soon as the realities of power politics intrude (Laïdi: 2012: 625). Their rivalries are particularly intense on the Eurasian landmass and on the oceans. This costly geostrategic competition between China and India also draws in Russia, Pakistan, Japan and the United States. Fundamentally, New Delhi is alarmed by China's military rise and intention to encircle India with strategic ports in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Beijing's "String of Pearls" strategy and the intense geostrategic rivalry over who should refurbish and have access to the Iranian port of Chahabar and the Pakistani port of Gwadar illustrates well the intensifying and existential nature of Sino-Indian competition no matter the financial costs (Keck: 2013; Aneja: 2013; and BBC: 2016b). The Indian and United States Navies have for some years been engaged in joint manoeuvres in the Indian Ocean and the two countries have held talks about conducting joint naval patrols in the disputed South China Sea but China has warned against "countries from outside the area" militarising it (Pant: 2016).

Unavoidably, in a study of this nature, attention must explicitly be drawn to the potential for war in the Asia-Pacific region and particularly in the China Seas. The above mentioned rivalries are intimately related to China's new assertiveness which sees the People's Republic manifesting policies varying from status quo to anti status quo, in other words acting as a revisionist power, though perhaps not to the same extent as Russia but with the very significant exception of the China Seas where China's conduct can only be described as revisionist to the extent that the outbreak of great power armed conflict in that region, whether accidental or otherwise, cannot be excluded. As the former US Air Force officer turned realist scholar, John Mearsheimer (2010: 382), "put it bluntly: China cannot rise peacefully". Instead there exists "considerable potential for war … between China and the United States" with the latter supported by "most of China's neighbours … and Australia". Adam Liff and G John Ikenberry (2014: 55-56), both prominent international relations scholars with the latter having served on the US State Department's Policy Planning Staff, also report that "many observers" fear "the possibility of a catastrophic military conflict", which concern is exacerbated by "China's worsening relations with its

neighbours ... [this due to its] policies vis-à-vis disputed territory and features on its periphery, [which] appear provocative and newly 'assertive', even aggressive" to many of the other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. China's rapid and ongoing military build-up – the size of the defence budget of the People's Republic increased by 70% from 2006 to 2011 (Liff and Ikenberry: 2014: 76) – is shifting the balance of power and is destabilising the wider Indo-Pacific region. According to Liff and Ikenberry (2014: 84-85), all this and in particular China's "vast and ambiguous claims in the South and East China Seas … increase[s] the risk of misunderstanding and miscalculation". Finally, Francis Fukuyama (MIT Press: 2014), also formerly of the US State Department Policy Planning Staff, sees "eerie parallels" between the pre-1914 era and the present. He resigns himself to asking: "Will war again be an inevitable outcome of the changing balance of power and entangling alliances"?

Russia, the longstanding strategic ally of India, has since 2014 engaged in a rapprochement and "renaissance" with Pakistan. The related cooling of relations between Moscow and New Delhi may well "impinge upon Moscow and New Delhi's cooperation in the long-term" (Frolovskiy: 2016). India views Beijing's much vaunted One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project as a form of encirclement with significant geopolitical implications as OBOR is "arguably redrawing the continent's map". So reports Tanvi Madan (2016), Director of the India Project at the Brookings Institution, who adds that the project, in the form of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, includes territory claimed by India and so New Delhi is unlikely to formally endorse OBOR as a whole. Central Asia – with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan forming the "Heartland of the Eurasian landmass", according to Scott and Alcenat (2008: 1-2), and which arguably includes Azerbaijan and Georgia – remains as in past centuries an area of great power competition and China's contestation of Russia's historic hegemony of the Heartland can over the long-term only be cast as existential. For Moscow the stakes are high in that Central Asia is a potential competitor to Russia's energy exports, Russia's lifeblood. Russia fears President Xi Jinping's "westward strategy" or "New Silk Road economic belt" (a part of the OBOR project) as a form of encroachment, which may eventually reduce Central Asia to being an economic satellite of China (Rumer and Stronski: 2015). Yet it is also "highly unlikely that China will accept a geopolitical straightjacket … The 21st Century version of the Great Game is on" (Marantidou and Cosa: 2014).

Adding to Central Asia's complexities is the European Union's involvement as it endeavours, with United States encouragement, to wean itself off Russian energy imports in order to "stop the Kremlin using them as a political weapon", as former US Secretary of State John Kerry termed it (Chazan and Crooks: 2014).

It can hardly be cause for surprise that in these circumstances the South African proposal of a BRICSMAR, joint Naval manoeuvres similar to IBSAMAR, failed to gain traction within the BRICS as geo-strategically and militarily they are too far apart (Kornegay: 2015a: 237; Mishra: 2014: 16).

### 4.8 BRICS and regionalism

It was noted earlier that with the help of constructivist theory that the five countries forming the BRICS forum might be considered a "region". However, the application of Hartshorne's constructivist criteria easily discards the notion of BRICS as a region for it would be stretching credulity to assert that BRICS meets the requirements of "homogeneity" and of "contiguity" which is also connected to the criterion of "coherence". The BRICS' "binding" factors appear to be negatives, criticisms of the West and of Western diplomacy and even here there is not unanimity among the BRICS. The BRICS share very little in terms of common "values" and it is difficult to see what is "functional" about the BRICS as units of a "regional entity" in the Hartshorne sense. Even the two autocracies are deeply divided. Indeed, their divisions are of an existential nature and in that sense over the long-term even more divisive than their respective differences with Brazil and South Africa. India alone among the democracies is condemned to address life and death issues in its dealings with Beijing and Moscow hence the characterisation by Kornegay and Bohler-Muller (2013: 3) of the "Russia-India-China (RIC) 'triangle of ambivalence'".

Meena and Scholvin might be regarded as *avant-garde* yet the paradox is that Hartshorne's categories or criteria, as listed by Scholvin, of homogeneity, binding factors, common cultural and social values, economic management, functionality, contiguity, integration, coherence and permanent institutions can easily be applied to the "old" British Commonwealth, now the Commonwealth, as there is far more binding coherence drawing together the United Kingdom and the Dominions of

Australia, New Zealand and Canada than is the case with the BRICS. It is difficult to associate BRICS with soft power. According to a study, until 2013 the South African media coverage of BRICS, except for Russia, was balanced and "generally positive" because it gave South Africa a "seat at the big table" (Wasserman: 2013). By 2015 media coverage of BRICS was more cynical or sceptical (Bruce: 2015). South Africa-China relations were responsible for much of the controversies in political and media circles concerning South African foreign policy (Anthony *et al.*: 2015b: 9-10; van der Westhuizen and Smith: 2013: 2). And China, despite its economic and military might suffers from a severe shortage of soft power (Shambaugh: 2015; See also Goldkorn: 2013). According to the Pew Global Attitudes Project "only 45% of South Africans view China positively" (Bradley: 2016: 3). And for Fakir (2014) the BRICS "bloc still has a long ways to go before it becomes part of the public imagination".

### 4.9 Heartland and Rimland revisited: South Africa's geopolitical alignment

As seen Meena (2013: 580) applies the classical geopolitical theories of Heartland and Rimland to BRICS, yet the BRICS concept would seem to be the exact opposite of Heartland-Rimland and of the related Cold War containment strategy which was designed to limit and contain the influence of the Eurasian communist powers. Further, Meena's reference, with apparent approval, to Aleksandr Dugin and Neo-Eurasianism (which propagates a form of Russian imperialism: see Barbashin and Thoburn (2014) and Beiner (2015)) is also confusing. Instead, it can be argued that BRICS is a platform for the peaceful projection of Russian and Chinese power but with clear geopolitical implications and thus contrary to the strategy of containment. As seen Thakur (2014: 1797) describes BRICS as a "buffer zone" against the West for Russia and China. This then would seem to suggest some kind of manipulation by these two countries of the BRICS system. Abdenur (2014: 90), for example, suggests that "the BRICS helps China to counter US hegemony without direct confrontation" and Cheng (2013) sees Russia leveraging China's power "to help lift the status of all participating countries, particularly Russia, in the global rebalancing". Times have changed and whereas Spykman and Kennan perceived Russia to be America's and the liberal West's principal adversary there are today two major Eurasian countries equipped with the ambition to exercise on a global scale a role that is inimical to the interests of the West and the liberal international order.

Furthermore, these two powers have acquired sufficient capacity to project military power over considerable distances though perhaps not to the same extent as the United States. Of China and Russia, the latter is at present the more explicitly revisionist state though it is at a disadvantage economically vis-à-vis China and this is where BRICS comes in handy if Thakur and Cheng have it right.

Ikenberry (2008: 24-25) has given structural reasons why the international system is not overtly resisting the rising powers and why China's rise need not trigger a wrenching hegemonic transition but instead be integrated into the "Western-centred" liberal international order. But much has changed since 2008. In "the post-Ukraine world order", with many "combustible elements" present (Ignatieff: 2014), including Brexit, populism, mass migration, possible American isolationism and with uncertainties concerning the new US Trump Administration, the world is more violent, more dangerous and more unpredictable than at any time since the end of the Cold War. The question has been asked whether "international law and conventions, and mechanisms for collective security developed since the Second World War will inevitably give way to atavism in world politics" (Olivier and Olivier: 2014). While all this is happening "China is changing its image of low-profile to one of a more confident, assertive, anti-status quo power that is pushing back against the West, and generally seeking to challenge the US-led global system" (Zhang: 2013: 20). As part of its strategy China, *inter alia*, through its state media outlets, is using Africa as a "testing ground for the construction of a discourse that China hopes to be an alternative ... of the US-led international system". In this regard "China takes Africa as a stepping stone for global expansion" (Zhang: 2013: 2-3 and 9).

The mounting global instability coupled with the attempts by Russia and China to enhance their status at the expense of the West, with the BRICS potentially serving as a useful cover in this regard, are sufficient explanations why South Africa's overtly anti-Western approach to BRICS membership may be problematic rather than the actual membership itself. Unlike Brazil and India, South Africa's diplomacy in general and in particular its advocacy of BRICS as an alternative formation to the Western liberal order aligns it with the Eurasian autocracies as demonstrated at the United Nations where its position "is conspicuously congruent with the positions of Russia and China" (Olivier: 2013a: 411). Put otherwise and paraphrasing Olivier (2013a:

410), while South Africa for commercial and other reasons should be free to look East it would be wiser if it did not "put all its eggs in one basket" for, as Bohler-Muller (2012: 6) adds, this is likely to result in Pretoria "burning more bridges than it builds".

## 4.10 Conclusion

This chapter again focusses on South Africa's vulnerability as a BRICS member, a side-effect, *inter alia*, of its loose club diplomacy format – which in turn augments the country's tendency to bandwagon after the two Eurasian autocracies yet, without successfully decoupling economically from the powers of the West and the North. Evidently based on faulty, poor foreign policy analysis, South Africa's BRICS membership has not lived up to the optimism initially associated with it. South African foreign policy does not appear to factor in the existential rivalries between the three Eurasian powers. Thus, during his Budget Vote address to the National Assembly on 30 May 2013 Deputy Minister Ebrahim (2013b) observed the following about the Indian Ocean Rim:

> "This formation has attracted the quest for influence and hegemony in the geostrategic context, driven by global competition for natural resources and market share. A clear strategy to engage this formation is therefore necessary for our own economic development".

Regrettably, the Deputy Minister's analysis stopped there and he proceeded to speak about "the need to leverage this agglomeration of key economic anchor countries". There was therefore no discussion or elaboration of the naval arms race between India and China and how this might impact on South Africa's continued membership of BRICS or on South Africa's other vital bilateral relationships. Meanwhile, there are not enough binding factors and coherence for the forum to constitute a region in the constructivist or even in just the economic sense.

# Chapter 5: Conclusion: evaluation and recommendations

## 5.1 Introduction: the research question and analytical framework

The main research question of this study was: From the perspective of geopolitical repositioning, does South Africa's BRICS-aligned club diplomacy maximise the national interest or not and does it, therefore, benefit or impact negatively on the country's global standing?

### 5.1.1 Analytical framework

The study was demarcated conceptually with as principal units of analysis the forum and club diplomacy features of BRICS and their implications for South Africa's alliance diplomacy. Reference was also had to constructivist theory and classical geopolitics to determine the benefits or otherwise to the South African national interest of the country's BRICS diplomacy. The relevant time-frame extended from 2010 to 2016. In addressing the main research question attention was also given to the following four research objectives namely: firstly, to develop a concept-based framework to determine and assess the nature of BRICS as an international actor as well as the nature and scope of club diplomacy associated with BRICS; secondly, to contextualise South Africa's BRICS membership and club diplomacy with reference to the historical and (foreign) policy dimensions thereof; thirdly, to analyse and assess the diplomatic and geopolitical repositioning implicit in South Africa's prioritisation of the BRICS relationship; And fourthly, to evaluate these diplomatic aspirations and performances in the light of international developments and the South African national interest as a basis for policy and research recommendations.

### 5.1.2 Why South Africa?

The question may also be asked what interest is there in examining South Africa's BRICS membership. After all, "South Africa doesn't belong in BRICS … It's just wrong", said Jim O'Neill a little over a year after South Africa's accession. Reasons for his negativity included South Africa's small economy and its "many" dissimilarities with the other members (Naidoo: 2012). Then, what about the BRICS forum itself?

As seen, prominent global actors such as President Barack Obama, for example, appeared not to attach any serious interest to the forum. It is suggested that the interest lies in the fact that South Africa's adhesion to the forum coincided with a noticeable change in its foreign policy. From Africa's "poster child for constitutional democracy" (Allison: 2016) South Africa began shedding or diluting the unique role it played under Presidents Mandela and Mbeki as a "bridge-builder" between North and South (Qobo: 2010). What's more it realigned its foreign policy closely to that of Russia and China and this at an ever tenser period in international affairs.

## 5.2 Summary of key findings

The key findings relate to the four research objectives referred to above.

### 5.2.1 BRICS as an international actor and diplomatic club

It was found that the word "forum", selected by the BRICS themselves, is indeed the most appropriate appellation for this still rather informal and loose inter-state association. In a sense, it is an ongoing series of conferences and not yet an IGO. Although there is cooperation among the members it is unconvincing to define BRICS as an alliance. According to the former Indian Foreign Secretary and former National Security Adviser, Shivshankar Menon, BRICS is "a strategic partnership in specific policy areas" (mentioned are finance, trade, development and environmental policy) but with "conflicting positions" over foreign and trade policy. It is doubtful that the conditions exist for a long-term alliance (Azahaf and Schraad-Tischler: 2012: 16).

Menon's view is shared by Bobo Lo, Associate Fellow with the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House and a former Deputy Head of Mission at the Australian Embassy in Moscow among many positions held by him in the field of Sino-Russian studies. In his view the impression of Sino-Russian harmony seen by many "as an alliance in all but name, and as an existential threat to the US-led global order" is misleading. For behind the scenes "there are important differences in perceptions and interests ... This is no authoritarian entente but a relationship of strategic convenience shaped by individual national priorities that sometimes converge but at other times do not" (Lo: 2017). Indeed, this *Axis of Convenience* (the

title of his 2008 book), “is complicated by historical suspicions, cultural prejudices, geopolitical rivalries, and competing priorities. For Russia, China is at once the focus of a genuine convergence of interests and the greatest long-term threat to its national security. For China, Russia is a key supplier of energy and weapons, but is frequently dismissed as a self-important power whose rhetoric far outstrips its real influence” (Brookings: 2008).

The dynamics between the five members vary but there are several indications why South Africa’s behaviour might be characterised as bandwagoning and attention must again be drawn to the drawbacks of the club diplomacy model of which BRICS is a variant particularly when a weaker state like South Africa is grouped with partners like Russia and China without the safeguards of a formal inter-governmental organisation such as rules of procedure. This absence also allows more space for interpersonal relational elements to factor in. Hartley (2014) draws attention to the personal elements that would draw together men such as Presidents Putin and Zuma – and the latter has reportedly met the former more frequently than any other head of state. With China there are the increasingly intimate links between the ANC and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with the latter even training ANC cadres at the CCP political school in Shanghai and apparently paying or having paid for the ANC’s new political school at Vredefort (Mataboge: 2015; Plaut: 2015 and *News 24 - City Press*: 2014). According to Bradley (2016: 6), there have been reports that the ANC has accepted donations for its election campaigns from China (as well as from Nigeria, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Libya and Taiwan). This, writes Bradley, has raised concerns over the “dilution” of South African foreign policy objectives and about the country’s “ability to act independently of its funders” with the successive Dalai Lama visa fiascos seen as “a lightning rod in perceptions of China’s … high degree of influence” over South Africa’s decision-making.

The BRICS loose club diplomacy model also holds implications for domestic politics as the South African government appears to have conflated the Asian developmental state model of the 1950s and 1960s, which model was supported by the United States, with the Chinese state-owned enterprise model, a variant which was favourably referenced in the *eThekwini Declaration* (2013: par. 18). Anthony *et al*. (2015b: 5) write that BRICS “has been credited with forging a new geopolitical

identity seeking to challenge what is perceived as a western-dominated hegemony of the global economic and political system". As must be obvious from the preceding discussions this is an exaggeration. However, and unlike Brazil and India, this has not prevented South Africa from interpreting BRICS as a potential vehicle for decoupling from the Western economies, an idea that has got nowhere.

### 5.2.2 The historical and foreign policy context of South Africa's BRICS membership and club diplomacy

It has been a major theme of the South African government that the global South was not sufficiently represented in and integrated into the highest global governance structures. Clearly, the South African government was not only willing to join but was also ripe for membership of BRICS and to be part of what it saw as an attempt to shape a new world order in which the South would assert itself and balance against the traditional powers (Nkoana-Mashabane: 2012a).

By the own admission of South African government policymakers, ideology plays an important part in South African foreign policy decision-making and this turned out to be a key driver in the decision to join BRICS. Indeed, former Deputy Minister Ebrahim (2011a) specifically linked the decision to join the BRICS forum to the 1955 Bandung Conference and the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement and linked this rather atavistic approach to being "part of the forward march of history". Yet, the research undertaken as part of this study revealed that there exists in practice little "South-South cooperation" excepting conferences and rhetorical declarations of "solidarity". The global South turns out to be a rather realist place little inspired by the spirit of *"noblesse oblige".* Furthermore, with the geopolitical re-alignments of countries such as India and Vietnam, both now strategic partners of Washington, and with Brazil not far behind, the question can be asked how valid is the concept "global South"? Even the *White Paper* (2011: 19) on South Africa's foreign policy expressed concern about the cohesion and solidarity of the global South being eroded as some "key developing countries" became developed countries.

The study drew attention to the pitfalls of ideologically based decision-making and in passing noted its impact on foreign policy analysis. Though this field is beyond the

scope of this study it is worth noting the observation by Bungane (2013: 101) that "practitioners" (meaning diplomats of the South African Department of Foreign Affairs, as it was) "had to rely more on public pronouncements made by political principals for guidance" when formulating human rights-related foreign policy objectives and priorities for submission to, and consideration by, the political principals. Bungane rightly says this "has been a serious flaw" for it obviously constitutes a circular and closed shop form of policymaking not based on diplomatic groundwork, investigation and reporting and which "contrasts with the approach [of] other countries". That the approach referred to by Bungane has been more or less institutionalised emerges from planning documents such as the DIRCO *Strategic Plan 2006-2009* (5) which indicates that in formulating and implementing South Africa's foreign policy the Department is guided by the International Relations Peace and Security Cluster and the Extended Cabinet Committee but "the terms and tone of engagement are also guided by the President's State of the Nation Address". The DIRCO *Strategic Plan 2009-2012* (6) indicates that the principles of South African foreign policy have been set out in Presidential and Ministerial speeches since 1994 and "these principles have remained consistent and enduring, and have taken on even greater significance given current international developments". The latter assertion is in itself interesting as it corroborates the contention in the study that ideologically-based positions are resistant to revision.

### 5.2.3 The diplomatic and geopolitical repositioning in South Africa's prioritisation of the BRICS relationship

In the early years of BRICS South Africa was confident that membership earned it prestige for its diplomacy and national profile even though major leaders from the global North like President Obama did not appear to take the forum seriously. Over the last few years up to and including 2016 the BRICS countries have been in poor shape. Russia is caught up in a confrontation with the West and China's muscular foreign policy has caused it reputational damage particularly in Asia-Pacific. Over the long-term Russia and China are existential rivals. Brazil and India have moved back into Washington's fold. While uncertainties exist concerning the new US Trump Administration – and its attitude to AGOA on which many South African jobs depend remains to be seen – it rather looks as if South Africa will be potentially more isolated

in the future than in 2010. The limited benefits of bandwagoning, with its implied surrendering of independence and therefore loss of sovereignty, must surely become increasingly apparent to South African policymakers.

Geopolitically, *inter alia* through BRICS – which encapsulates the opposite of Cold War containment – South Africa has shifted away from its initial normative and bridge-building diplomacy to one aligned with the Eurasian autocracies which by implication positions South Africa in opposition to, or at the very least distances the country from, the Western powers, the developed North and the liberal international order which since 1945 has significantly contributed to much of the world living in peace and in many cases also enjoying prosperity.

### 5.2.4 The South African national interest and international developments

The contemporary understanding in South Africa of national interest is that it is, *inter alia*, very much concerned with the nation's values. It follows that the country's values should inform its foreign policy. As Cilliers (1999: 7) explains South Africa's domestic values should in terms of the Constitution be extrapolated to its foreign relations. Some of these Constitutional values include: human dignity; equality; the advancement of human rights and freedoms; non-racialism and non-sexism; supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law; universal adult suffrage, regular elections and a multi-party system of democratic government that ensures accountability. The *South African Defence Review 2015* had occasion to reflect on the national interest and speaks of the need to protect the national interest by preserving such elements as constitutional order, demonstrable good governance, contributing to the rooting of democracy, and promoting peace, stability and development on the African continent (Meyer: 2015: iii-iv).

Regrettably, "BRICS solidarity" has drawn the government into pursuing certain actions which many in South Africa regarded as contrary to the country's values and again the above observations about club diplomacy and bandwagoning are germane. Examples include BRICS' defence of Russia over the Crimea-Ukraine crises and specifically South Africa's *de facto* siding with China over the South China Sea disputes. Although South Africa's national interests were not immediately

affected by Russo-Ukraine relations its membership of the United Nations obliged it to take a stand of some sort and its BRICS membership came into play. On 27 March 2014 South Africa, Brazil, China and India were among 58 countries which abstained when the UN General Assembly, with 100 states in favour and 11 opposed, passed Resolution GA11493 dismissing Russia's annexation of the Crimea as illegal. Keck (2014) went so far as to say that "the BRICS grouping ... has unanimously and, in many ways, forcefully backed Russia's position on Crimea". Keck referred to the *Chairperson's Statement* on the BRICS Foreign Ministers Meeting which was held on 24 March 2014 on the sidelines of The Hague Nuclear Security Summit. The Chairperson, Minister Nkoana-Mashabane, noted "with concern" and opposed Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop's suggestion that Australia might ban Russia from attending the November 2014 G20 Brisbane Summit. The Chairperson stated that the "BRICS countries agreed that the challenges that exist within the regions of the BRICS countries must be addressed within the fold of the United Nations in a calm and level-headed manner" (DIRCO: 2014). The reference to "calm and level-headed" discussion is telling bearing in mind that Russia militarily invaded and occupied the Crimea. According to Sidiropoulos (2014: 1-3) South Africa's stance reflected its "*realpolitik* perspective" in terms of which the country "accords its alliance with the BRICS states high priority". The result was to erode South Africa's credibility as an advocate of a rules-based global order by adopting "equivocal positions".

When in July 2016 China refused to accept a ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration on the South China Sea disputes, Minister Nkoana-Mashabane, as reported by Saberin (2016), effectively came out in support of China's position on the grounds that "a multilateral approach should not be imposed for finding a lasting solution to a bilateral issue". This was disingenuous for although the case was brought by the Philippines only, many states are involved in disputes with China over who owns what in the South China Sea. Even though this dispute has become a dangerous global flashpoint, China is nevertheless proceeding to change the facts on the ground by building military bases on disputed South China Sea islands and on new artificial islands. This large-scale enterprise has already "decisively tipped the fragile balance of power in the hotly contested region" (Kuo: 2016).

South Africa again demonstrated "BRICS solidarity" on 1 July 2016 when it joined China, Russia and India in voting against a United Nations resolution on "The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet". Not surprisingly, Brazil voted in favour of the resolution. South Africa and other countries attracted criticism for acting to weaken "protections for freedom of expression online". Media reports recalled South Africa's joining Russia and China in previous "controversial votes at the UN", such as in November 2015 when it voted against a resolution recognising threats against defenders of human rights (*Mail & Guardian*: 2016b). The international criminal justice lawyer, Angela Mudukuti (2015), has written that in 2015 South Africa's voting record in UN forums left "a lot to be desired. In March [2015], it voted against the establishment of a new UN role that would be mandated to deal with the issues surrounding privacy and the surveillance of citizens. It abstained from voting on resolutions relating to human rights violations perpetrated in Iran and North Korea. It also voted to prevent condemnation of human rights abuses in Burma and Zimbabwe".

Six years after South Africa joined the forum, with the BRICS as countries and as a group experiencing serious problems and with many and major deficiencies concerning intra-BRICS cooperation – with the partial exception of the track 2 structures such as the BRICS Business Council – the South African government continues to suggest that the "levels of synergy in assuming major positions in the BRICS context [are] strengthening annually, as can be seen in the annual summit declarations that the BRICS Leaders issue" (Saberin: 2016). The *eThekwini Declaration* issued on 27 March 2013 during the Durban BRICS Summit was quite instructive about the relevancy or otherwise of BRICS to the current evolutions in international politics. The BRICS heads of state or government addressed or referred to an incredibly wide-ranging list of items which simply could not all have been adequately addressed in the time available. Yet, glossed over were the very real tensions between China and Brazil over trade, between China and India over security, and between China and Russia over status. Passed over in silence was the massive arms race between India and China, particularly in the Indian Ocean. Although the habitual demand for UN Security Council enlargement and reform was enumerated what stood out was Russia's and China's silence over whether they would actually support India's candidature to the Council (*eThekwini Declaration*:

2013: par. 20). The Declaration omitted all mention of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) yet at the time this was clearly a priority matter for Chinese foreign policy. This in itself was indicative that BRICS might be less relevant to China than previously thought.

Attention is drawn by the forum's supporters to the NDB but the degree of control South Africa has over that institution, which in any event appears to have an existence apart from the BRICS forum, is open to doubt. As for the CRA it would actually be of very little use to South Africa were there to be a run on the rand in the event of an investment status downgrade by the ratings agencies. Indeed, were the South African Reserve Bank intent on intervening in such an eventuality, it would still be obliged to approach the International Monetary Fund, according to Draper and Qobo (2015). The same authors report that the South African business sector is interested in the BRICS trade facilitation agenda but is concerned about issues such as "'fair' trade" so in practice "the BRICS process seems to be of limited use to South African business". As for the Russian-driven Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership, under which trade facilitation resorts, it is so vague and open ended in the breath of its ambitions that it can be considered as simply wordy. (See the ambitious list at FICCI / *The Economic Times*: 2016). Likewise with South Africa's decision to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, this appears to have little purpose but the move might erode the effectiveness of the NDB. On the other hand, say Draper and Qobo (2015), it might earn South Africa "kudos from China". Also relevant here is the interrogation by Anthony *et al*. (2015b: 8) about the extent to which South Africa's voting decisions at the United Nations are "autonomous" from the influence of "emerging powers", in other words Russia and China.

If the above foreign policy actions are indeed designed to align with the BRICS "alliance", as Sidiropoulos (2014: 1-3) suggests, then South Africa's membership of the forum, and the obligations that follow from that membership, as understood by the South African government, do not serve the best interests of this country.

## 5.3 Conclusion and recommendations

The ambitious scale of South Africa's BRICS policy was explained by Ambassador Anil Sooklal (2014) as based primarily "on its shared views on the need to restructure the global political, economic and financial architecture to be more equitable [and] balanced". The government's "BRICS Strategy" sought to contribute to humanity's "development" and to "a more equitable and fair world". Ambassador Sooklal claimed further that BRICS membership had "delivered tangible economic dividends" to South Africa but as discussed earlier in this study this claim is open to serious challenge.

As Alexandroff (2016) suggests, not only have the BRICS not succeeded in changing the norms and rules of the liberal international order, other than a partial and "more realistic" redistribution of influence in the IMF and World Bank, but it also does not appear as if at BRIC's inception that such a normative change was even a goal either "collectively or singularly". Subject to a *caveat* about the possible attitudes of Russia and China, which perhaps need to be nuanced somewhat (see the discussion above by Zhang (2013)), it was not an overt BRICS intention to use the forum as a "counterweight" to the West save in the case of South Africa which possibly misread the immediate intentions of its Eurasian partners and certainly those of Brazil and India. For its part the South African government did not conceal its hostility to the West and the liberal order. The conclusion then is that after more than six years of membership BRICS has not delivered for South Africa those objectives and changes in the international system that it had initially hoped for. Even though the world may increasingly be moving towards multipolarity, BRICS, though proclaimed by South Africa as a vanguard of the global powers of the South, has not succeeded in fashioning a new emerging world order. BRICS has not successfully balanced against the so-called traditional powers. The end of Western primacy has not yet occurred but instead the West has for several years now been morphing into a new North which incorporates key emerging economies of the "global South". This was evidenced, for example, in recent years in the negotiations aimed at mega-trade agreements such as TPP, an agreement involving both developed and developing economies of the Americas, Asia and the Pacific Ocean. (Although President Trump has withdrawn the United States from TPP the remaining

eleven participant countries are proceeding with the talks and Japan has called for the United States to re-join the talks (Chandran and Fujita: 2017). A US return to TPP is not improbable as this would, *inter alia*, facilitate the talks aimed at adjusting the North America Free Trade Agreement and TPP was initially supported by Republican Party legislators in the US Congress). The significance of TPP is that it would consolidate United States leadership and influence in Asia-Pacific for well into the 21st Century. Even with eleven states TPP is certainly a hugely important affirmation of the Western liberal international order.

As well as shedding unhelpful rhetoric, policymakers should divest themselves of ideological and atavistic preferences. This is also precisely the point made by Hengari (2013) who writes that South Africa must "rely on solid analytical capabilities in its embassies". Referring specifically to African diplomacy, Hengari stressed that South Africa should also rely on "strong local, regional and continental partnership" but also "build sound intelligence networks with external powers, including France, the United States of America and the United Kingdom … [For] to look at these powers through the anti-imperialist prism of the Cold War is not entirely helpful". Ultimately there is no substitute for the work of the diplomat serving in the field, that is while representing his or her country abroad, and doing what Roskin (1994: 6) refers to as "diplomatic spadework", the essential task of information and intelligence gathering. That policymakers and foreign ministries should give more attention to the knowledge which ambassadors and chargés d'affaires can provide about bilateral relations and about their countries of accreditation was also very much the view of the distinguished American diplomat and scholar, George Kennan (1997: 206-209).

A less romantic approach to Bandung and to notions of non-alignment and of a mythical South would soon enough reveal the stark reality that there is in addition to growing and intense political and economic competition between developed and developing countries, also equally intense, even fierce, competition between developing countries. For these reasons Soko and Qobo (2016: 98) argue "that national interests, rather than friendships, have been the salient drivers of the growing presence of the BRIC countries in Africa. The BRIC countries are not primarily driven by Africa's development concerns, but are seeking to fulfil their own

commercial interests as well as use Africa as an avenue for shoring up their international legitimacy and credibility".

In this regard, it is also interesting to note that the *White Paper* observes that "strong bilateral relations enhance the strength of South Africa's international positions and influence in multilateral organisations and groupings" (*White Paper*: 2011: 19-20). If so, then all the resources and efforts dedicated towards BRICS may well have been unnecessarily misspent and South Africa, like the middle power that it is rather than the spokesperson for the global South and of Africa, should rather focus on furthering its key bilateral relationships and on addressing its own pressing domestic priorities. Accordingly, although it remains important to pursue economic and commercial ties with the BRIC countries this should not be elevated above other foreign policy objectives. It remains highly important to maintain the closest economic, trading and diplomatic ties with the developed countries of the North.

Returning to the main research question and bearing in mind the preceding discussions it cannot be stated without qualification that South Africa's BRICS-aligned club diplomacy maximises the South African national interest. Although other factors have played a role it is undeniable that the country's global standing has diminished particularly in the years since it acceded to the BRICS forum. All this in turn has diminished South Africa's claim to be a "bridge builder". Unless its foreign policy is recalibrated South Africa stands little chance to play any meaningful role in the complicated global political situation pursuant to the election of Donald Trump to the US Presidency.

### 5.3.1 Specific recommendations

The first recommendation of this study is that South Africa recalibrates its foreign policy by taking into account the complexities of contemporary international politics. This does not necessarily involve leaving BRICS, which could lead to further loss of prestige by the country, but it does require adopting a more independent approach particularly as regards Russia and China. Any impression of being a mere bandwagoner should be avoided as such an approach does not resemble a partnership of equals. In any event, South Africa should avoid all ideological bias.

Inescapably tied to this first recommendation is that in reviewing its foreign policy South Africa should determine and focus on how its foreign relations could facilitate its own economic growth and job creation. Indeed, as Olivier (2013b) writes "foreign policy begins at home" and should be tailored to serve domestic interests. Without economic growth and the capacity to absorb the growing numbers of jobseekers entering the labour market every year the likelihood of socio-economic dislocation and social unrest will increase exponentially. Diplomacy can only be effective when founded upon a healthy, or relatively healthy, domestic situation. As Olivier says, foreign policy should bring "home the beef". As seen, South Africa's trade with the BRICS economies is largely with China but this has also been at the expense of the de-industrialisation of the South African economy and the loss of tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs (Cilliers: 2017: 11), a relationship increasingly resembling the colonial era core-periphery paradigm (Carmody: 2013: 47), the very danger former President Mbeki warned against (*Mail & Guardian*: 2006). It is essential that South Africa moves its economy up the value chain and as far as possible escapes the commodities rut for an economy benefits most from the type of advanced intra-industry trade which characterises much of South Africa's trade with the European Union and the United States. The EU and US economies are set to grow from 2016 to 2018 (European Commission: 2017) and South Africa should endeavour to take advantage of this. Therefore, politically, diplomatically and through commercial diplomacy and the active encouragement of its private sector, South Africa should act to improve its somewhat frayed relations with its traditional Western partners and desist from looking at the world only through a BRICS-prism.

(A particularly low point in EU-South African relations was reached in July 2013 during the visit to South Africa by the then EU Trade Commissioner, Karel De Gucht. He seized the opportunity to deliver a "blunt criticism of South Africa's trade and investment policies" (*Business Day*: 2013). De Gucht, *inter alia*, criticised South Africa for "unilaterally" revoking its bilateral investment treaties with various EU member states and said that South Africa should not take its relations with the EU "for granted" (De Gucht: 2013)).

Secondly, South Africa should, as the *Mail & Guardian* (2016a) suggests, balance "its membership of BRICS with demands from the European Union [and a Brexit

United Kingdom] as well as a United States that is leaning towards protectionism". The fact is that South Africa has advantages which it should use, such as not being dependent on any one geopolitical centre, as Steyn (2017) submits. The country should therefore carefully "watch developments in the US and China closely ... Both influence the world economy hugely". From a diplomatic perspective, it would be prudent for South Africa to factor in the possibility that BRICS' future is uncertain. As Cilliers (2017: 13 and 17) warns "for the next five to ten years China's foreign policy will be focused on the One Belt One Road initiative" and it is therefore likely that Beijing is already "thinking beyond BRICS". As regards the United States, in 2016 South Africa was nearly disqualified from benefitting from AGOA due to a dispute over South Africa's anti-dumping duties on chicken imports from the United States. However, there still remains the threat of the "out-of-cycle reviews" by the US Congress to determine South Africa's (and that of all beneficiary countries') continued eligibility for AGOA benefits. This is in terms of a provision inserted into AGOA when it was extended by the US Senate in 2015 (Viljoen: 2015). These out-of-cycle reviews which "can kick in at any time", according to Peter Draper (cited in Creamer: 2017), mean that South Africa's eligibility will be subject to investigations into such matters as South Africa's continued compliance with the rule of law, political pluralism and combating corruption. Barriers to US trade and investment also fall within the purview of these reviews and an immediate danger here is the Private Security Industry Amendment Bill of 2012 which requires majority local ownership of security companies which, in the opinion of the commercial attorney Peter Leon, is likely to "create a very irate reaction in Washington" (cited in Creamer: 2017). All this means that not only must increased efforts be made to improve relations with the United States but in tandem with this South Africa must strive to put its own house back in order and "recover from the damage done by [President] Zuma to South Africa's domestic governance", as Cilliers (2017: 17) puts it. (This also ties in with the fourth recommendation, below).

Thirdly, South Africa should refocus on its African Agenda which for some years now has lost momentum as well as political support both from South Africa and from other African states, as Azahaf and Schraad-Tischler (2012: 84) point out. South Africa's security and economic growth depend on a stable and economically productive Africa and Southern Africa.

Fourthly, South Africa should strive to restore its governance practices to an acceptable level because, as Allison (2016) reflects: “democracy may still be South Africa’s biggest selling point”. In turn, by reaffirming South Africa’s constitutional values and by once again advancing a rules-based international system, South Africa will be in a position to resume its role as a bridge-builder which previously earned it much diplomatic prestige.

## 5.4 Recommendations for future research and study

Regarding future research, firstly, the implicit dichotomy and contradictions revealed in the present study between BRICS-type club diplomacy and multilateralism, to which since 1994 South Africa has proclaimed its commitment, should be explored. Does South Africa really have the resources to simultaneously manage both types of diplomacy? Can prioritising club diplomacy over all of South Africa’s other diplomatic engagements really in the long run be beneficial for a middle ranking country like South Africa?

Secondly, much of this study is concerned with the geopolitical and security implications of South Africa’s BRICS membership. It is suggested that future research could usefully be directed at attaining a more detailed understanding of South Africa’s current security situation and how the country’s foreign and security policies could be recalibrated to adequately meet the challenges of the future, challenges which indeed already exist in the global environment.

To begin with it should be recalled that in the late 1990s there was considerable interest in South-South cooperation, but specifically at the level of the “Deep South”. The Deep South countries singled out for consideration were all located on or south of the Tropic of Capricorn: Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and South Africa and all were members of the Valdivia Group. In addition to their location, they shared a number of common features such as being democracies with open, export-orientated economies. This was a time of enthusiasm for regionalism and inter-regional cooperation and Ambassador Abdul Minty, then Deputy Director-General for Multilateral Affairs in the South African Department of Foreign Affairs, advocated the forging of “such South-South linkages between SADC and Mercosur”

(Minty: 1998: 142). This was also the theme of President Nelson Mandela's celebrated address at the Ushuaia Mercosur Summit on 24 July 1998:

> "For too long geography has kept us apart despite the many similarities of our histories ... Today, new conditions allow us to reach out as neighbours across the Atlantic, and indeed they require of us that we do so ... [for] the great potential for strengthening the South through cooperation and building relations amongst ourselves ... and ... for advancing a mutually beneficial partnership with the countries of the North ... [has been] confirmed ... As an African country at the cross-roads of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans ... [o]ur strategic location brings us the potential to be a bridgehead between South America, the Asian East and our own continent of Africa" (Mandela: 1998).

The 1990s also saw the beginnings of a setting of a security agenda for the South and Ronaldo Sardenberg, then attached to the Brazilian Presidency, said this should "perforce" include the Southern Cone countries of South America, Southern Africa and Australia and New Zealand, which approach would be compatible with the regional integration processes already underway. Sardenberg specifically commented that: "A common security agenda for the countries of the South would not entail a necessary opposition of interests between North and South" (Sardenberg: 1998: 115-116). Indeed, in the second decade of the 21st Century, a resuscitation of Sardenberg's proposal would amount to a significant reorientation of South Africa's alliance diplomacy but in a manner reflecting contemporary geopolitical realities and with the further benefit of moving South Africa closer again to the West and the North.

Regrettably, the then envisaged Deep South cooperation lost traction despite the many commonalities between the "Valdivia" countries and this for the following reasons: the greater traction accorded to cooperation at Global South level, South Africa's seemingly "natural" inclination, in South-South matters, towards the Indian Ocean which under the Zuma Administration has also been encapsulated by the "Look East" strategy followed by membership of BRICS. However, the results have not been altogether happy or beneficial. Quite aside from uncertainties as to the continued relevance and the exact meaning of the Global South concept, South

Africa through its BRICS membership has found itself, *ipso facto*, implicated in great power politics and rivalries but as a follower or a "piggybacker", to paraphrase Olivier (2013a: 408). Consequently, not only have South Africa's relations with its traditional – and still most important trading – partners in the North been frayed but it cannot be said with any sense of exactitude that its relations with its potentially foremost South-South partners, its fellow IBSA democracies India and Brazil, are on the best footing. Over the long term these negative developments may well pose an increasing threat to South Africa's security interests.

As noted in the present study the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific are zones of intense great power competition and rivalry, and bearing in mind the implications of South Africa's BRICS membership, this very much relates to the suggested future research. Furthermore, South Africa's taking over the chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) (from October 2017 to October 2019) is another reason why a reconsideration of South Africa's maritime and security strategies would be opportune. The problem with IORA, although a much more inclusive body than the BRICS, is that through its very inclusivity it has become "as unwieldy as its title", says Medcalf (2013). As such it is incapable of bringing "a rules-based order in time for a future where China's expanding interests brush up against those of others with troubling regularity". Luke (2014: 1-2) singles out IORA's "less-than-stellar past ... sometimes of limited effectiveness" and this at a time when "the Indian Ocean Region remains one of the most insecure regions in the world".

South Africa's membership of IORA could also potentially pose a problem for the United States and other powers in view of Pretoria's current close alignment, *inter alia* through BRICS, with Beijing and Moscow and the ANC's current strictures against the so-called "wrath of US-led Western imperialism" (ANC: 2015: 162, par. 39). In this regard, as already mentioned, it is no surprise that the idea of a BRICSMAR failed to gain traction within BRICS. Instead, the retired Indian Navy officer and currently Research Fellow at the National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi, Commander Raghavendra Mishra (2014: 16), recommended making use of IBSA as a "point of convergence between [the] South Atlantic ZPCSA [South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone] and IORA". Significantly, from the geopolitical and Indian Ocean balancing perspectives, Mishra recommended "an outreach" by IBSA

to countries such as Australia, a close United States ally, and Indonesia, which in 2015 formally elevated its bilateral ties with Washington to the level of a strategic partnership. Here, in effect, we see a call to return to the Deep South cooperation that was talked about in the 1990s.

Indeed, Kornegay (2015b: 45) encourages South Africa to become more actively involved in the ZPCSA (like Angola, for example). The South African Navy already participates in the biennial ATLASUR exercises along with the navies of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay and Kornegay sees the South Atlantic naval exercises as "complementing" IBSAMAR in the Indian Ocean. He speaks of a potential "IBSAMAR-ATLASUR linkage" (Kornegay: 2015b: 55). Commander Abhijit Singh (2015: 217), Research Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, describes IBSA as having "sought to unite the southern powers and project their political aspirations on the world stage, also harmonising national positions on security issues". However, Singh also notes that for India, "the South Atlantic-Southern Indian Ocean theatre lacks the Indo-Pacific's economic and geo-political salience. Unlike the Indian Ocean's eight choke points and numerous regional hotspots, the Southern Atlantic does not have the strategic vulnerability that makes it a key geopolitical space". Moreover, he mentions a number of resources-related constraints (Singh: 2015: 232).

But Singh is clearly concerned by China's growing roles in Africa and South America, as part of its attempt to reduce dependence on Middle Eastern oil, which has led "to a dramatic increase in sea-borne energy flows across the South Atlantic" (Singh: 2015: 218). At the same time India is also increasingly seeking energy sources in South America. China's growing presence in Africa has obliged India to expand its role in the Indian Ocean. Anna Samson (2011: 70-71) of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University sees a clear link between China's quest for resources and Beijing's grand strategic objectives which in Africa include "constraining the United States' military dominance in the Horn of Africa and the continent more generally ... effectively [encircling] the United States (and to a lesser extent Europe), controlling trade routes and ensuring preferential trading relationships; building long-term energy security through controlling energy prices; and using aid / trade / economic relationships to secure legitimacy for territorial

ambitions within Asia". Similarly, the *South African Defence Review* (South African Department of Defence: 2015: 67-68) warns of tensions and even conflict which could possibly arise between states pursuing control over dwindling supplies.

Naturally, all this and specifically the intense and ongoing geostrategic competition, indeed rivalry, between India and China once again draws attention to the ultimate fragility and artificiality of the BRICS concept particularly at the political, diplomatic, maritime and overland transportation as well as at the military and strategic levels.

Flemes and Costa Vaz (2011: 10-15) point out that the three IBSA countries have very different regional roles and moreover the abilities of Brazil and particularly South Africa to "conduct global-balancing", as the authors put it, are limited. Yet, even so the same authors suggest that "India, Brazil and South Africa may consolidate a maritime cooperative axis connecting the South Atlantic and the Indian Oceans, an arrangement to which South African commitment and resources would be essential". Not surprisingly, and in spite of his earlier doubts, Commander Singh (2015: 236) also does suggest that "South Africa has an important role in establishing an IBSAMAR-ATLASUR link, and must bring about greater interaction between Indian Ocean and Atlantic powers".

The suggested research should investigate and set out the complexities and challenges resulting from increased South African maritime cooperation with its fellow democracies in the Indian Ocean and the South Atlantic. A significant recalibration of South African foreign policy would be required as this would include initiating discussions with the United States, the world's foremost maritime power and a significant force in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific theatres. Over the long term a supporting US Navy role will be essential in ensuring maritime security in the Southern Oceans, the greater Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific. The implicit revival of Deep South cooperation, but including cooperation with India and other Southern democracies, would very likely also have the significant advantage of facilitating the resumption of South Africa's normative diplomacy associated with former President Nelson Mandela.

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