Foreign Policy Strategies of Emerging Powers in a Multipolar World: an introductory review

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ABSTRACT This Introductory Review examines the major debates concerning the rise of emerging powers in the global system. It points to the fundamental difference between the contours of ascendancy in the first quarter of the twenty-first century from previous historical eras with reference to the number of countries placed in this category, the privileging of economic dimensions of power, and the much more elaborate and open levels with regard to institutionalization. Ample attention is paid to the BRICS, but consistent with the image of multipolarity, it also gives some emphasis to the question of whether the changing global system provides enhanced space for middle powers. After highlighting these highly relevant contextual considerations, the core of the Review moves to an analysis centred on more specific puzzles about the foreign policy strategies of emerging powers. One major puzzle is whether the preference of rising states is to work through established institutions or to utilize parallel and/or competitive mechanisms. Another concerns the balance between material interests, status-enhancement, and identity issues as motivators for policy preferences. Still another focuses on the degree to which China should be differentiated from the other BRICS, or indeed whether the BRICS share values such as a common politics of resentment or want to differentiate themselves on a normative-oriented basis in alternative groupings such as IBSA. A more sophisticated awareness of the limitations as well as of the capacities of the BRICS - with an appreciation of the intricate mix of concerns about solidarity and sovereignty, as well as conceptual tensions between realism and complex interdependence – is not only important for assessing the future trajectory of the BRICS role in the world, but in locating space for categories of countries such as middle powers. The major puzzle for middle powers is whether or not they will be able to mobilize attributes, notably the leveraging of ‘network power’, that provide them with comparative advantage. Although in overall terms the global system has not progressed towards multipolarity in a linear fashion underwritten by alternative actors, it is precisely due to this imprecision – and level of academic and operational
contestation – that the articles assembled in this Special Issue have such salience.

The rise of emerging countries beyond the West is pivotal to understanding how the global system is being reshaped in the first quarter of the 21st century. The ascent of these states is addressing imbalances in the global system—and in the globalisation process—that up until now have mainly reflected the greater influence of traditionally powerful states and commercial actors. The rise of new groupings of states from the global South (groupings that cross regions and exercise considerable influence, especially in international economic and social policy negotiations) is starting to overcome the disorganisation that in the past has tended to mute emerging countries’ contributions in global policy debates. The emerging states that grab most of the attention—China, India, Brazil and to some extent South Africa—are beginning to reverse the historically weak mechanisms of collective action associated with forums such as the G77, and the splintering effects of the policy competition that has often arisen among developing states as a consequence of economic globalisation.

Yet, notwithstanding the process of catch-up from the academic literature to the commercial and diplomatic realities on the ground, there are more questions than answers in dealing with the phenomenon of emerging states. To begin with, the number of countries deemed to be emerging is different from our historical understanding of the context and contours of ascendancy in the international system. In the past the assumption has been that there is one big ascending power. This was the case with Britain and Prussia in the late 19th century—with estimates of ascendancy being gauged by quantitative measures (a heavy privileging of both estimates of industrial production and number of ships in their fleets) before World War I. Prussia received abundant attention because it was assumed to be a revisionist power—not one that favoured the status quo with a shake-up of the system. The same is true with the perception of the rise of the USSR—vis-à-vis the USA—as punctuated by the claim by the Soviet leadership that it would ‘bury’ America. Even when the lens of ascendancy is recalibrated so that the challenge comes from friends and allies, the assumption is that there is one big ascendant power. This is true about the struggles for primacy between the UK and the USA—up to and even including the immediate post-1945 era—struggles punctuated by tensions over currency, debtor–creditor relations and institutional design (very much reminiscent of tensions that are being replayed today in different ways).

It is also true about the wrong-headed assumptions that Japan or a putative ‘Pax Nipponica’ was the USA’s main competitor in the 1980s. This perception of a Japanese challenge, which reached its climax with the publication of a much-publicised book by Ezra Vogel, was reflected in concerns that Japan had too low a yen and too massive a trade surplus, and in the perceived need to defend US strategic concerns such as the semi-conductor industry. Indeed, in the late 1980s US members of Congress smashed Japanese products to symbolise the priority for the USA to fight back.
There is of course one exception to the rule of one, of a collective challenge in the 1970s from the ‘Third World’—with the ascendancy of OPEC and the G77/NAM/UNCTAD to this narrative. But again this alternative ‘rise’ was commonly reduced to a single image—with Saudi Arabian (or Arab) sheiks becoming a substitute for larger forces emanating from the global South.

Other than in the 1970s the current global order reflects a dynamic mix of established great powers, newly emerging regional powers, and multiple regional structures. The challenges confronted by current Southern powers, such as Brazil and South Africa, located as they are between the centre and periphery of the current global order and at the nexus of international and regional politics, demand particularly complex foreign policy strategies that can be contradictory and may even seem to be inconsistent at times.8 If we want to understand these countries’ decisions and strategies, then it is imperative also to include their features as regional powers. It is true that the foreign policies of emerging powers in the past decade have been continuously shaped by the development of global forces and by different practices of global ordering. But, equally, the regions within which they have sought to assert their power or to develop a more prominent role have also reflected global developments.9

Beyond historical analogies

The context and contours we have before us in the first decade of the 21st century are very different, and are at the thematic core of this Special Issue. Although there is a tendency by some analysts to reduce a multidimensional phenomenon to a single challenge—mainly substituting China for a larger cluster of countries (and even in some cases to see China as a new Prussia)10—a solid argument can be made that this time it is different.

Instead of one emerging power there are a several countries that can be deemed emerging states11 Moving from one to a cluster of countries, however, does not mean that there is any precision in determining which countries are in ascendancy. This puzzle jumps out in the popular acronyms used to showcase the emerging powers.

The best known of these acronyms continues to be BRIC, the formulation developed by Goldman Sachs.12 Yet, notwithstanding the extension of this acronym from concept to practice, with meetings of BRIC at foreign minister and head of government levels, the salience of this formulation is contested.13 The most difficult of the countries to mesh with an image of an emerging power is Russia. If Russia has some characteristics of a rising power (resources generally and energy specifically), it is a power in which many of its status characteristics are legacies from the era of bipolarity (UN Security Council/P5/veto attributes)14 or of democratic transition (G8 membership). With a shrunken territory as a result of the break-up of the USSR, a declining population and a lack of diversification in its investment and trade profile, Russia can be framed as much a country in decline as in ascendancy.

Deleting Russia from the cluster reduces BRIC to BIC, or in reverse order CIB. Such a contraction has some appeal in that it highlights what is commonly taken to be the big three of the emerging powers, China, India and Brazil. With
Andrew Hurrell’s core criteria in mind, namely expanding economic prowess, a high degree of political power and military potential and the capability to play an influential role in global politics, it is these three countries that constitute the big three.\textsuperscript{15}

By way of contrast, another possibility is to widen the cluster beyond the BRIC to BRICS or BASIC or BRICSAM.\textsuperscript{16} These groupings are less focused on sheer economic strength, more so on diplomatic profile. The first was the model when South Africa formally joined with Brazil, Russia, India and China to create BRICS summit in 2011. The second came to light in the context of the Copenhagen conference on climate change control, in which China, India, Brazil and South Africa engaged in negotiations with the USA. The third emerged out of the so-called Heiligendamm process\textsuperscript{17} with China, India, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa constituting a G5 through an extended outreach or consultative initiative with the G8.

As much as with the BRIC concept such an approach is contested. If space is opened up for Mexico, an OECD country, should South Korea also be included? If there is a focus on the Non-BRIC, should not other middle level countries—whether classic middle powers (Australia) or a new cluster from the global South, especially those such as Indonesia and Turkey, which can be deemed regional anchors or powers—be included as well?\textsuperscript{18}

On the assumption global affairs are, indeed, moving towards a multipolar system, in which power coalesces around a small number of dominant poles (US, European Union, rising states from the global South), then middle powers may well find themselves relegated to a subordinate role. The article by Andrew F Cooper examines the problématique of middle powers being squeezed by structural pressures at the apex of power but—arguably—maintaining the capacity for revitalised forms of agency in terms of specific forms of policy practice.

The article by Hongying Wang and Erik French nuances this argument by focusing on the limitations of BRIC themselves. Although acknowledging that the rise of new powers in the developing world—such as China, India and Brazil—is a major aspect of the changing international order in recent decades, Wang and French point out that none of these countries is a rival of the reigning superpower, the USA. For the foreseeable future they will remain essentially middle powers themselves. As new actors on the world stage, how have they contributed to the multilateral institutions and initiatives that make up the mechanisms of global governance? How do they compare with the older middle powers in the developed world, such as Japan and Canada, in this regard? The paper by Wang and French explores these questions. It finds that, despite their status as ‘structural equivalents’, the old and the new middle powers have approached global governance in very different ways for historical and ideational reasons. The findings highlight the utility of multiple theoretical approaches to understanding world politics.

**Towards a new form of multipolarity**

Although the number and type of states deemed to be emerging needs further elaboration, the general image of ascendency by a cluster of emerging countries
as opposed to a single actor points to the rise of a multipolar world. To be sure, the extent and implications of this shift in the global system is still open to debate. The USA is uncomfortable with any fundamental shift that reinforces multipolarism, even as it recognises that its position of hegemonic power is eroding or over. Although the renewed controversy about the USA’s decline absorbs most academic attention,¹⁹ the more important question concerns the implications of waning hegemony for sources of international leadership. Rather than ‘laying down the law’ in a disciplinary manner, the USA must negotiate and bargain, as it is beginning to learn to do in the G20 process.²⁰

For their part the emerging states have exhibited a willingness to work to some considerable extent within new selective multilateral institutions as a means of status-enhancement. However, it is still unclear to what extent they want to embrace this institutional main game, as opposed to pursuing national self-insurance and/or alternative global or regional institutional options in which they have more autonomy.²¹ Put another way, it is unclear whether the preference of rising states is to work through core club-like mechanisms or to utilise other parallel forms of international coordination. One argument points towards the emergence of ‘an ambiguous new order…in which multilateral institutions…have only a limited role to play alongside emerging national and regional strategies’.²² Other analysts highlight the salience of hedging in the diplomatic approach of the rising powers generally and China in particular. The G20 is deemed an advance as a ‘transitional mechanism’ in global economic governance but not at the expense of any reduction in these countries’ overall space for manoeuvre either at the national or international level.²³

The scenario of a multipolar world with a cooperative face is built on material interests resulting from deepening systemic interdependence among states.²⁴ While they may disagree on specific issues, this image showcases the need by both the old and new powers to work together especially under crisis conditions highly divergent from images of rising powers in the past.

Traditionally the image of emerging powers has not been a multilateral one, Prussia under Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm performed as a classic realist power—mixing balance of power with unilateral action. The goal was to enhance national interest and national capabilities through the acquisition of territory. The USSR’s behaviour was quite similar, with an emphasis on bipolarity and proxies on a regional basis. The role of multilateralism as played out in the UN was secondary to the great game, and usually centred on the (non-)use of veto power in the UN Security Council.

To be sure, it must be reiterated that the USA operated in much the same manner, with an arbitrary focus on multilateral forums. This was true at the time of the country’s rise, in that the USA walked away from the League of Nations post-World War I. During the inter-war period the USA adopted a maverick role in times of crisis—as witnessed by its willingness to torpedo the 1933 World Economic Conference in London.²⁵ But the USA’s ambivalence towards multilateralism also continued during this moment of US unipolarity in the post-cold war period, as featured by the American reliance on informal ‘coalitions of the willing’ as opposed to formal institutions such as the UN or NATO. In such initiatives the emphasis was tilted strongly—to use the phrase
effectively promoted by Richard Haass—towards the sheriff not the posse.26

Situated in this version of a hub and spoke matrix, the USA, as the central pivot, is accorded full power of agency with an enormous amount of autonomy provided for its commitments and capabilities.27

As with the numbers relating to emerging powers, the collective challenge of the ‘Third World’ offers a partial exception. As opposed to individual rising states the G77/NAM/UNCTAD challenge of the ‘Third World’ put a heavy emphasis on collective action. This challenge was cast in an oppositional, or even counter-hegemonic, framework with the aim of transforming the system. This approach had a potentially constructive element, the trade union-oriented approach to a more equitable deal on commodity sales for example. But it also contributed to an ossification of diplomacy, with a sharp division between North and South.

The established powers were challenged explicitly because of their privileged role in systemic terms, as expressed in their veto status inside the UN, the directorate role assumed by the G7/8, the longstanding debate over votes and shares in the international financial institutions (IFIS), the globally directed initiatives (such as those dealing with offshore financial centres) from the OECD, and the existence of exclusive small groups such as the green door process through the World Trade Organizatiaon (WTO).

The intensity of the challenge was magnified by a psychological sense of for the emerging states of being outsiders in the multilateral system, kept away from these privileges. The only redress was therefore through solidarity, maximising the use of weight of numbers. Attempts to negotiate around these differences (and images of bias in the system) met with repeated failure. The classic case of this dilemma was the Cancun conference of the early 1980s, a creative attempt to break out of the North–South standoff inspired by the Brandt Commission report under the leadership of Mexico, Canada and Austria.

As with the number of emerging powers, a strong case can be made that this time it is different. As Philip Golub showcases in his article, the emergence or re-emergence of major postcolonial world regions as dynamic centres of the world capitalist economy is changing global patterns of power. His article reviews these recent changes and compares them to the effort by the G77 and the non-aligned countries to obtain fundamental changes in the global order in the 1970s. The ambitious effort to establish a New International Economic Order (NIEO) failed at the time in the face of ‘Northern’ resistance as well as a result of divisions within the NAM itself. Today, by way of contrast, emerging and re-emerging countries are engaged in a less theorised but nonetheless more successful effort to alter the global balance by claiming a central place in world capitalism rather than challenging it.

In institutional terms key multilateral forums are opening up in a more equitable fashion. As highlighted by the pivotal response—the G20—to the financial crisis, there is some considerable recognition at the heart of the system that the G8 or any other small exclusive club is not a legitimate or effective means of problem solving. Furthermore, as Daniel Flemes points out, the nature of innovation within rising powers has been induced through sophisticated sites of negotiation and by the establishment of new intergovernmental foreign policy
networks. Unlike previous rising powers, Brazil, China and India have gained relative weight thanks to their status as agenda setters, brokers and coalition builders.

The article by Flemes examines the relevance of different foreign policy networks, such as India–Brazil–South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA) and Brazil–South Africa–India–China (BASIC), for their strategic approaches and argues that they are crucial vehicles for their ascension. Drawing on the work of Hafner-Burton et al, who raised the question of how states increase their power by enhancing their network positions, a typology of foreign policy networks is proposed: mediation, advocacy and substitution networks play important roles in today’s shifting global order. The article analyses how the different network types work together and how particular states have adopted better to the new environment than others. These ‘network powers’ have crucially contributed to the evolution of a new, informal type of multipolarity, and they benefit more from these new structures than any other player.

**BRICS or China?**

As noted, the fundamental claims made so far in this Special Issue can be disputed. A counter-argument can be made that, rather than a break with the past, basic similarities can be found between the present moment and historical precedents. In terms of numbers of emerging countries there is a school of thought that says: what we have before is not the rise of a BRIC, CIB, BRICS, BASIC or BRICSAM but the rise of China.

This view has to be taken seriously. On many quantitative assessments China’s rise is of a very different magnitude, as witnessed by its overtaking Japan as the world’s second biggest economy in terms of GDP. Yet what stands out is the impressive economic performance by the entire cluster of countries that can be considered emerging powers. All the original BRIC—Brazil, Russia, India and China—have an annual GDP of over $1 trillion dollars each.

Yes, China is out in front. Annual GDP data in September 2010 have put China’s economy at $4.909 trillion, highest among the BRIC members. But this is followed by Brazil at $1.572 trillion, India at $1.296 trillion and Russia at $1.231 trillion. By way of comparison, when BRIC is stretched out to include other big emerging countries, there is indeed some difference in numbers. Mexico’s GDP has been reported as $875 billion, Indonesia’s as $540 billion and South Africa’s as $286 billion.

Nevertheless, GDP is not the only salient quantitative indicator of a country’s rise. As China’s political leaders continue to declare, China is not only a rising country but a poor country. In terms of GDP per capita China falls behind not only other members of the G7/8 but also a wide variety of other big emerging countries including India and Indonesia as well as Turkey and Argentina— with a PPP of some $3259—whereas Mexico’s is some $10 200 and Brazil’s $8295.29. China’s differentiation from other emerging powers—akin to the historical mode of analysis—must therefore be based not simply on economic prowess but on geopolitical and security grounds. Such a view is based not only on current assessments but on calculations of future capabilities and
intentions. China’s armament politics and growing military assertiveness also cause regional contestation as they are interpreted as security threats, for instance by Japan. The case of the PRC differs from those of other emerging powers also because of the perceived security challenges directly related to China’s intensified maritime activities in contested waters since the mid-2000s, together with insufficient transparency over its military forces.\(^{32}\)

In comparison India, Brazil and South Africa engage in a common approach to influencing global security issues on the basis of the IBSA Dialogue Forum’s Defense Working Group. IBSA’s present security agenda signals that the alliance’s best prospects of having some meaningful impact on global security affairs are related to cooperative institutional strategies, particularly within the UN system. From the perspective of the regional dimensions there is a very clear divide between the strong tendency of Brazil and South Africa to act as regional stabilisers and brokers, on the one hand, and India’s Hobbesian perspective that keeps it inevitably committed to sub-regional hegemony and regional deterrence, on the other, thus making it very difficult for IBSA to derive a common perspective from their regional experiences.\(^{33}\) In spite of this, some opportunities for security cooperation associated with their respective regional contexts exist, namely those associated with the armaments industry and maritime security.\(^{34}\)

Two contributions to this Special Issue have special relevance from a realist perspective. The first of these, by Alexandr Burilkov and Torsten Geise, examines ‘Maritime Strategies of Rising Powers: empirical evidence from the cases of Russia and China’. Mahanian concepts on the importance of the command of the sea persist, arguing that naval power is an effective tool of statecraft in peace and war. The article uses the realist framework of the resource-extractive state as developed by Taliaferro as a starting point, and argue that Russian and Chinese strategies are formed through the interplay of threat perception, domestic factors and strategic culture.

The second case, by Hannes Ebert and Tim Maurer, is on the topic of ‘Contested Cyber Space and Rising Powers: strategies of Brazil, India and South Africa’ and draws different conclusions. Although the USA invented and has therefore historically dominated cyberspace, rising powers have been increasingly challenging the established internet governance structure. Two main
sets of counter-hegemonic strategies have emerged over the past decade: China and Russia joined ranks submitting joint proposals, while Brazil, India and South Africa drafted their own strategies. While there is a consensus that the contested cyber world order will create new forms of conflict, there is still a need to explain these divergent cyber postures. Political contestation in cyberspace is therefore also a test of international relations theory: are rising powers challenging the USA driven by national interests and the urge to maximise their security? Or do domestic factors such as values and political structures explain the different trajectories vis-à-vis the cyber hegemon? Ebert and Maurer argue that the rising powers’ cyber strategies are indeed predominantly driven by the status of civil liberties and the internal pressure to guarantee them. Combining insights from the literature on (counter)hegemony and cyber security, the article also adds value to the theoretical debate on new spaces of power politics at the interface of global and domestic levels of analysis.

The tendency to put China in a special category is especially strong among US analysts—Fred Bergsten, the longstanding director of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, comes to mind—who promote the idea of a G2—a formulation that allows big deals and trade-offs to be made. Such a scenario, as in the past, connects the rise of a single big emerging power with a core bilateral relationship. Consistent with this perspective, some support built up for a de facto G2 immediately after the shocks of the financial crisis, with the Obama administration entertaining the prospect of working via this approach with China. Trade-offs with China were mooted for instance between progress on climate change and IFI reform.

Nevertheless, and more significantly, this push for a G2 ended in frustration. China was not comfortable with this arrangement (notwithstanding the symbolic attractions of such an arrangement). To give just one illustration, Huang Ping, an eminent sociologist at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, has taken the position that China should resist the G2 as a means to decide on important world matters, because of its wider diplomatic repercussions. The so-called G2 is both unrealistic and problematic to fit in with the traditional Chinese value of a harmonious world. Once you start to go that way, how would the Japanese, Koreans, Russians, Indians and all our neighboring nations think of us?.

China and the USA have certainly built up a special form of interdependence, dubbed ‘Chimerica’ by Niall Ferguson. China has massive holdings of US treasuries. US multinationals have invested heavily in China, and companies such as Wal-mart and Costgo (and American consumers) continue to rely heavily on made-in-China goods. It seems clear, however, that, notwithstanding the exceptional level of interdependence, this deep connection does not translate into a new form of exclusive political–diplomatic relationship.

The politics of resentment by BRICS

Rising powers have shifted from the margins to the centre of global economic action. On the eve of the first BRIC summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia in 2009, Brazil’s president noted that the four countries, with only 15% of world GDP,
account for 65% of world growth. China’s ambassador to India similarly noted on the eve of the fourth summit in New Delhi that BRIC ‘account for 42 percent of the global population, make up 18 percent of the world GDP and 15 percent of the world total trade volume. Their contribution to the world economic growth rate has exceeded 50 percent.’ Brazil’s President Dilma Rousseff added that intra-BRIC trade had climbed from $27 billion in 2002 to $212bn in 2010. The ambition is to double the volume to $500 billion by 2015. On current projections in 2025 the G8—the world’s eight biggest economies—will most probably be the USA, China, India, Japan, Germany, UK, France and Russia. BRIC should match the original G7’s share of global output around 2040. Their growing economic self-confidence finds expression increasingly in political assertiveness as well, and there is no hiding the declaratory message of global transition that underlies the group’s policy priorities. 

Brazilian President Lula da Silva, host of the April 2010 summit, declared grandly that ‘a new global economic geography has been born.’ Although generic in some respects, BRICS are different from other countries in the global South, with each being either too big for or too uncomfortable with its immediate neighbourhood. All have demonstrated an impressive global reach in terms of their diplomatic profile. The stretch of China’s international influence has been well documented. For example, Beijing’s concerted charm offensive towards Africa has been conducted not only bilaterally but also multilaterally, through the convening of the impressive Forum on China–Africa Cooperation in November 2006. Opening the 2012 meeting, President Hu Jintao announced $20 billion in loans to African countries over the next three years, ‘cementing an alliance that appears increasingly hostile to the west’. Similarly New Delhi hosted its first India–Africa Summit in April 2008. India has become a hub of diplomatic interaction—network as well as club diplomacy—as old and new friends alike vie for attention and deals. Brazil under President Lula launched a number of high-profile diplomatic initiatives, from leadership of the G20 developing countries via the WTO to the proposal for a global fund against hunger and a push on biofuel diplomacy using its sugar cane-based ethanol production. South Africa shares an innovative partnership with India and Brazil via the IBSA Dialogue Forum, as well as playing a strong role in the G77, the African Union and the New Economic Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD).

BRICS form a useful grouping for members to share and learn from one another’s development experiences. They relate to the global system with a mutually reinforcing sense of historical grievances and claims to represent the interests of all developing countries. They share a neo-Westphalian commitment to state sovereignty and non-intervention. They profess a shared vision of inclusive global growth and the rapid socioeconomic transformation. In comparison to most Western economies responsible for the crisis, BRICS had exemplary budgetary and fiscal performances. They blamed the European and US central banks for ‘aggressive policy actions’ to stabilise their domestic economies, which had spilled over into emerging market economies by generating ‘excessive liquidity’ and had fostered ‘excessive capital flows and commodity prices’. Turning the tables, they called for the advanced economies ‘to adopt responsible
macroeconomic and financial policies, avoid creating excessive global liquidity and undertake structural reforms to lift growth that create jobs.49

A positive assessment of the reasons why the acronym BRICS has moved from being an easy marker to guide foreign investors interested in emerging markets to denote an important political group of countries that are determined to promote major changes in international relations is offered by Fabiano Mielniczuk. Theoretically his work draws on social constructivism as a way to demonstrate that the changing identities of the five BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) can be treated as the main cause of the convergence of their interests in the international arena. Through a detailed analysis of these countries’ statements at the opening sessions of the United Nations General Assembly from 1991 to 2011, Mielniczuk retraces their social claims about themselves, as well as capturing the way they have judged the international sphere they were supposed to engage with, in order to demonstrate the changing character of their identities. These new identities, it is argued, created the opportunity for converging interests, which explains the emerging political structure of BRICS. The article concludes that, after a number of major summits and a significant number of low-level meetings covering a wide range of issues, BRICS might be considered one of the major long-lasting forces shaping the new architecture of international relations in the 21st century.

Nonetheless some caution is warranted on a number of counts with respect to these developments. One question concerns the degree of fairness built into this process of transition. If at first glance this shift can be taken not only to dilute hegemonic power, but to signal a redistribution of wealth and power away from the triad of the USA, Europe, and Japan and towards a tier of countries that have ‘emerged’ from developing status, the article by Phillip Nel and Ian Taylor takes a contrarian perspective. Nel and Taylor argue that these undoubtedly distributive tendencies obscure a less obvious tendency towards increasing inequality, now no longer between the North and the South, but between emerging powers and other tiers of the traditional South. This is partially a structural result of the explosive growth that states like India, Brazil and China have experienced in recent years. But it is also the result of external economic policies pursued by these emerging powers. This paper focuses on three such effects: how the manipulation of external trade relations by China and India in particular have ‘begged’ their neighbours; how capital market regulations put in place by India, Malaysia and Brazil in response to the recent financial crisis have encouraged currency bubbles in other developing countries; and how the stimulation of tri-continental trade between Brazil, China, India and Africa have led to trade diversion rather than trade creation, with dire effects for regional trade relations within Latin America and Africa. When these distributional results are considered in conjunction with the patterns of rising inequality within most emerging markets and in the ‘next 11’, the world looks less equal than is often assumed.

The second question concerns the robustness of these contours of transition in the international hierarchy. One explanation of the trajectory of BRICS points to a comprehensive process of realignment of power, with a new alternative concert of oppositional or adversarial states taking shape. Equally, however,
there are strong counter-forces to reconfigured inter-state polarisation and ‘overt balancing’. The most serious drag on the prospects of BRICS being a major force in global governance is not resistance by the old order but serious differences of values and interests among the group’s members, which leaves them open to the dismissive comment of being ‘bricks in search of cement’.

The IBSA grouping faces similar problems. The trilateral coalition suffers from considerable interest divergences on global governance issues and limited potential gains from its sector cooperation, particularly in trade. The perspectives of bi- and trilateral trade are limited by several constraints. The different sizes and degrees of global integration of members’ economies lead to different degrees of trade benefits. But the main obstacle consists in the limited complementarities between the three markets, because India, Brazil and South Africa produce similar products and compete for access to OECD markets. While a trilateral trade agreement has been alluded to on numerous occasions, such an ambitious undertaking is unlikely to materialise between these three countries, which are technically bound to regional trade blocs. A more realistic approach could be directed towards trade facilitation and the improvement of transport and infrastructure links between the three players.

In all the emerging powers’ networks, domestic priorities and problems trump club solidarity. All are still at early stages of development. The April 2010 Brasilia BRIC summit was shortened into a one-day event when President Hu Jintao went home early to deal with a major earthquake that had killed over 600 people in western China. In June another BRIC summit around the Toronto G20 was cancelled when President Lula stayed at home because of the massive floods in northeast Brazil. Nor do rising powers always act as a concerted bloc within other institutional settings. This was highlighted in 2012 when BRICS failed to mount a united campaign for either the Nigerian or the Colombian candidate against the ultimately successful US nominee for president of the World Bank.

Contestation from emerging countries is often perceived as errant behaviour, irrational and counter to global collective interests. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the debate on nuclear non-proliferation. Few serious attempts have been made to compare, differentiate and understand the rationale of India, Brazil and South Africa in this regard. The starting point of Mariana Carpes’ contribution—like others in this Special Issue—is that emerging powers are improving their role as stakeholders of the international system, but still have relatively less power than the traditional great powers. This asymmetry tends to push them towards international cooperation, and/or coalitions such as BRICS, IBSA and BASIC. In some issue-areas, however, the distribution of capabilities places them in such different international power positions that one could suggest that none of the aforementioned acronyms holds these countries together. This could be the case with nuclear politics.

Despite the differences in their international nuclear status, Brazil, India and South Africa share the same commitment to non-proliferation, which could be considered a common feature of their nuclear strategy as the IBSA countries, therefore strengthening the power of this acronym. But, once the domestic level—more specifically, the historical characteristics of each of these countries’
nuclear paths—is taken into account, a contradiction between the discourse of non-proliferation and the national interests arises. By analysing the nuclear history of Brazil, India and South Africa from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, and their current nuclear strategies and national interests, Carpes’ article seeks to answer the following questions: how much have these countries actually been doing in terms of non-proliferation? What are the bases of these countries’ nuclear strategies? Is there any contradiction between these countries’ nuclear discourse and their practices? Regarding nuclear politics, does the IBSA acronym still hold?

BRICS are riven with rivalries over borders, resources and status. With long and not always settled borders, India and Russia have problems with China. China’s highly competitive exports inflict material harm on Brazil. China’s and India’s anxiety about rising energy prices must be set against Russia being a beneficiary, while Brazil is both a cause and beneficiary of rising food prices. India is vulnerable to internal and exogenous shocks, while South Africa’s place at the table may make political sense but is economically less defensible. Two of the five are authoritarian states, although all the three democracies have a tradition of reticence in global democracy-promotion efforts. They are divided on reform of the UN Security Council, with China’s interest arguably lying more in a bipolar than a genuinely multipolar global order, and on the global economic effects of China’s currency value. Moreover, in 2012 Brazil and India seemed to be stalling economically, which would undercut the very basis of their recently added global clout. In part this may be because they share cultural and political traits with each other that set them apart from the command-and-control Chinese economic model.

Given these differences—including the differences in political systems between China and Russia and the three countries comprising IBSA—questions abound about whether and how BRICS can offer collective leadership on a normative basis in the global system. Oliver Stuenkel addressed this question in terms of democracy promotion in a previous issue of Third World Quarterly. Although several Western governments and organisations continue to spend a considerable amount of resources every year on democracy-related projects, BRICS are more reluctant when it comes to democracy promotion or reject the idea altogether. While democracy promotion is, for obvious reasons, not an issue for the Chinese and Russian governments, emerging democracies such as Brazil and India offer a more nuanced perspective about whether and how to promote democracy, causing its interpretation and application to be increasingly open to contestation and competition between established and emerging democracies.

Emerging powers often criticise efforts by the USA and Europe to promote democracy, yet in several cases emerging democracies have overcome their qualms about sovereignty and defended democratic regimes abroad. Were these incidents part of an emerging doctrine, a belief system, or mere ad hoc interventions to be decided on a case-by-case basis? Is defending democracy and political pluralism part of emerging powers’ national interest? If so, what are the best means to go about it? How do emerging powers deal with the tension in their world-views between the notions of sovereignty and
intervention, and what does this mean for the future of democracy promotion? The article argues that for emerging powers to resolve their ambiguity about democracy promotion, they first need to determine which role they seek to play in their respective regions and whether they are willing to bear the cost of regional leadership.

Building in middle and network powers

This return of salience for middle power states does not mean simply a repeat of a strictly defined cast of states or repertoires from past eras. As Cox has suggested, ‘the middle-power role is not a fixed universal’ but a concept and set of practices that continually evolve in search of different forms of actorness. One attempt to trace this evolving pattern of actorness is Flemes’ analytical framework of network powers, allowing for an innovative perspective on the foreign policies of these actors. Rather than a static model that needs to be discarded, the middle power concept embraces a porous and accessible approach both in terms of normative underpinnings and practical applications. In an era where there is an obsession with the new global geometry of power, it is easy for the strengths of intermediate states separate from the ‘would-be great powers’ of BRIC to be downplayed, if not dismissed completely.

Significantly, however, this image of marginalisation is contradicted by a revival of interest in the middle power model predicated on alternative sources of capacity and agency in international politics. With a focus on such attributes as GDP and other dimensions of economic and demographic weight, a number of reports has pointed to the appearance of an ‘emerging middle’ in the global economy. Goldman Sachs has conceptualised a Next 11, featuring a lengthy list of countries (Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Korea, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Turkey and Vietnam) it deems to possess the economic trajectories to belong in this category. Other analysts from the investment industry have tweaked this concept of a new middle, either as CIVETS (Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa) or MIKT (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea and Turkey).

These attempts to ascribe middle states’ standing on the basis of a quantitative assessment will be refined—and their number narrowed down from a highly diverse assembly of aspirational states to a core group of (potentially) influential alternative actors—by a reassessment of behavioural attributes such as their network-building activities. The need for academic research to conduct a sustained catch-up exercise is invigorated by signs of debate among policy makers about ‘identity dilemmas’ and the need for relocation as middle powers in that smaller pivotal group. This debate is most visible (and contested) in two traditional middle powers, Canada and Australia. The Harper government has embraced the middle power model, albeit with a variant approach that puts the emphasis on instrumental delivery as opposed to declaratory statements. The Gilliard/Rudd government has revitalised the notion of Australia as a ‘creative’ middle state. There is also evidence of a conceptually sophisticated and policy relevant engagement with the middle power model among a wider cluster of states, most concertedly in South Korea and to some extent in Indonesia, Turkey, South
Africa, Mexico, Spain and The Netherlands, all of which are jockeying for status and policy space in the new form of selective multilateralism.

What gives middle power some potential added leverage is their shared participation in G20 summitry. Indeed, Cooper’s and Flemes’ articles examine the G20 as the hub site of transition in global governance, with a special focus on mapping how middle powers in the G20 use that forum either to react to or to find space for innovative leadership on an issue-specific basis through advocacy networks of varying memberships. Although the G20 has been cast as a ‘concert of powers’ it is not in any way similar to manifestations of this constellation from previous eras. The simple fact that the G20 is made up of 19 countries—along with the EU—distinguishes it from the 19th or 20th century stereotype of a ‘Big 4’ or 5. By way of contrast the members of the G20 are numerous and diverse. There is neither the image of allies or victors in war, nor the sense of ideological uniformity or anti-revolutionary ethos. In the G20, as the hub of the new order, there are countries from every quadrant of the globe, plus some implicit regional representation.

Cohesiveness within the G20 has not congealed to the point where members of diplomatic groupings address issues such as currency valuations, global imbalances, bank taxes, or austerity versus stimulus in a firm and consistent manner. Schirm’s analysis, for instance, highlights the presence of loose coalitions within the G20, where views on specific issues vary among and between different developed and developing countries, and where like-minded groupings such as the established G8 and BRICS co-mingle on a variety of issue areas.60

While sharing some similar characteristics on the need for rules and order in multilateral institutions, middle powers and/or non-G7/BRICS countries in the G20 differ significantly on their regional roles. This divergence is highlighted in the work done by Bessma Momani and Crystal Ennis in their article on the foreign policy strategies of two influential regional actors, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, since the onset of the 2011 Arab uprisings. Both states have, to various degrees over the years, held a leadership role in the region. While holding divergent preferences on the region’s direction and revolutionary outcomes, the current regional climate provides a renewed impetus for each to exert influence. Neither state expects to use hard power to achieve its foreign policy objectives. Instead, both Saudi Arabia and Turkey use a mixture of public diplomacy, media activity, economic incentives, convening power, and the mobilisation of Islam. Although both countries share similar foreign policy instruments, they vary greatly in how they utilise these instruments and justify their involvement in the region. Saudi Arabia has long considered its custodian role of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina as its de facto guarantee of regional significance, while promulgating its prominent role in the G20, the Organization of Islamic States and the Arab League as examples of regional leadership. In contrast, Turkey has prided itself as being viewed as a modern role model. Its rapidly growing economy, built on modern industrialisation, along with its successful Islamist government, are offered as examples to be emulated. Where Saudi Arabia has been predominately counterrevolutionary, motivated by geopolitical security fears and driven by sectarianism, Turkey has been able to walk a clearer line in support of democratic, albeit Islamist, transitions.

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Concluding thoughts

The role of and change of influence by an array of emerging states is much commented upon but far from fully understood. The broad contours of what is innovative about this phenomenon are becoming more apparent: change is taking place under stressful conditions but not from an external war; there is a cluster of candidates that can be considered to be ascending powers; this process of change has dramatic bursts but is of longer duration than might have been expected; a core site of change is taking place under conditions of embedded institutionalisation; and the issue-areas of cooperation and tension are quite wide.

Certainly national interests are more important than values in the changing world order and summits might transform into locations of highly complex cross-issue bargaining. That will increase the need for the coordination of foreign policies at the state level, too. The old value-driven communities are dissolving. The Western camp suffers from the renationalisation of Europe as well as from the political polarisation of the USA and, as demonstrated in this Special Issue, BRICS or the rising South are not less divided. Therefore different conceptions of world order will continuously compete and interact with each other. It is likely that the management of global interdependence will work through convening different groupings for different purposes on an *ad hoc* basis—an approach for which networked powers have already delivered the blueprint.

That said, what the details of this emerging process will be are far from clear. Having embraced the embedded institutional option, there are signs that the emerging states (or at least some of them) are becoming more wary of involvement in the new concert diplomacy because of the obligations placed on them. It is questionable which rising powers will become responsible and legitimate stakeholders of the new order and how global responsibility and legitimacy will be defined.

The camps of debate over particular issue areas, over values such as legitimacy, responsibility or national sovereignty and the future order as a whole will not always be delineated along the lines of liberal democracies versus autocracies or the West versus the rest. Charles Kupchan’s pragmatic plea for a more pluralist and inclusive approach to legitimacy might be instructive: ‘it is a very safe bet that the world will be multi-polar long before it is democratic’, and therefore ‘responsible governance, rather than liberal democracy, should be adopted as the standard for determining which states are legitimate and in good standing—and thus stakeholders of the next order’. The rise of new players has resulted in a fundamentally contested order of world politics and the meaning of essential concepts must be renegotiated. We have to wait and see what new approaches BRICS will bring to the table in the course of this normative struggle under the conditions of the new institutional heterogeneity.

Thus, the trend is not following a precise, linear transition from a US-centred equilibrium to a multipolar one underwritten by a set of alternative actors. While the global system will be shaped by what this more diverse cluster of core countries wants and does on the basis of their varying political cultures and competing ideas of domestic and global order, so too will it be modified by
how others respond to these emerging states and who they decide to interact with in order to attain their own goals and objectives in specific policy domains.

Notes
4 For one illustration about how seriously US society took this threat, especially in the Sputnik era, see ‘We must win the cold war’, Life, 2 June 1961.
11 Alexandroff & Cooper, Rising States, Rising Institutions.
13 Yekaterinburg Joint Communiqué, Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the People’s Republic of China, the Russian Federation, the Republic of India and the Federative Republic of Brazil, 16 May 2008.
14 P5 permanent members of the UN Security Council.
20 AF Cooper & R Thakur, The Group of Twenty (G20), New York: Routledge, 2013.
25 On the differences in these eras, see AF Cooper, ‘The G20 as an improvised crisis committee and/or a contested “steering committee” for the world’, International Affairs, 86(3), 2010, pp 741–757.


37 ‘Nation should play greater role in G20, says expert’, China Daily, 1 March 2009.


40 Y Zhang, ‘Powering the world’, Indian Express (Delhi), 28 March 2012.

41 D Rousselle, ‘We’re all in it together’, Times of India, 29 March 2012.


47 The claims to developing-country representation are widely contested within their own respective regions. MA Vieira & C Alden, ‘India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA): South–South cooperation and the paradox of regional leadership’, Global Governance, 17(4), 2011, pp 507–528.


49 Ibid, para 6.

50 Hurrell, ‘Hegemony, liberalism and global order’.


58 Hurrell, ‘Hegemony, liberalism and global order’.

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