

South Africa's national interest and BRICS: Towards bandwagoning or balancing?

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1. Introduction

South Africa's entry into the forum of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRICS) in 2010 has cast the spotlight onto the nature and character of the country's national and strategic interests, a focus that originates from the complex nature of the relationship between BRICS countries and their strategic role in the global economy. This research brief looks at the material capacity of BRICS countries to challenge and/or influence the existing global economic order.

The key question is what South Africa stands to gain from its relationship with the other BRICS countries in terms of its own national development and the promotion of regional integration in Africa. An equally important consideration is what unites the BRICS countries in view of the balance of forces in the global economy.

Literature on the balance of power in international relations and the international political economy explains state behaviour and collaboration in two primary ways:

- Bandwagoning, which implies the state's desire to preserve its national interest by seeking protection through stronger and powerful states (Cheng & Hsu, 1998).
- Balancing, which entails the shifting of the status quo distribution away from the situation that favours the dominant state in the global system (Sangtu, 2010).

The implication of these two concepts for a state's national and strategic interests is that the preference for either balancing or bandwagoning is a dynamic, fluid decision.

The dynamism of the process of defining a state's national interest is linked to the changing nature of the global political economy, as well as the changing domestic conditions in each country. For South Africa, the debate has been about the actual nature and character of the country's national interest – an ongoing debate which has seen national interest juxtaposed with foreign policy in relation to government.

Furthermore, a state's national interest has also been confused with its public interest in regard to the role of the Fourth Estate and other public bodies. The discussion on South Africa's national interest has therefore tended to conflate national interest and foreign policy, and "many analysts assume that foreign policy is based on national interests" (Van Nieuwkerk, 2004).

Couched in this dialectical relation in the analysis of foreign policy and national interest is "the relationship between the dynamics within states and the distribution of power among them" (Rice, 2008). Hence the recently published White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy states that "in a fast changing and interdependent world, it is essential for South Africa to regularly make an evaluation of its foreign policy and to ensure that its national interests are maximised" (RSA, 2011).

2. Defining South Africa's national interest

The challenge faced by most analyses of South Africa's national interest, as well as by the Draft White Paper, is the development of a more coherent, elaborate statement of the country's national interest. Without such an explanation, it is less useful to draw on the notion of the "inextricable link

of South Africa's national interest" (RSA, 2011) with the region of southern Africa and the continent.

The Ten-Year Review of the South African government states that "adeptness at identifying the national interest and pursuing it in a creative way is part of the challenge of governance and state leadership in the current global arena" (RSA, 2003). The major challenge, however, is how to develop a discourse on South Africa's national interest that views issues such as foreign policy, economic diplomacy, public interest, national security and others as subsets of the whole, namely the country's overarching national interest.

This overarching statement of South Africa's national interest should include the country's mission and vision that are derived from all sectors of society regarding what and how best its vital interests can be served. Zakaria (1998) puts the challenge this way: "Foreign policy is made not by the nation as a whole but by its government. Consequently, what government can extract for its purposes reflects the ease with which central decision-makers can achieve their ends." Foreign policy, therefore, ceases to be the basis on which national interest is theorised, and rather becomes one of the subsets of the overall national interest.

In the same way that public interest and national interest are differentiated elsewhere (Netshitenzhe, 2002), an all-embracing statement of a country's national interest cannot be derived from just one of its subsets. While this research brief acknowledges that all the elements or subsets of a comprehensive statement of South Africa's national interest are evident, the conceptualisation of national interest in public discourse and government documents is both methodologically flawed and conceptually narrow in its explanation.

For instance, the government's foreign policy provides an essential yet limited scope for the statement of the country's national interest. The government's policies on trade, security, energy and immigration, as well as business engagements, civil society engagements and other institutional and societal networks, are important subsets of the overall statement of national interest. Inversely, the sub-narrative here is whether foreign policy, public interest and national security so constructed can actually work against a country's national interest.

In an extremely useful discussion, Netshitenzhe (2002) states that "national interest as a concept is meant to define the aggregate of things that guarantee the survival and flourishing of nation-state and nation. Usually the national interest is counter-posed to that of other states". While he is of the view that national interest "is not decreed ... it's a sixth sense and it evolves with a nation's history", his definition provides a good framework for constructing an overarching statement of South Africa's strategic interest. Indeed, the relationship between national interest and public interest needs to be nurtured through civic dialogue and discourse that rests on the premise that public interest "is meant to represent the interests of the aggregate collective of citizens – independent of state institutions. It's a kind of collective civil interest".

However, Van Nieuwkerk (2004) is critical of the derivative view of national interest and cites the example of Botswana:

Central to our country's foreign policy are the interests of Botswana which embrace the preservation of the democratic form of government, its institutions and values, its sovereignty and territorial integrity, brooking no interference in its national affairs, its respect for self-determination and independence of peoples, its non-racialism, its non-alignment, the non-use of its territory as launching pad for attacks against neighbouring states, the non-use of force in the settlement of disputes and the development and security of its foreign markets.

Van Nieuwkerk also posits that an "inverse relationship" exists, with global political economic factors shaping and influencing local and domestic state action. The global influence is taken as a given and there is no systematic explanation of its causality. However, he does concede invoking a constructivist notion that "the world is not simply given and/or natural but one of artifice – it is constructed through the actions of other actors themselves" (Van Nieuwkerk, 2004).

Hopf (1998) concurs with the above in his elaborate statement concerning national interest being derived from all the subsystems of a nation:

Although any understanding of world politics requires a theorisation of the domestic and the analysis of the systemic, there would be no systemic theory of world politics because the world system has no predominant

system; it has subcultures, each of which can be understood only by examining how states constitute themselves in their societies. The answer to the question of who are enemies and friends begins at home. Finding out precisely how a state's identity affects the construction of its interests vis-à-vis another state demands that the social context in which the state's collection of identities is being discursively constructed be investigated as deeply and broadly as possible. This means exploring not only how the state's identities are produced in interactions with other states, but also how its identities are being produced in interactions with its own society and the many identities and discourses that constitute that society.

It is the latter point with which this policy brief is concerned. South Africa's national interest is best conceptualised and derived from how its identities are being produced in interactions with its own society and the many identities that constitute that society. With regard to the proper conceptualisation of South Africa's national interest, Van Nieuwkerk (2004) is correct in proposing the following questions: "What is South Africa's national interest? Who determines it? Can South Africa afford competing interpretations of the national interest? Or is contestation inevitable; in fact a normal feature of democratic intellectual dialogue? Most of all, can the concept realistically guide South Africa's foreign policy?"

The debate on South Africa's national interest and foreign policy has been ongoing. This policy brief contends that the way in which the debate has developed has tended to place foreign policy above national interest, and not vice versa. The dilemma is that the media has foisted the false, if essentialist, notion of foreign policy in relation to national interest on the debate. For instance, an article in *The Star* made the following assertion: "How seriously do the Zuma people take foreign policy? This is the question still preoccupying the diplomats in Pretoria as well as policy experts ... as the whole of this administration are too focused on the vicious quarrels within the tripartite alliance" (Fabricius, 2010). The national debate in the tripartite alliance is important if it is meant to assist in defining national interest, in the same way that a debate in *Afri-Forum* on the Afrikaans language is important in terms of how it serves the country's national interest.

South Africa therefore needs to conceptualise and define its national interest better. A country's national interest is the collective – and, indeed, an aggregation – of all the other interests in all the political, economic and social dimensions of state activity. To define the national interest of a state based on one of its subsystems is not only incorrect, but also narrows the scope of state-society interaction that is required to construct an overarching statement of national interest. A great deal of work has been undertaken in each of the subsystems of national interest in South Africa, but what seems to be lacking is a systematic, coordinative discourse towards establishing an overarching framework.

3. Institutions and state collaboration

The debate on state collaboration and international cooperation in the global economy has clearly highlighted the complex problem that role players face. There is concern about whether global problems can be addressed without the involvement of institutions, or through loose triangular forums such as BRICS. The complexity of the tension in international cooperation is compounded by the need for players to coordinate their choices through binding institutional arrangements if they are to achieve their collective goals.

For instance, a formal institutional framework could help create a more useful platform where countries can also compete with each other to assume positions of influence in international policy forums. Indeed, both India and Brazil have called for the expansion of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and their inclusion in it, although China has objected to this (Nye, 2011). These differences need to be mediated through an institutional arrangement within BRICS in order to prevent them from leading to mistrust and suspicion.

Clearly, the assumption that international players can share the same interests and agendas on a global scale outside of an institutional framework is tenuous. BRICS collaboration is being defined and crafted – although in state-centric and bilateral ways – outside of institutionally binding obligations, norms and goals. In the absence of an institutional strategic framework, BRICS relations with Africa can only be conceived through collaboration at the level

of individual state action (bilateralism), as has been the case thus far. It is this aspect of BRICS' role in Africa's development that provides both challenges and opportunities for South Africa's crucial position in relation to:

- how the country will balance its national interest as a member of BRICS, and as a key regional player with interests in the region and in Africa.
- the ways in which South Africa will be able to moderate, mediate, facilitate and drive regional positions in BRICS' engagements in order to promote development and continental integration.

There will be further discussion on these questions later. International institutions have been explained as a combination of "sets of principles, norms, rules and decision making procedures upon which actors' expectations converge" (Krasner, 1985). The literature on "realism in international relations" explains the relationship between states in the anarchic international system as that of states primarily concerned with their national security. For neorealists, international institutions are insignificant, in that power considerations among states are dominant in the anarchic system (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2003). In this view, collaboration among states will only be sustainable if states place a high premium on interaction, have symmetric resources, and are interdependent.

Some neorealists have developed further analysis acknowledging the role of institutions in the international system, focusing on, for instance, how institutions can affect the distribution of costs and benefits of state interaction. Furthermore, neorealist institutions can be used as devices to seek and maintain asymmetric gains and, more broadly, to assist in controlling other players' behaviour. Neoliberal institutionalists have argued for specific incentives for states to create institutions, as opposed to simply engaging in ad hoc bargaining. Collaboration is seen to be primarily demand driven – that is, players will create institutions because they are useful – but the mechanisms for creating them have not been specified (Keohane, 1989). An important angle in the neoliberal institutionalist argument is that institutions may constrain future institutional development (Keohane, 1988).

A more recent innovation in examining institutions' role in the international political economy is the role played by politicians and experts. Hass (1987) focuses on the efforts of politicians to use linkages across various issues to create new "policy planks" in the international policy arena. Constructivism has focused on the matter of ideas, arguing that reality is, in fact, constructed in the minds of decision makers. Constructivists argue that "power and interests do not have effects apart from the shared knowledge that constitutes them as such" (Wendt, 1992).

Constructivists see norms and values as important causal forces. Institutions are not only important in constraining players, but also essential in altering how they conceive their basic interests. The establishment of an effective institutional framework is, therefore, important in getting arrangements and alliances between states to work.

4. State collaboration in BRICS: Bandwagoning or balancing?

The previous section has sought to provide an institutional analysis of state collaboration in the global economy through the lenses of the types of institution. It offers insights into BRICS' state collaboration in terms of how these states will collaborate or coordinate their actions by placing the premium on their influence in changing and transforming the global economy. Internally, BRICS' state collaboration faces challenges and opportunities in respect of "free riding", an inhibiting factor that could lead to some states within BRICS viewing certain actions as creating instability in their economy or the regional economy. The institutional design of state collaboration therefore seeks to find coordination points that will help deal with varying costs and benefits for the participating states, especially in state collaboration of loose and informal arrangements such as BRICS.

The involvement of BRICS countries (especially China, India and Russia) in Africa is growing in unprecedented ways. The social, political and economic uncertainties thus created require innovative and creative ways to manage the expanding economic and development engagement appropriately. South Africa's role in this increasing engagement is critical if the political and economic arrangements and opportunities are

to accrue significant gains in job creation, economic growth and greater regional integration in Africa. How this engagement is to be focused in terms of the strategic roles that different stakeholders will play in the political economy, and the kind of inputs that each will bring to the process, is critical.

A significant challenge is that the industrial base (in particular, manufacturing) of most African countries is weak and its contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) is minimal (Hartzenberg et al., 2011). Most countries in southern Africa, for instance, are characterised by the predominance of small industrial units which produce mostly for the national and regional markets. These fundamental differences in resources, technology and capital endowments between Africa and other BRICS member countries (such as China, India and Russia) make them complementary economic development partners (Fundira, 2011).

South Africa's situation is slightly different to that of the rest of the continent due to its expanded and diverse industrial base. However, "its social fabric is fraying" (Viljoen, 2011).

The next section lays the groundwork for establishing possible coordination points among BRICS countries themselves and in their relations with the rest of the world.

4.1 The realities of rising BRICS

There is concern worldwide about the scope and scale of global challenges, combined with the alleged decline in the United States' strategic influence in the global policy arena. This has spawned vast amounts of literature on the viability of the unipolar system. The emerging new global arena is also bringing about change in the foundations of the global international economy.

This situation was recently underscored by an altercation between American President Barack Obama and some Chinese officials at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. Commenting on the United States' frustration with China's stance on international trade relations, President Obama said: "We're going to continue to be firm that China operates by the same rules as everyone." It is reported that Pang Sen, a Deputy Director-General at China's Foreign Ministry replied: "First we have to know

whose rules we are talking about. If the rules are made collectively through an agreement and China is part of it, then China will abide by them. If [the] rules are decided by one or even several countries, China does not have the obligation to abide by that" (Mail & Guardian, 2011).

While state-driven processes of connecting the world are still prevalent, most connections in the world are facilitated through non-state activities and networks. Furthermore, the changing global situation has brought into sharp relief the traditional notions about the influence of formal and informal institutional arrangements in the global policy arena. The ascendance of emerging markets and their role in the policy space has increased over the past few years. This has seen a proliferation of both formal and informal institutions, including the formation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the G20, the G77, the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum, and BRICS.

The relationship among the BRICS countries is considered below in order to establish the connections in these countries' strategic engagements in the world, and how they connect with each other and globally. In short, the objective is to assess what unites the BRICS countries, and how South Africa will position itself in BRICS.

4.1.1 China

China's emergence as a significant player in the global economy has been linked to trends pointing to 2050 that "China will have the largest GDP in the world, will be the globe's largest emitter of carbon, will have the largest standing military and will be the world's second largest population" (Ikenberry, 2011).

The scale of the development path that China has undertaken both domestically and internationally has positioned the country as a major strategic player in the global economic arena. China's accession to the WTO in 2001 reassured its proponents that the country was prepared to work within the "American-led liberal hegemonic order" (Mingjiang & Chan, 2010).

This pragmatic posture was first generated by China's consolidation of its regional multilateralism in East Asia. In this way, China "believes that multilateralism is a powerful instrument for coping with unipolarity and opposing hegemony" (Mingjiang & Chan, 2010).

China's diplomatic pragmatism is premised on the notion that the emerging global economic order has to place a premium on collective and inclusive decision making among states.

The formation of the BRICS forum has been positioned as a critical platform for China to "push for reforms of other major existing international institutions", and this pragmatic diplomatic positioning is premised on the assumption that "cooperation among BRIC[S] countries is possible because they have many common positions and interests in international relations, in particular in the economic arena" (Mingjiang & Chan, 2010).

From a realist perspective, China understands the dynamics of shifting global power. Although the country opposes neorealism, it also understands how strategic persuasion through formal and informal institutions such as BRICS, the G20 and in the UNSC is critical for its rising global power and influence. In the short to medium term, China's strategic goal is to consolidate and persuade its fellow BRICS countries to adopt common positions in respect of the transformation of the international economic system. In the long term, the country's constructivist posture is to introduce new thinking, ideas and values into the global economic

system in order to transform it to be more inclusive and democratic.

4.1.2 India

India's growing influence in the global political and economic arena can be associated with its grand national strategy that is premised on democratic consolidation, technological advancement (especially in the information and communications technology sector), and its active engagement within the international policy arena. India's core concern for human rights and democracy buttresses its image as a country with a foreign policy strategy of "cautious prudence, and Indian policymakers are reluctant to embrace a potentially polarizing ideological goal" (Brookings Institution, 2011).

Several factors pointing to India's rise have been counted, including the projections of the Goldman Sachs Global Economics Group (2007) report that "India has the ability to sustain annual growth rates of around 8% until 2020 and will surpass the United States in gross domestic product by 2050".

India's diplomatic presence in the world has strengthened to counter-pose that of China. India's presence in Africa has increased exponentially over



BRICS leaders: President Manmohan Singh (India); President Dmitry Medvedev (Russia); President Hu Jintao (China); President Dilma Rousseff (Brazil); President Jacob Zuma (South Africa)

the past few years following its historical links with developing nations in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the G20, the G77, BRICS and – more importantly – within IBSA.

4.1.3 Brazil

The Brazilian foreign policy has been anchored on two concepts, namely universalism and autonomy. Universalism is linked to the country's position in the region, with its diversity and cultural attributes serving as a springboard for parachuting its national and regional interests to the rest of the world. Autonomy relates to Brazil's ability to engage the international policy terrain in ways that project its national and regional interests and those of the developing world. Brazil's role in the G20 has been exceptional and "propelled the country to the WTO's decision-making core, together with India" (Vigevani & Ramanzini, 2010).

The former Brazilian Foreign Minister, Celso Amorim, has acknowledged Brazil's soft balancing in the international terrain as follows: "I would say without modesty that Brazil changed the dynamic of WTO negotiations. Not Brazil by itself. But Brazil leads the G20 and is sought – almost courted. I would say – by the United States, the European Union and Japan, among other countries" (quoted in Vigevani & Ramanzini, 2010).

Brazil's articulation of its role in the international policy arena – in BRICS, IBSA, the WTO and the G20 – is underpinned by its commitment to regional integration in South America and as leader of Mercosur, the Common Market of the South.

In relation to the balance of power in the international system, Brazil's position is described thus: "Although the United States remains the only superpower in the international system, today one can no longer say that the world order can be fitted into a strictly 'unipolar' model. The political and military resources that the United States government and society have at their disposal, though virtually unmatched, do not ensure their capacity to define outcomes on a global scale" (Vigevani & Ramanzini, 2010).

4.1.4 Russia

The assumed relative decline of the United States in the international system has given rise to a significant body of literature that recasts the positive role of

Russia in the world since the collapse of the Soviet Union almost two decades ago. Hopes are that Russia's relationship with China, Brazil, India and South Africa will place it at an advantage in relation to the United States. Furthermore, the impending entry of Russia into the WTO will place the country prominently in the arena of international economic activity.

Russia's strategic role in BRICS is to deal with its continuing irritation with the United States' alleged arrogance and disregard for international law, norms and obligations. Rather than seeing itself as a "responsible stakeholder" in an international economic system underwritten by the United States, "Russia want[s] the United States to be a responsible normal great power in concert with other elite few" (Kuchins & Weitz, 2008).

Russia is the only member of BRICS that has raised some of the critical intra-BRICS challenges and mistrusts among its five member countries. Russia's foreign policy posture in BRICS is to balance China's rise and assertiveness. A secret Russian document is quoted as follows (Skak, 2011):

"...special attention must be directed towards monitoring the growing role of China in international affairs, including having in mind the consequences of Beijing's activities for our regional and global interest. We must proceed from the fundamental importance of keeping China on a position of acting jointly with us – taking into account the situational dynamics – within the G20, BRICS, and Security Council of the UN (in which our support is often of greater significance for Chinese than their support is for us nowadays)."

4.1.5 South Africa

South Africa's role and position in the international arena have to a large degree derived their legitimacy from the democratic and egalitarian values that led to the collapse of apartheid seventeen years ago. The transition from apartheid to becoming a full member of the international community wrought a litany of challenges. On the one hand, there were expectations that South Africa was to become a beacon of hope; on the other hand, strategic lapses away from its founding values of human rights and democracy have led many to believe that the country has lost its moral high ground (Baker & Lyman, 2008).

However, it is in the international political economic arena that the country's value has been more prominent. South Africa's predilection for multilateralism and influence in the UN, G20, G77 and WTO has elevated it to the status of a middle power. This status was at its highest when the country took the lead in standing for the Global South's cause; the African agenda including championing the establishment of the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

South Africa's international position was raised further by its membership of IBSA in 2005, combined with its non-permanent status at the UNSC in 2007/08. Its ascendance to the BRICS forum in 2010 has provided the country with greater scope to be the "dealmaker" for southern Africa. South Africa will, therefore, have to balance its national interest, regional interest and advancement of the African agenda.

South Africa's national interest in relation to its economic diplomacy in state collaboration within BRICS will present the country with opportunities for itself and for the process of regional integration in Africa. However, these challenges and opportunities can best be addressed once South Africa has developed a proper statement of and framework for its engagement in BRICS, as derived from its national interest. What are the incentives and motivations for a range of stakeholders in Africa for greater collaboration with BRICS, and which roles should each stakeholder play in the process? Put differently, what and where are the political economy areas of win-win situations in the BRICS development engagement with Africa?

5. Synthesis discussion on BRICS

State collaboration is not a new phenomenon in international political economy. The BRICS forum and the set of interactions and institutional frameworks that this relationship will create are not unique in international politics. What is unique about BRICS, however, is its rising role as a group of emerging markets in the determination of a new, democratic and inclusive economic order or trajectory in the world.

The rising power of the BRICS countries is one thing; how these countries will maximise their aggregate power to change and transform the global economy

is another. This will, in the main, be a function of how the BRICS countries both collectively and individually balance and bandwagon with each other and with the rest of the world, in particular, the United States. In this situation, while hard power is still important, it is less useful and strategic influence is more appropriate.

Intra-BRICS differences, mistrust and challenges will form the basis of each BRICS country's balancing or bandwagoning strategy. For China, the challenge is the United States' reassertion of its strategic influence in the South-East Asian subregion. The question therefore, is whether Asian States will balance against China's rising influence or bandwagon with it.

So, for instance, "China has moved to assert territorial claims in the resource-rich but hotly contested waters near Philippines and Vietnam. Many of the region's smaller countries have asked Washington to re-engage in the region as a counter-weight" (Johnson & Calmes, 2011). China's upgrading of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has drawn serious attention from Washington. On the other hand, Russia is cautiously sceptical of China's rise and "afraid of becoming a raw material and energy appendage to China" (Danchenko, 2010). In BRICS, China is critical to Russia as it asserts itself in Europe by building alliances and regional structures to block the United States.

Brazil is also asserting its influence in the Organisation of American States (OAS). The country's strategic foreign policy posture is to soft-balance the United States to bring about BRICS' "long, soft landing in America's relative decline, not a short, violent crash" (Jones, 2011). India has immense weight in Myanmar and Iran, and wields strong influence in the international policy bodies. India and Brazil have aspirations of becoming permanent members of the UNSC and are sceptical of China and Russia's position in this regard. The continuation of the IBSA forum alongside BRICS will provide India and Brazil with a strategic platform to balance their strength in areas in which they have lesser influence within the BRICS forum.

What will South Africa do in this difficult and intensely competitive situation? It may be argued 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” (Walt, 2010).

The challenge for South Africa, therefore, is to prioritise the maximisation of its national interest. South Africa has to work on its comparative advantage as a “regional power and this gateway status can be exploited at the economic and political level” (Spies, 2010). In relation to BRICS, South Africa will exert both internal balancing and external balancing. The former will involve South Africa’s definition of its national interest in relation to BRICS and the country will use this to place the region and the African agenda at the centre of the BRICS agenda. The latter will involve South Africa’s leveraging of the capabilities and economic strength of other BRICS countries to expand its strategic influence in the world.

The critical matter of South Africa’s balancing act has been described in this way: “The role of South Africa’s traditional trading partners – Western countries – has been lessened significantly ... China is South Africa’s largest trading partner, and South Africa is the largest destination in Africa for China’s direct investment ... By joining the BRIC countries, South Africa also hopes to become the gateway for the BRIC countries’ entry into Africa ...” (quoted in Bhadrakumar, 2010).

Indeed, South Africa’s balancing behaviour will determine the extent to which it will be able to influence its fellow BRICS countries to commit to economic development in Africa. It will also have to do this whilst balancing the consolidation of its traditional and historical links with the world.

6. Conclusion and policy recommendations

This research brief has sought to analyse the implications of the BRICS countries’ relationship for South Africa. An evaluation of the BRICS countries’ foreign policy posture and their position in the international policy arena was deemed important in order to establish the relational strength that the BRICS forum can muster. The relationship among the BRICS countries is expected to be complex, with impacts from both within and outside the forum. The positions that BRICS countries will adopt will

depend not only on their internal relationship within the forum, but also on the relationship that these countries have with the rest of the world. The dynamic, changing character of interactions among states in the rest of the world will, in turn, also determine the balancing and bandwagoning behaviour of the BRICS countries.

A number of policy areas that BRICS countries will have to address in order to resolve some of the policy and institutional issues are outlined below. These policy implications are raised mindful that the BRICS’ institutional and relational framework among these countries is largely still under construction. Many of the policy challenges raised below are open-ended questions posed in a manner that implicitly provides probable answers to rather difficult areas of collective and individual state action.

In this situation, South Africa should urgently develop a framework for its national interest in BRICS. In the medium to long term, South Africa will need to develop a comprehensive and coherent statement of its national interest, which places national development, regional integration and the African agenda at the core.

Policy implications include the following:

- *Conceptual gap:* South Africa needs to define its national interest and build a discourse of how its national interests are balanced against its first principles in the Constitution, regional integration, the African agenda, as well as its international values, norms and obligations towards the rest of the world.
- *Preference aggregation:* State collaboration, more specifically intra-BRICS collaboration, will revolve around how each BRICS economy maps its policy preferences and how BRICS as a whole establishes an institutional framework for aggregating these policy decisions into a BRICS Plan or Programme.
- *Coordination equilibrium:* Free riding in intra-BRICS relations will result in a problem of finding a BRICS coordination equilibrium with the rest of world with regard to human rights, trade, the UNSC, monetary cooperation and resource extraction, and how to balance the preponderant state – the United States.

- *BRICS mediation discourse:* The five BRICS countries are regional powers in their respective regions. The assumption is that they have mediated their regional interest and strategic positions, and have secured a regional mandate. For instance, South Africa may reflect in its engagements with BRICS and the rest of world that it is “the gateway to Africa”.
- *BRICS expansion:* BRICS is a growing forum. The question is: In which ways will the inclusion of Mexico, Turkey, Nigeria, Egypt, Thailand or Indonesia change the relationship among the BRICS countries? How will the balance of power configuration be resolved at BRICS and at regional level?
- *China extension/expansion:* China’s extension and expansion of its scope and scale of interaction and activities in the world has policy implications.

How will BRICS countries find a balance between third-party preferences in which China will engage (e.g. the EU, ASEAN and USA) and those that the BRICS countries have with China? Similarly, what and how will BRICS countries (particularly China and Russia) deal with IBSA’s influence on and divergent interest in BRICS?

- *BRICS knowledge hub:* BRICS needs to manage, organise and disseminate the information and knowledge about its activities in each country and in the rest of the world. Will the BRICS countries adopt a hub-and-spokes approach where the specific country knowledge and information (spokes) are transmitted into the central hub, and where will the hub be located amongst the BRICS?

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