

South Africa's contribution towards the formation of BRIC

*Written by Dr Sehlare Makgetlaneng**

Chief Research Specialist

Programme Leader: Governance and Security

Africa Institute of South Africa,

Human Sciences Research Council

Pretoria, South Africa

South Africa has contributed towards the formation of a new global organisational actor consisting of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) which later became BRICS as a result of its admission into it as its member. This is despite the fact that it was not formally an integral part of BRIC at its formation. Why it was invited to be its member and why it accepted this invitation is not an issue the way these questions are discussed by a considerable number of South African scholars who question its membership to BRICS. More than any African country, it tangibly, best and effectively articulated key socio-political and economic issues, processes and developments in international affairs and how they affect Africa and the rest of the South. More than any African country it tangibly, best and effectively called for the resolution of problems serving as obstacles to the achievement of development and progress not only of Africa and the rest the South, but also of the world as a whole. In the process it contributed towards the formation of BRIC without being a participant in the meetings where its formation was discussed and agreed upon.

Under the leadership of Thabo Mbeki South Africa forged and expanded closer working relations with Brazil, Russia, India and China with the eventual establishment of the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum. The material support to the African National Congress by Russia and India in its leadership of the national liberation struggle to end the apartheid rule was one of the key factors which facilitated the expansion of its closer working relations with Russia and India. The IBSA Dialogue Forum serves as “mechanism for political consultation and co-ordination as well as for strengthening sectoral co-operation and economic relations between India, Brazil and South Africa.”¹ The decision to form the IBSA Dialogue Forum was announced by India, Brazil and South Africa during their meeting in Brasilia, Brazil in June 2003. South Africa played a key role in the establishment of this trilateral organisational forum. While Russia and China did not become its members, South Africa wanted to ask them to be its members. If South Africa implemented its decision to ask them to be its members and they agreed, it should have played a leading role in the formation of the organisation consisting of the five BRICS members. It is possible that this agreement should also have led to the organisation having in essence the same objectives pursued by BRICS. This possibility is supported by the fact that the objectives of a new global organisational actor consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) and IBSA Dialogue Forum are essentially the same. IBSA has been since its inception structurally needing the support of Russia and China to achieve its objectives. The reality that all IBSA countries are members of BRICS is such that, to a greater extent, the fact that Russia and China are not IBSA members is structurally irrelevant. This reality is structurally challenging the continued existence of IBSA.

It is possible that Russia and China should have agreed to be members of the organisation formed on the basis of the expansion of IBSA Dialogue Forum. Why? Russia played a leading role in the formation of BRIC. Evgeny Primakov as the Prime Minister of Russia called for the establishment of the organisation consisting of Russia, India and China while

visiting India in 1998. Although his proposal was questioned, it led to the formation of BRIC. This is despite the fact that his proposed organisation turned, firstly, into a four-member formation and, secondly, into a five-member formation. Russia took the first step towards the formation of BRIC when its president called a meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of Brazil, Russia, India and China at the United Nations General Assembly session in New York in September 2006. The first ministerial BRIC meeting was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia in May 2009. Expecting to be an integral part of the founding meeting of the organisation, South Africa was disappointed that it was not invited to attend it. Tshediso Matona as the Director-General of the Department of Trade and Industry pointed out that the “Department of International Relations and Cooperation must look into this. We must be in that club.”² Francis Kornegay, American researcher working for the Institute for Global Dialogue pointing out in 2009 that it was a fundamental mistake for Africa and for the rest of the South particularly in its cooperation agenda that South Africa was excluded from the formation of BRIC. Maintaining that “South Africa’s marginalization by BRIC means Africa’s marginalization in the overall scheme of things having to do with the terms of South-South cooperation and the future of such initiatives along these lines such as the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Trilateral Forum,” he concluded that:

Indeed, from an African perspective, South Africa’s exclusion from BRIC could complicate the nature and dynamics of the whole notion of South-South cooperation to such an extent as to conceptually call it into question as an expression of global South cohesiveness.³

Kornegay’s position is important for various key reasons. South Africa has successfully made a unique achievement in international relations and cooperation and foreign policy particularly on the issue of the restructuring and transformation of the global governance and its multilateral organisations and institutions. This achievement is the fact that it made it impossible for any global organisation formed by members of the United Nations Organisation committed, among others, to the restructuring and transformation of the global governance and its multilateral organisations and institutions to exclude it as a member. It successfully fought for its membership to any group of countries opposed to the Western dominance of the global system and its multilateral organisations and institutions.

Thabo Mbeki as the Deputy President and the President of South Africa challenged the global status quo particularly through his call to end what is referred to as global apartheid. South Africa’s leadership role in calling for the end of global apartheid was not surprising as the country which was under the apartheid rule regarded by the United Nations Organisation as the crime against humanity. Global apartheid is used in explaining the global control of political, economic, financial, trade, human resources development, technological and military resources by the decisive global minority. It is used in comparing the form and content of the access of the people of the world or globe to these resources to South Africa’s apartheid era. Challenges South Africa faced internally within itself before 1994 are used in articulating problems confronted by the decisive majority of the people of the world on the global scale. This reality is supported by Samir Amin, the political economist of Egypt, who maintained in 1997 that South Africa is

a kind of microcosm of the world capitalist system, which brings together in a single territory a number of features peculiar to each constituent category of that system. It has a white population which, in its lifestyle and standard of living belongs to the

“first world”, while the urban areas reserved for blacks and coloureds belong to the modern industrial “third world” and the “tribal” peasantry do not differ from peasant communities in Africa’s “fourth world.”⁴

As a microcosm of the world capitalist system, South Africa is a social formation in which:

You have everything that exists anywhere and usually the worst of everything! You have strata with the level of consumption of developed capitalist countries, but not the average productivity of these countries. Elsewhere there is an industrial third world, hardworking people with high productivity but low wages, and a fourth world too - the poorest people of Africa in the erstwhile Bantustans.⁵

Global apartheid is basically what Amin referred to as the South Africanisation of the world or “the extension of the South African model to the world level”⁶ in the 1970s. This thesis of the South Africanisation of the world is supported by Thomas Schelling, a conservative scholar and analyst of international conflicts. Comparing the international conflict situation with South Africa under the apartheid rule, he pointed out that:

If we were to think about a “new world order” that might embark on the gradual development of some constitutional framework within which the people of the globe would eventually share collective responsibility and reciprocal obligations, somewhat analogous to what we expect in a traditional nation state, and if we were to think about the political mechanisms that might be developed, what actual nation, existing now or in the past, might such an incipient world state resemble? If we were to contemplate gradually relinquishing some measure of sovereignty in order to form not a more perfect union, but a more effective world legal structure, what familiar political entity might be our basis for comparison?

I find my answer stunning and embarrassing: South Africa.

We live in a world that is one-fifth rich and four-fifths poor; the rich are segregated into the rich countries and the poor into poor countries; the rich are predominantly lighter skinned and the poor darker skinned; most of the poor live in “homelands” that are physically remote, often separated by oceans and great distances from the rich.⁷

The demand that global apartheid must be ended is a call upon the global progressive forces to end the socio-political and economic injustice including the form and content of the global governance and its multilateral organisations and institutions. According to Salih Booker:

Global apartheid is a system in which the differential access to human rights – economic, social, political and civil – and the differential access to wealth and power in the world are determined by race, class, gender and geography. It is a system where structural racism is embedded in global political and economic processes and cultural assumptions. It is the international practice of double standards that assumes inferior rights for people who can be considered others as defined by their location, race or gender.⁸

South Africa’s unique achievement in international relations and cooperation and foreign policy in the struggle for the restructuring and transformation of the global governance and its multilateral organisations and institutions is in line with its continental and global status. Its continental and global status is characterised by its position in a hierarchy of political,

economic, financial, trade, human resources development, technological and military international power relations that extends from the United States of America at the centre of capitalism to the African continent at the periphery of capitalism. It is a Southern African regional power and the African continental power consolidating its regional and continental status and striving to be an important international power, a major force within the Group of 20 countries and BRICS and an important actor within the United Nations Organisation as a permanent member of its Security Council. To the extent that this achievement is the reality that it made impossible for any global organisation established by members of the United Nations Organisation committed to end the Western domination of the world and to the restructuring and transformation of the global governance and its multilateral organisations and institutions concerned with African affairs in theory and practice and striving to have a meaningful sustainable closer working relations with Africa to exclude it as a member, its membership to BRIC was inevitable. It was impossible for Russia and China to exclude it from BRIC.

It is interesting to note that Kornegay accused Russia of being “the culprit in this plot” of excluding South Africa from the meeting where BRIC was formed. He should have blamed South Africa for having not raised officially its determination to be a member of BRIC in advance before its first ministerial meeting held in Yekaterinburg, Russia in May 2009. If it made it clear officially in advance before this meeting that it wanted to be its member, its request should have been accepted. Secondly, Russia played a leading role in ensuring that South Africa become a member of BRIC. It made it clear in public before South Africa was invited to be a member that it is was going to be accepted into the organisation. It is interesting to note that Antonio Negri in 2006 spoke about what he referred to as “the south-south relation or (Brazil, South Africa, India, China, etc.)” as a “curious discovery” which did “overcome the institutional blackmail” of the International Monetary Fund which “still obliges some” countries “to submit to certain economic-political schemes.”⁹ He regarded this “new axis” which “should be invented” to block “the blackmailing and imperialist criteria of dependency” as a “new Bandung.”¹⁰ The difference between Brazil, South Africa, India and China (BSIC) and Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) is the issue theoretically only given the fact that Russia’s name is not included in the BSIC axis. The fact that Negri makes it clear in no uncertain terms that some other key countries are included without their names being mentioned is such that the fact that Russia’s name is not mentioned in this axis does not mean that it is excluded in this formation. Russia’s role in the formation of BRIC and its role in international relations and cooperation particularly as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council render its exclusion in this new global axis theoretically irrelevant.

Russia is an important international power, a major force in international relations and cooperation and an important actor within the United Nations Organisation as a permanent member of its Security Council. The content of its right to its national self-determination and the free, independent exercise of its sovereignty and foreign policy is of strategic importance in its international relations and cooperation. It has continued successfully frustrating the efforts of the Western powers in their agenda against the interests of developing countries particularly within the United Nations Security Council. It has been a welcome and substantial addition to the restructuring and transformation of the global governance and its multilateral institutions and organisations controlled by these powers used in the defence of the global system under their leadership. This can best be understood if we come to grips with the reality that central to the structural obstacles to their restructuring and transformation is a political issue. Russia is a leader within the global governance opposition to the regime

change agenda of the West. It has successfully proposed a workable alternative to sanctions against Iran. This proposed solution is best reflected in a plan to resolve issues regarded by the Western powers as peace and security problems relating to the Iranian nuclear programme. Thanks to Russia's leadership on this important issue, the United States is making some serious efforts to normalise its relations with Iran. It has successfully opposed any United Nations Security Council resolution aiming at authorising and legitimising the Western military intervention in Syria. Briefly, Russia has been successful as the permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in defending the global system of checks and balances which is critical to international peace and security.

Directly related to South Africa's unique achievement in international relations and cooperation and foreign policy is its position in a hierarchy of international power relations. Its largest and strongest diversified economy, capital accumulation process, relative international strength and considerable African continental and Southern African regional strength give it enormous advantages and privileges to play increased leading role in African affairs and in the relationship between the African continent and the rest of the world particularly countries which are opposed to the Western domination of the world. Secondly, it constitutes a potentially powerful centre of independent development on the African continent.¹¹

It is in this context that Kornegay's position that South Africa's exclusion from the formation of BRIC was the marginalisation of Africa and that it could complicate the struggle to achieve and consolidate South-South solidarity and unity objectives articulates tangibly, best and effectively South Africa's unique achievement in international relations and cooperation and foreign policy. At issue was going to be not only the marginalisation of Africa, but also of BRIC members in working with Africa in the achievement of its objectives including the structural change and transformation of its internal and external relations. They needed South Africa as a member of the organisation for its credibility and legitimacy in the advancement of its global interests. The African National Congress (ANC) in its struggle to provide the South African society with the direction in its national and international relations paved the way for South Africa's independent role in international relations and cooperation including within the multilateral organisations and institutions as important member actively contributing towards the resolution of problems particularly regionally in Southern Africa, continentally in Africa as a regional and continental power. Its ruling party's Freedom Charter includes clauses which are an integral part of the objectives of these organisations and institutions. Thabo Mbeki, as the head of the Department of International Affairs of the ANC before 1994, pointed out that key factors characterising South Africa's relationship with the Southern African region, the African continent and the rest of the world should be taken into account in the formulation and implementation of its foreign policy in its post-apartheid era. This policy formulation and implementation process should be based on the advancement of "identifiable national interests, with the full understanding" that it has to be "balanced with the interests of other countries."¹² Central to this process is South Africa's commitment to the advancement of "mutually beneficial co-operation among the people of the world."¹³ The importance of these factors is that its foreign policy will have to address key issues "in the political, economic and military-strategic fields at the regional, continental and global levels."¹⁴

The Mbeki administration paved the way for South Africa's increased regional, continental and global role including within the multilateral institutions and organisations. Central to this regional, continental and global task as the core of its foreign policy, according to Pallo

Jordan, has been the creation and expansion of the space for Africa to define and fight for its future by exploring and offering its viable agenda conducive for the resolution of its problems. From the first day of his administration, Mbeki embarked upon a programme of action to contribute towards the resolution of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The thrust of the South African foreign policy was to “minimise the capacity” of the external powers dominant in international relations and cooperation to interfere in the internal affairs of the DRC so as to enable it and its neighbours to “resolve their problems.” The implementation of its policy is informed by the reality that: “Ruthless foreign interests, most of them based in the West, have taken” and still take “advantage of the relative weakness of African governments to intervene in the internal affairs of African states to install regimes they deem more favourable to them.”¹⁵

Upon it being asked by SADC to facilitate dialogue between the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front and the two Movement for Democratic Change political formations, South Africa implemented essentially the same policy in its contribution towards the resolution of Zimbabwe’s conflict. South Africa made serious efforts to ensure that Zimbabweans through their representatives resolve their conflicts without interference of the Western powers. It frustrated the efforts of the Western powers to interfere in Zimbabwe’s internal affairs as an integral part of the tactical means to achieve their strategic objectives. This policy approach is explained by Jordan. Maintaining that “Zimbabwe occupies South Africa’s attention for reasons of altruism and self-interest, which dictates that we assist Zimbabwe back to its feet,” he concludes that helping Zimbabwe does not mean South Africa is “imposing solutions from the outside.” The point is that “the people of Zimbabwe must solve their problems.” South Africa and other “friends and neighbours” of Zimbabwe “can assist them to reduce the high degree of polarisation in their country by devising means of drawing the two sides together.” South Africa’s “insistence on a national dialogue” between them “is the only sensible approach.” Maintaining further that no Southern African country could consider this approach preferred by the “counsels of confrontation and escalation of the political conflict” as “desirable,” he concludes that “South Africa’s quiet diplomacy has nudged the two sides in the right direction” and that the solution “will come from the Zimbabwean themselves.”¹⁶ When South Africa made efforts to apply this policy approach in its contribution towards the resolution of conflicts of Ivory Coast upon request by the African Union, President Jacques Chirac criticised South Africa for threatening France’s interests not only in the country but also in some of its former colonies in West Africa. Nigeria and the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) criticised South Africa in the name that it was against “a tradition of regional responsibility”. The so-called “tradition of regional responsibility” proved to be against the advancement of Africa’s popular interests. Nigeria and ECOWAS have currently so far failed to resolve Nigeria’s internal peace and security problems created, expanded and sustained by Bok Haram. Though its failure and by asking the Western powers such as the United States to help it in solving this problem, Nigeria has provided them with opportunity in advancing their interests not only internally in the country, but also regionally in West Africa. Will Nigeria and ECOWAS use the so-called “tradition of regional responsibility” to criticise African countries such as South Africa in deciding to assist it in solving its national peace and security problem?

South Africa is in a region that is relatively more developed, politically, economically, financially, technologically and militarily and also in terms of trade and human resources development than other regions of sub-Saharan Africa. It is the richest region with the largest market. Its combined population, Gross Domestic Product, purchasing power and abundant natural resources support its being the largest continental market. South Africa is a leading

social formation in this process. Relations between South Africa and other countries in the Southern African region are politically, economically, financially, technologically and militarily and also in terms of trade and human resources development different from relations between other regional powers and other countries of other regions of the continent. Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia have played the strategic Pan-African role in Central Africa. They have crucially represented the Southern African region and the African continent in saving the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) from the external expansionist programme of action embarked upon by Rwanda and Uganda supported by the United States and Britain. They militarily contributed towards the defeat of their programme of action to have the DRC as their sphere of control and influence. SADC is still actively contributing towards the advancement of peace and security of the DRC as an organization and through some of its countries. More than their counterparts in all other regions of Africa including North Africa, Southern African countries are important actors continental and global relations affairs in the political field of the structural change and transformation of the global system and its organisations and institutions. Southern Africa has more strategic countries than any other region of Africa. South Africa has been playing a leading role in the advancement of peace and security in the Great Lakes region in general and the DRC in particular.

Southern Africa occupies a key strategic position in the plans of the Western powers for their continued control of Africa's human, natural, material and financial resources. Its leading position in their plans is pointed out by David Cherry as follows:

Any plan of the Anglo-American powers for Africa will have, as a major motivation, the increased exploitation of Africa as a base of operations, a source of oil and gas, and a source of mineral wealth, especially those metals – platinum, chromium, manganese – needed for advanced military technology that are not widely dispersed in the Earth's crust, but are found in Southern Africa.¹⁷

South Africa is a target not in its own right by these Western powers in their programme of action on the national, regional, continental and global fronts.

South Africa has relative advantages compared to other African countries in its national, regional, continental and global relations. Some of these advantages are pointed out by Ha-Joon Chang in his lecture to members of South African parliament in Cape Town on 11 May 2010. He maintains that South Africa has “right political conditions to do anything useful.”¹⁸ Some of these “right political conditions” are the fact that, firstly, it has “a mass-based, well-organised, disciplined party” which gives it “a huge advantage” in its political, economic and ideological agenda to have the developmental state. Its “disciplined ruling party”¹⁹ is such that it has “a uniquely strong party base which enhances policy implementation capacity.”²⁰ Secondly, it has “highly developed organisational vehicles that can be used for developmental projects, like the DBSA (Development Bank of Southern Africa), IDC (Industrial Development Corporation) and various state-owned enterprises.”²¹ These organisational vehicles are “organisations that are potential ingredients for a developmental state.”²² Its Department of Trade and Industry is “in a position to play the pilot agency.” It has “serious financial resources and analytical capacities in the DBSA and the IDC.” It has also “a significant number of state-owned enterprises with an international standard of technological and business capabilities.” These are factors available to South Africa on the organisational front. Thirdly, on the human resources or human capital front, it “already has enough capable people to “do” a developmental state.”²³ These are factors available to South Africa to confront its socio-political and economic problems for their

resolution in order to bring its developmental state into existence. The achievement to have the developmental state deriving “political legitimacy from its record in economic development and progress is through “aggressive state intervention directing investment to promote particular sectors, through trade protection, subsidies, regulation, state ownership and other means, brought about unprecedented growth and structural transformation”.²⁴

The “right political conditions” or factors available to South Africa are its crucial “assets” in solving its problems. They are its weapons in confronting its “weaknesses” or factors on its “negative side”. These weaknesses are the fact that, firstly, South Africa has “no control over the banking sector”.²⁵ The private financial sector in South Africa is dominated by four banks. They are the Absa Group Limited, the First National Bank, the Nedbank Group Limited and the Standard Bank of South Africa. The domination of the financial sector in South Africa by these four banks is a serious problem particularly given the fact that “finance industry” in the country is “too strong.”²⁶ Secondly, South Africa has “energy and minerals conglomerates with unusually globalised links and capabilities” with the result that it has “bigger problems to handle”.²⁷ These “right political conditions” are factors available to the South African state on the human capital and organisational front to solve these two problems it is confronting on its “negative side”. These factors on its “positive side” are of crucial strategic importance to be used effectively, firstly, in solving “a great weakness in agencies to promote research and development”.²⁸ Secondly, in “strengthening the development bank”.²⁹ Thirdly, in “establishing special-purpose banks under state ownership”. Fourthly, in “also strengthening the research, development and support function of the state” in its national, regional, continental and global affairs or relations.

These factors characterising South Africa in its national, regional, continental and global relations are weapons through which it structurally contributed towards the formation of BRIC. They are such that its membership to BRIC was inevitable.

Notes and References

¹ Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Cape Town Ministerial Communique, India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum, Pretoria (<http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/2005/ibsa0311.htm>), page 1 of 5.

² Tshediso Matona, quoted in “Why South Africa Needs BRICS, why BRICS Needs South Africa,” Vladimir Shubin, Security Index: A Russian Journal of International Security, No. 3 (104), Vol. 19, Summer 2013, p. 34.

³ Francis Kornegay, “South Africa Excluded as a Emerging Economic Power?,” News from Africa, June 28, 2009 (http://www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art_11630.html).

⁴ Samir Amin, The First Babu Memorial Lecture, 22 September 1997, University of London, London (<http://www.pambazuka.org/en/Issue/451>).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Samir Amin, “Towards a New Structural Crisis of the Capitalist System?” in Carl Widstrand (editor), Multinational Firms in Africa (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1975), p. 10.

⁷ Thomas Schelling “The Global Dimension,” in G. Allison and G.F. Trevorton (editors), Rethinking America’s Security, New York: Norton, 1992, pp. 196-210.

⁸ Salih Booker, “No action in Africa,” Global Dialogue: An International Affairs

review published by the Institute for Global Dialogue, Vol. 7.3, November 2002, p. 16.

⁹ Antonio Negri, *Goodbye Mr. Socialism: Antonio Negri in Conversation with Raf Valvola Scelsi*, New York; Seven Stories Press, 2006, p. 151.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 151-2.

¹¹ David Cherry, Book Reviews, *Executive Intelligence Review*, 11 July 2008, p. 52.

¹² Thabo Mbeki, "South Africa's International Relations - Today and Tomorrow," *South Africa International*, 21(4), April 1991, p. 234.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Pallo Jordan, "A space for Africa to define its future," *ThisDay* (Johannesburg), 19 March 2004, p. 11.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ David Cherry, "Desperate African presidents court self-destruction in NEPAD plan," *Executive Intelligence Review* 29 (23), 14 June 2002, p. 20.

¹⁸ Ha-Joon Chang, "The making of a developmental state: Advice to parliament," *New Agenda: South African Journal of Social and Economic Policy*, Issue 38, Second Quarter, 2010, p. 34.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p. 37.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁹ Ibid.

Contact: Sehlare Makgetlaneng, PhD
Chief Research Specialist
Programme Leader: Governance and Security
Africa Institute of South Africa,
Human Sciences Research Council
Pretoria, SOUTH AFRICA

Cell: +27 72 263 5167
Tel: +27 12 316 9785 (direct line)
Tel: +27 12 316 9700 (switchboard)
E-mails: smakgetlaneng@hsrc.ac.za
sehlarengaka@gmail.com

134 Pretorius Street
Pretoria 0002
SOUTH AFRICA