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**SOUTH AFRICA, THE INDIAN OCEAN  
AND THE IBSA-BRICS EQUATION:  
Reflections on Geopolitical and  
Strategic Dimensions**

Francis A. Kornegay, Jr.

OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION

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NEW DELHI**

### **About the Author**

Francis A. Kornegay is a Senior Fellow at the South African-based Institute for Global Dialogue. He headed the South African delegation to the 3rd BRICS Think-Tank Symposium in Beijing in March, 2011. He is a specialist on South African foreign policy, South-South Cooperation and has participated extensively in IBSA projects. He has widely published on these and a range of other issues.

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## **SOUTH AFRICA, THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE IBSA-BRICS EQUATION: Reflections on Geopolitical and Strategic Dimensions**

### **Introduction**

South Africa's entry into the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) forum in 2011 alongside its membership in the trilateral forum of India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) raises a number of issues in the nature of trends analysis. These have to do with the relationships among the developing countries of the so-called global South, overlapping into the realm of emerging powers. These can be considered semi-developed countries exhibiting robust rates of growth, development, rising living standards and growing regional geopolitical influence in an increasingly multipolar global environment. This paper attempts to analyze how South Africa relates to this scenario, given its unique role and positioning on the African continent, as well as how Africa figures in this picture, linked as it is to the broader strategic implications arising out of South Africa's membership in both IBSA and BRICS.

These groupings, in turn, are suggestive of an important geostrategic dimension of connectivity between Africa and Asia via South Africa's additional positioning within the Indian Ocean nexus. As such, with South Africa as the point of departure, this dimension should illuminate the comparative advantages of the BRICS and IBSA groupings as platforms of multilateral utility for their members, as also to serve as points of reference for drawing some observations about South Africa's partners in these groupings, with particular reference to India and China.

From the vantage-point of how South Africa navigates its bilateral relations within these multilateral frameworks, questions of foreign policy identity and strategic autonomy have emerged in the intellectual and policy debates and discourses concerning the utility of the country's membership and participation in them. Whereas IBSA was seen as a natural outgrowth of South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy trajectory prioritizing Africa and the South and evoked no controversy, its commitment to BRICS remains a controversial issue.

For all the controversy surrounding its BRICS membership (unlike the case with IBSA, which has generated little visibility in media and public commentaries—much to its disadvantage—), BRICS has enjoyed a high level of visibility rarely seen in regard to issues concerning South Africa's foreign policy commitments. And herein lies the difference. The original quartet of Brazil, Russia, India, and China arose out of the championing of the emerging market by its Wall Street guru at Goldman Sach, chief economist Jim O'Neill, through his prognostications about future growth opportunities for overseas investors.

BRIC caught the instant imagination of the international financial and business media. As such, it was perhaps inevitable that this Wall Street acronym would stimulate the geopolitical imagination of the countries being targeted to all this hyped international high finance and investor attention. Irrespective of the Wall Street capitalist motivations that drove O'Neill, the BRIC quartet individually and collectively were motivated by their own geo-economic compulsions interacting with the fast evolving geopolitics of global economic governance that had been propelled by the financial meltdown of 2008-2009. This was especially so in the case of Russia and China.

In essence, the co-leaders of the Eurasian ascendant Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Russia and China, had apparently made a strategic calculation: there was something to be gained in their already launched campaign against the reserve currency hegemony of the American dollar by roping in India, already a 'strategic triangle' partner at a foreign ministerial level, with 'out of area' emerging power of the southern western hemisphere, Brazil.

India, moreover, was already an observer member of the SCO, though in an ambivalent position. In the event, a pragmatic convergence of interests among four emerging and/or re-emerging resurgent powers (two of them permanent members of the UN Security Council) gave natural logic to the coming together of a BRIC quartet, Goldman Sachs' hype notwithstanding.

Obviously, the formalization of a catchy marketing acronym into a real-life political organism fed the proprietary Western capitalist ego of Mr. O'Neill and, indeed, has been a piece of baggage that seemed hard to shake—that is until South Africa, much to O'Neill's annoyance, was brought into the club. So, as BRIC has become BRICS, the resulting quintet, in jazz-like fashion, has retuned itself in accordance with the rhythmic beat originally intended—one having nothing to do with the increasingly discordant notes in the global financial districts of an occupied Wall Street.

That said, the 'BRIC to BRICS' controversy within South Africa was an inevitable outcome of the wake-up call that suddenly registered in our capitol, Tshwane-Pretoria, when, out of the distraction of political infighting within the ruling African National Congress (ANC), awareness dawned that South Africa's IBSA partners appeared to have deserted it in favour of a more internationally compelling coalition of forces.

Although at present there is an ongoing South African civil society debate over whether the country should or should not be in IBSA (and, indeed, whether or not the membership in BRICS has made IBSA redundant), the fact of the matter is that the 'original sin' that spawned the controversy was committed when South Africa was left out of BRICS in the first place—and this, amid conflicting anecdotes as to which IBSA partner favoured and which opposed South Africa making the quadrilateral a quintet.<sup>1</sup>

Many of these concerns were first raised by this author in 2009, immediately in the wake of the formal launching of BRIC in Yekateringburg, in an IGD 'Global Insight' publication exploring the implications of South Africa's exclusion from this auspicious creation.<sup>2</sup> In what was billed as 'BRIC laying in New Delhi,' this analysis relied upon the ORF's 'pre-BRIC summit preparatory meeting' and the document thereof as a point of reference for exploring issues raised by BRIC's launch for South Africa.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the issues raised at the time have come to the fore now with South Africa's entry into BRICS. As such, this paper attempts to continue reflecting on how South Africa fits into the emerging power scheme of things in the ambit of what now is a BRICS-IBSA equation—a study that demands an assessment of the comparative relevance of each of these formations in relation to their geopolitical and geoeconomic potentialities.

These considerations relate to South Africa's positioning in the broader continental context. They also bring into the IBSA-BRICS equation Africa's connectivity to Asia via what Martin Walker, senior fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, calls the 'Indian Ocean

nexus' that links China, India, the Middle East and Africa (CHIMEA).<sup>4</sup> Thereby, an intriguing scenario of a SA-Sino-Indian 'triangle' straddling BRICS and IBSA emerges as a factor in evaluating how each of these actors may contribute to a further fleshing out of the fledgling multilateralisms posed by each grouping; what options they offer in contributing to a defining of the contours of a 21<sup>st</sup> century multipolar order. However, for South Africa, whether and how it is able to build synergy between its African and emerging power/global South agendas becomes a key consideration in assessing how it stacks up in the unfolding geopolitical-economic sweepstakes.

### **Tshwane-Pretoria's Balancing Act**

For South Africa, what had on the surface been a rather straight-forward post-apartheid foreign policy paradigm is turning out to be a vexing balancing act in which the main point of reference would shift from a Eurocentric to an Afrocentric foreign policy identity. This shift links it to concentric circles of prioritized commitments with Africa as the epicentre of a continental strategy channeled through the region as a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), followed by a focus on the developing countries of the global South, where the newly incumbent ANC had already developed close ties of solidarity as a liberation movement in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the G77, as well as with allies in the formerly Soviet-aligned so-called 'socialist' bloc.

Last but not least, the new ANC government would place great emphasis on what is called 'North-South bridge-building' by forging useful bilateral relations with major western trading partners, including states that had been very supportive during the struggle, such as Scandinavia, social-



democratic parties such as the SPD in Germany, the Labour Party in Britain, as well as with important anti-apartheid constituencies in the US.

Increasingly the balancing act in navigating this concentric circle has centered on what can be called an Afro-Global South/Emerging Powers nexus, one in which South Africa must strategically position itself, being by far Africa's largest and most sophisticated economy, as the default leader of the continent. This, in turn, involves, through parleys, the inclusion of and participation by this leadership in the new emerging power-structures of a fast changing global strategic landscape.

This aspirational agenda is rooted in deeply held convictions within the ANC about the need to develop a countervailing balance of forces to offset western hegemony. It brings with it an ideologically motivated bias conditioned by decades of socialization within the bipolar East-West paradigm of the Cold War and the 'positive neutrality' tendencies that grew out of the political culture of non-alignment.

This thinking produced an idealist quest for a sort of 'G8 of the South' which, under President Thabo Mbeki, contributed to or fed into what amounted to a reductionist diplomacy, culminating in the launching of IBSA in 2003. Though there were debates over whether or not Russia and China would or should be included in an expansion of IBSA, the debates petered out with the group being branded as a global South's triumvirate of democratic 'middle powers' that were also regional hegemons in their respective continents.

Yet, South Africa's leaders had always envisioned the country being integral to such an expanding global South/emerging powers coalition. However, though it was very much at the centre of the politics of IBSA's formation, it

was nowhere in the political-diplomatic loop that eventually gave rise to BRIC and the much greater international prestige and visibility that went along with it. If Russia and China were to be kept out of the democratic trilateralism of IBSA, South Africa would end up being excluded from the emerging big power quadrilateralism of BRIC; and this at a time when the quartet, led by China, was accelerating its economic diplomacy in South Africa's backyard, its economic hinterland and 'strategic depth' on the African continent.

On top of this, South Africa was fast becoming a key strategic platform for Beijing's orchestrating part of its geopolitical-economic agenda in Africa. The Standard Bank of South Africa/Industrial and Commercial Bank of China constellation in which ICBC has a 20% stake in Standard is indicative of this agenda. Beijing's China-Africa Development (CAD) Fund is based in Johannesburg's posh Sandton satellite city. China obviously is not alone in this respect as India is also heavily invested in South Africa, where both the Asian giants have made what Stephen Gelb calls 'market-seeking' investments intended to produce in South Africa [goods] for sale in the SADC region as well as in the South African local market.<sup>5</sup>

What is noteworthy in the manner Tshwane-Pretoria is balancing its relationships within and amongst its BRICS and IBSA partners is its 'comprehensive strategic partnership' with Beijing, characterized by close party-to-party consultations between the ANC and the Communist Party of China (CCP). (This is a relationship rich in historical irony in as much as the ANC and its South African Communist Party alliance partner were on the pro-Moscow divide of Sino-Soviet rivalry within the communist camp.)

South Africa seems not to have a comparably close relationship at an equivalent political level with either India or Brazil, IBSA notwithstanding. The ANC-CCP relationship illuminates the hybrid nature of the South African one-party dominant model characterized by an ideological 'party-state' grafted onto a liberal democratic multiparty parliamentary system. At the regime level, there is mutual compatibility between the South African and Chinese party-states, given their shared but different Marxist-Leninist lineages. South African governance, foreign policy included, reflects a dual interplay between party headquarters at Luthuli House in Johannesburg and the state presidency at the Union Building in Tshwane-Pretoria.

Although excluded from the launch, South Africa was very much in the initial calculus of the BRIC quartet. The ORF preparatory document observed that “it may be useful for BRIC to engage with countries like South Africa, both to enhance trade possibilities between Brazil and the other three nations [using South Africa as a transit point] and tap into the trade possibilities with regional trade partners of each of the BRIC countries.”<sup>6</sup> In any case, the China-South Africa connection has emerged as an important vector in assessing the manner in which Tshwane-Pretoria manages to navigate both its diplomacy within Africa, interacting with its balancing of the IBSA-BRICS equation, as also the relative importance it attaches to each of these platforms in addition to its 'north-south bridge-building.'

As a member of BRICS, questions being posed on decisions taken by South Africa in 2011 allude to the concerns as to whether its Africa policy is primarily informed by the continent's agenda and South Africa's interpretation of it, or by its BRICS-cum-emerging powers agenda. Tshwane-Pretoria's ambivalent position vis-a-vis the P3 in the UN

Security Council on Resolution 1973—a position that aligns it with Nigeria and Gabon and distances it from its BRICS partners—followed by its reactive formation against recognizing the Libyan National Transitional Council may be one case in point; its confusing ambivalence and reversals on Cote d'Ivoire may be another (although influences closer to home having to do with Angola's support of Laurent Gbagbo may have been more consequential, except that both Moscow and Beijing were also similarly aligned).<sup>7</sup>

Beyond these instances having to do with Africa policy, the tacit refusal of a visa for the Dalai Lama to visit South Africa for a non-official function has generated yet more controversy. This episode resulted in questions being raised about the country's foreign policy independence and strategic autonomy. Such concerns imply a certain uneasiness vis-à-vis South Africa's membership in BRICS in the context of its 'comprehensive' relationship with China.

This includes a persistent perception that Beijing had championed South Africa's entry into BRICS, with the implied 'pay-back' expectations that accompany such favours. Without going into the pros and cons surrounding these issues and controversies, what appears to emerge as a major concern regarding South Africa's BRICS membership is that it is not grounded in a solid intra-African network of strategic partnership with other key African state actors.

The Abuja-Pretoria axis that existed during the respective Nigerian and South African presidencies of Olusegun Obasanjo and Thabo Mbeki no longer exists. SA-Nigerian relations is the key to the formation of genuine pan-African strategic alliance formation in the African Union (AU), both as

a compass pointing out the common position African states should take, as also for informing African strategy in engaging emerging and traditional powers alike. Ideally, a 'strategic triangle' between South Africa, Nigeria and a post-Mubarak Egypt as a networking framework within the AU—slotting in other key actors such as Angola, Ethiopia, Ghana and Kenya—would be the best position from which to anchor Tshwane-Pretoria's strategies within the concentric circle of global South/emerging powers where BRICS and IBSA enter the equation.

The comparative strategic utilities of IBSA and BRICS ought to flow, ideally, from a foundational African agenda, not the other way around, especially with a looming extra-African power hovering in the background and increasingly in the foreground. I will return to this African agenda dimension later.

### **IBSA-BRICS Equations: Comparative advantages**

Meanwhile, there is a need to briefly explore the comparative multilateral utilities of IBSA and BRICS for South Africa's manifold agendas and, for that matter, those of its IBSA partners within BRICS as well. Because of the 'high politics' visibility of BRICS, with Russia and especially China in the lead, there has been a natural assumption that even before South Africa joined up, IBSA would become redundant or, at best, marginalized. But IBSA's demise has not happened and need not occur, although both Russia and (more so) China, have intimated that IBSA has become irrelevant; no doubt a case of wishful thinking on Beijing's part.

By the same token, New Delhi has been very vocal on the need for IBSA to remain a functioning platform for Brazil, South Africa and India. President

Manmohan Singh is on record emphasizing the need for IBSA to stay extant and that there be no move toward merging IBSA and BRICS, as it would mean, in effect, IBSA being absorbed by BRICS. This would have major geopolitical implications. This is particularly true for India, since any such move would compromise its strategic autonomy by allowing China to firm up its domination over the multilateral agenda of the co-optive emerging powers.

Whereas neither Brazil nor South Africa would be as affected as India, their space for maneuverability too would be circumscribed. Indeed, part of the debate outside the government in South Africa is that the BRIC quartet needed South Africa as much as South Africa needed to become a member to make it a quintet and that IBSA better suited its purposes as long as India and Brazil remained committed. Moreover, the question of foreign policy independence has emerged as a major concern for the South African people who are looking askance at Tshwane-Pretoria's subordination to Beijing's will on such issues as the unofficial visit to the country by the Dalai Lama.

Perhaps the 'comprehensive' strategic partnership between South Africa and China may be too comprehensive for South Africa's own good. This is coupled with questions being raised about how committed Tshwane-Pretoria is to IBSA, now that it is in BRICS and, as is being asked in certain South African quarters, whether IBSA remains relevant. This appears to politically place the onus of keeping IBSA a thriving forum on the Government of South Africa. It may also reflect on the comparative nature of Tshwane-Pretoria's bilateral relations with India on the one hand and China on the other as also on South Africa's adeptness or lack thereof in balancing relations between the two Asian giants within the IBSA-BRICS equation.

But beyond this triangle, there are other emerging powers like Turkey and Egypt as well as members of the G8 like Japan who want a relationship with IBSA. On its part, IBSA has been grappling for quite some time with questions of 'outreach' involving these and other countries. All of which raises important issues about the comparative advantage and/or complementarities between BRICS and IBSA. Apart from 'rule of thumb' entity that IBSA is to South-South cooperation and BRICS is to the emerging powers, there is a very glaring difference between the two platforms in terms of their geostrategic utility.

From a trilateral Indo-Brazilian-South African perspective, the geostrategic logic of IBSA is crystal clear, the aim being to create a 'Gondwanan' maritime link between the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. The fact that the three geostrategically linked regional powers have instituted IBSAMAR speaks enough for this logic. What the three countries choose to do or not do with it depends on their individual and joint political will aimed at making good on their articulated aspirations to shape the terms of strategic and geopolitical multipolarity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. BRICS has no geostrategic logic. Or rather, it combines two geostrategic logics, i.e., IBSA's southern hemispheric maritime logic on the one hand and Russia-China-India central Eurasian geostrategic imperatives on the other.

Indeed, India overlaps into both the spheres as it is an observer member of the Sino-Russian led SCO. Thus, whereas IBSA has trilateral geostrategic utility, depending upon how this is exploited, BRICS has no such utility in terms of a quintet. This is why, in spite of much agenda overlap between IBSA and BRICS, the latter is much more focussed on and caught up in the high politics of global economic governance and the issue of global international finance—that is, the increasingly compelling urgency of

moving away from dollar reserve currency hegemony toward a more equitably functional multipolar system of finance capital. This is the domain of emerging powers not that of South-South cooperation though countries like South Africa straddle the emerging powers and the global South.

By the same token, IBSA has already carved out a South-South developmental partnership agenda through its development fund under the management of the UNDP. It has built up a modest but politically significant track record as a donor through this partnership initiative. There would or should be no need for BRICS to duplicate the IBSA agenda and every reason for all of the BRICS countries, China and Russia included, to actually channel resources to other developing countries through it in tandem with their own emerging developmental partnership initiatives (i.e. as South Africa's SADPA and India's similar initiative). The IBSA fund could also serve as a point of reference for fashioning a new kind of development partnership-oriented alternative to the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

With BRICS still to follow-up on implementing its Sanya plan of action, IBSA has moved far ahead, albeit unevenly, by setting up more than sixteen sectoral working groups involved in a wide range of activities. Then again, there are some IBSA-affiliated forums which can be duplicated by BRICS, such as the IBSA parliamentary forum, which underlines the democratic nature of the three countries comprising it.

Here again, this forum is suggestive of yet another dimension that IBSA might take in its evolution by the spinning off of the parliamentary forum into a more autonomous proto-parliamentary body, rather than stay tied as



tightly, as it presently does, to the heads-of-state summits. The political systems of Russia and China rule out a BRICS parliamentary forum.

Rather than allowing a competitive and/or zero-sum approach to IBSA and BRICS to gain currency, a more win-win oriented approach might help both of them to focus on their complementarities and on how synergies might be built around their comparative advantages. Such an approach might inform their relationship at both the geopolitical and global governance levels. In terms of the latter, BRICS is best placed to operate as the strategic countervailing 'caucus' to the G7/8 within the G20 'directorate' of global economic governance. IBSA, on the other hand, is better placed to undertake an ambitious geostrategic project in fleshing out the CHIMEA potential of what Martin Walker calls the 'Indian Ocean nexus.'

### **Triangular Dynamics in the Indian Ocean**

South Africa's balancing act between BRICS and IBSA runs parallel to Tshwane-Pretoria trying to balance its ties with China and at the same time with India. This makes for a triangular set of dynamics between these two Asian giants with South Africa in the middle, overlapping the triangular dynamics within IBSA as well. To further complicate matters, South Africa's centrality to these two triangles interacts with India's balancing between BRICS and IBSA on the basis of its Eurasian triangle with Russia and China (coupled with its observer status within the SCO). Where these balancing acts converge for both Tshwane-Pretoria and New Delhi is in the increasingly dynamic maritime terrain of the Indian Ocean.

Much is made of the perceived rivalry between China and India in the dominantly Indian Ocean narrative emphasising the need for the US to play

a balancing role in the two nations' strategic maneuverings in the maritime region. This theme, basically a contention in Robert Kaplan's book, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (Random House, 2010), is countered by the more positive geoeconomic scenario revolving around Martin Walker's CHIMEA nexus of triangular commercial, trade and investment dynamics, which factors in the Indian Ocean as a maritime energy transport-communications corridor.<sup>8</sup> This factor rationalizes China's orientation of its economic diplomacy and its perceived energy security imperatives in the Indian Ocean expanse, stretching from Myanmar which divides the borders of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, to the western realm of the Ocean surrounding Mauritius via the Sri Lanka and Pakistan route.

Indo-African-Creole Mauritius, moreover, is a member of SADC, raising that other dimension of Sino-Indian Ocean narrative, which has to do with Beijing's economic stakes in Eastern and Southern Africa, stretching into the Great Lakes hinterland of the Democratic Republic of Congo. China's geoeconomic imperatives, coupled with a recent tendency among strategic analysts to down play the importance of a 'string of pearls' encirclement of India via Pakistan's strategic port of Gwadar (off the coast of Baluchistan province) challenges the sense of urgency attached to the threat perception that emanates from the sea-borne Sino-Indian rivalry.<sup>9</sup>

There also exists 'great games' dynamics involving the territories bordering the Indian Ocean: these dynamics enter into the equation due to India's efforts to offset Sino-Pakistan maneuverings along its contested north western border state of Jammu and Kashmir by forging economic and strategic ties with Vietnam—a country with which China has been embroiled in a territorial dispute in the South-China Sea.

As such, the Indian Ocean great power rivalry scenario cannot be totally dismissed. South Africa, meanwhile, is very much on the periphery of this Asian geopolitics. Yet, its trilateral collaboration with India via IBSA in the IBSAMAR naval exercises with Brazil may be suggestive of a more stabilizing set of dynamics that can be injected into the Indian Ocean scenario by both New Delhi as well as Tshwane-Pretoria.

Moreover, both China and India are caught up in the anti-piracy coalition of forces that has been mobilized in the Indian Ocean and which is beginning to draw in a hitherto standoffish South Africa as the piracy threat has migrated into the Mozambique Channel. South Africa, in conjunction with SADC, has perforce to devise a maritime security strategy within the context of the continental framework outlined by the AU. This pressure is being generated on South Africa at a time when India is taking over the chairmanship, for a two year term, of the Indian Ocean Rim-Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC).

The question that emerges out of all of this is why there should not be a scenario of convergence that exploits this unfolding set of circumstances, as it could very well be fructified into a new multilateral paradigm of Afro-Asian interregional cooperation within the Indian Ocean.

For this to happen, however, India and South Africa—leaving the distant Brazil out for the time being—would have to develop a more dynamic geostrategic programme of naval and maritime security cooperation as an expanded dimension of IBSAMAR, linking it to the fledging SADC's and AU's maritime strategies. India's taking over of the IOR-ARC chair should provide another point of synergy for fleshing out IBSAMAR. This, in turn, could be expanded into a broader geoeconomic Afro-Asian strategic

partnership. It could rope in all of the regional economic communities bordering the Indian Ocean Rim with the IOR-ARC built up as the interregional interface.

This would mean bringing into this paradigm-building exercise the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as the Eastern and Southern African tripartite grouping of COMESA, SADC and the EAC along the African side of the Indian Ocean littoral. Once such an architecture of interregionally pluralistic multilateral cooperation is created, there would remain no reason for IBSA partners South Africa and India, together, to be able to pre-empt the intensification of the great power rivalry based on mutual suspicion. This could be done in two stages.

South Africa is in a position to convene an *IBSAMAR Summit on Maritime Security and Cooperation in the Southern Hemisphere*, an initiative that could bring together other littoral states from South America, West and East Africa, those bordering the Indo-Pacific rim (including the GCC, SAARC and the ASEAN) and the IOR-ARC. Only South Africa, by dint of its geostrategic positioning astride the southern sea lanes is in a position to take this initiative. Yet, up to now at least, Tshwane-Pretoria has been reluctant to assume leadership on Indian Ocean matters.

Apart from this reluctance for a leadership role, it had, in 2008 too, declined to take on the leadership role in the fledgling *Indian Ocean Naval Symposium* (IONS). However, its turn to lead IONS reportedly comes up in 2013 when India will still be chairing the IOR-ARC.<sup>10</sup> Taking over the chair of IONS would be a natural follow-up to the Indian Ocean conference Tshwane-Pretoria is planning to host in April 2012. An IBSAMAR summit, in turn,

coordinated closely with India as the chair of the IOR-ARC, could flow naturally from South Africa's IONS leadership as well as next year's Indian Ocean conference (which will precede the IOR-ARC Research Group's Nairobi conference on African maritime cooperation planned for July 2012).<sup>11</sup>

An IBSAMAR summit, built upon these important consultations would then set the stage for India, as a member of IBSA/IBSAMAR and the chairman of the IOR-ARC, to work in collaboration with regional economic communities and key state actor stakeholders in fashioning a comprehensive *Maritime Security and Development Cooperation Initiative for the Indian Ocean/Indo-Pacific realm*. This would allow for the co-opting of Beijing into an interregional framework under New Delhi's initiative. It would build upon an IBSA-based process that, among others things, should preempt (or at least regulate) a competitive, zero-sum geopolitical scenario. In the process, both South Africa's and India's strategic autonomy and latitude for maneuvering within BRICS would be enhanced by the joint construction of a new interregional security and geoeconomic architecture of South-South cooperation.

Another consideration that such an exercise might factor in is the need for an alternative institutional body that complements the UN Security Council as the global peace and security architecture. This might take the form of a *Maritime Security & Cooperation Council*. Here again, the IBSA countries, as maritime regional powers in the southern hemisphere, are well-placed to undertake such an initiative. At least in part, this would be based on the assumption that UN Security Council reform/expansion is realistically not likely in the foreseeable future, despite the urgent need to update the international security regime.<sup>12</sup>

Such a structure would have a credibility advantage, as India, Brazil and South Africa are essentially 'nonaligned', in the sense that they fall outside the power bloc patterns represented on the Security Council by the P5. As such, they could form the secretariat of such a maritime council which, unlike the Security Council, should comprise an inclusively global membership based on regional economic and continental groupings. Whether it would or should fall formally under the UN system and how it might relate to this system is open to debate.

As currently structured, the UN system is unable to accommodate all situations in which international security responses and management are required. In the absence of any countervailing multilateral security mechanism, NATO tends to occupy vacuums with ad-hoc 'coalitions of the willing' as in the controversial case of Libya. Moreover, it also has a presence, less controversially, in the Indian Ocean addressing the piracy threat.

### **Conclusion**

For all the ongoing debate in South Africa about the country's membership in BRICS, it could almost be seen as analogous to Russia's membership in the G8. South Africa, after all, falls well outside the emergent great power league of Brazil, Russia, India and China. But South Africa's comparatively small size is deceptive, given the size of its economy and industrial sophistication within a growth surging continent that forms its natural economic hinterland and strategic depth. Neither is South Africa a finished product as a nation-state. It is potentially a federal-state nestled within an integrated Eastern and Southern Africa within which it could form the core, much as Germany forms the dominant economic fulcrum of the EU.

South Africa will likely play an analogous role within an increasingly integrated Eastern and Southern Africa—just as Germany plays in Europe—and, perhaps, in the continent as a whole.

Finally, the geographic positioning of South Africa as a triple gateway to the South Atlantic, the Indian Ocean and to the hinterland African market makes it an unavoidable factor in anyone's southern hemispheric geopolitical-strategic calculus. The question outstanding is what will South Africa's leaders make out of these natural advantages?

Will they, in conjunction with their partners in IBSA exhibit sufficient boldness of geopolitical and strategic imagination to translate these natural advantages into a new international subsystem, one that enhances their individual and collective strategic autonomy within BRICS as a potentially revisionist global economic governance alliance?

Dominated as BRICS is by China and Russia, the fact that these two have other strategic 'fish to fry' in reconfiguring northern hemispheric Eurasian power equations must also be factored into the calculus of the IBSA members of BRICS. This is critical, given the interdependency of changes in the global North and the global South. Both IBSA and BRICS constitute different but interrelated paths toward a new multipolar strategic landscape. And the Indian Ocean occupies the centre of gravity in this shifting landscape.

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### Endnotes:

1. Notably, Ambassador M. Rasgotra, at an event hosted by ORF prior to the launch of BRIC made the following remarks: “We – all four of us – belong to two disadvantaged continents – Latin America and Asia. I have asked myself why at least one more country from another disadvantaged continent, Africa, is not in this group. South Africa for example...” Open Remarks in *BRIC In the New World Order*, editors, Nandan Unnikrishnan & Samir Saran, ORF and Macmillan, 2010.
2. *South Africa's South-South Dilemmas: Will a BRIC fall on IBSA?* Global Insight, Issue 88/July 2009. p.7
3. Ibid., p. 3. This was accessed from a June 2009 report via [www.newkerala.com/nkfullnews-1-39244](http://www.newkerala.com/nkfullnews-1-39244). It included the entire communiqué covering all 43 items/recommendations.
4. Martin Walker, “Indian Ocean Nexus,” *The Wilson Quarterly*, spring 2008, pp. 21-28.
5. Stephen Gelb, "FDI Links Between South Africa and the Other BRICS Countries", p. 2. This paper was prepared for the 3<sup>rd</sup> BRICS Think-Tank Symposium, March 23-25, 2011 and is part of the compendium of presentations from that symposium published by the China Centre for Contemporary World Studies which was the host.
6. Kornegay, op.cit., p. 4.
7. For an interesting critique of the Russia and China BRICS dimension of the Resolution 1973 controversy surrounding Libya, see: “NATO settles down in Libya,” by MK Bhadrakumar, *Asia Times Online*, November 1, 2011.
8. Kaplan has written a string of Indian Ocean geopolitical pieces for the *Foreign Affairs* like “Center Stage for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean,” March/April 2009. The following summary offered up promotionally is indicative of the Kaplan narrative: “Already the world's preeminent energy and trade interstate highway, the Indian Ocean will matter even more as India and China enter into a dynamic great-power rivalry in these waters.” Martin Walker does not discount this rivalry potential: “The economic promise of CHIMEA is dazzling, but the geopolitical and strategic implications are sobering. As the Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Pacific proved in their own periods of surging trade growth, commercial highways can easily become battlegrounds in their turn. And with the CHIMEA nations poised in this century to become the globe's centre of gravity, the stakes in the Indian Ocean promise to become very high indeed.”
9. See: “China's pearls unstring – for now,” by Vivian Yang, *Asia Times Online*, June 20, 2011.
10. IONS is an initiative in which ORF Senior Fellow, Dr. PK Ghosh, has been very active.



11. President Jacob Zuma, in opening the 5<sup>th</sup> IBSA summit in Tshwane-Pretoria made the following comment: “I wish to focus our vision on possible future areas of cooperation for IBSA. As you know, the scourge of piracy has been manifesting in both the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. *I am specifically contemplating a maritime security cooperation dialogue and possible framework which could further include non-security functional cooperation areas of engagement.* We can reflect more on this and make proposals.” He followed this up by also mentioning a further, related dimension of logistical connectivity: transport communications links. See: Opening Remarks by President JG Zuma at the 5<sup>th</sup> IBSA Summit, Presidential Guest House, Pretoria, South African Government Information (GCIS), October 18, 2011. (italics added)
12. The Tshwane Declaration communiqué following the IBSA summit predictably references UNSC reform under 'global governance reform.' In this regard, more realistic is its reiteration of the need for the Security Council to work more closely with 'regional organisations,' a reference to deep misgivings over the marginalization of the AU in the Libyan imbroglio.

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**Observer Research Foundation**  
20, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi-110 002  
Email: [orf@orfonline.org](mailto:orf@orfonline.org)  
Phone: +91-11-43520020 Fax: +91-11-43520003  
[www.orfonline.org](http://www.orfonline.org)