

The Global South in Transition: Power, Politics, and the Role of BRICS in Shaping Global Relations

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ABSTRACT

This paper will explore the developing concept of the Global South and its role in the reshaping of global relations, particularly through BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). The concept of the Global South emerges from post-colonial contexts, reflecting a shift in world order where developing nations assert their independence and pursue development distinct from the Western model. The chapter maps out the ascent of new powers within the Global South, especially China, India, and Brazil, tracing BRICS as a prime institutional challenge to Western power supremacy. It looks for internal contradictions within BRICS, underlined by tensions between neoliberal strategies and regional cooperation. For all that BRICS constitutes a new kind of alternative to the previous power structure, it does also face problems such as political fragmentation and sub-imperialism risk. The chapter concludes that the success of the Global South, through BRICS, depends on overcoming these obstacles and aligning diverse member states towards a shared vision of development and global equity.

Keywords : BRICS; Global South; South-South Cooperation; Neoliberalism; Geo-political Shifts

INTRODUCTION

The Global South concept has been receiving ever-growing attention; that speaks of a shift in the world order, where the developing countries are to take independent and significant positions. These nations are usually outside the Western cultural and developmental framework; their patterns of development will reflect the pattern distinct from the model indicated by the West. Their progress trajectories and the cultural paradigms are distinctive and frequently at variance

with those of more advanced countries. The term Global South refers broadly to the regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Dados and Connell, 2012). Its origin can be traced to 1955 Bandung Conference¹ where leaders from newly independent countries of Asia and Africa came to confer on an agenda for promoting Afro-Asian economic and cultural cooperation and to oppose colonialism and neo-colonialism by any nation. However, the term Global South gained currency during the end of cold war. In 1980, the Brandt Commission²

1. The Bandung Conference, also known as the Asian-African Conference, was held from April 18 to 24, 1955, in Bandung, Indonesia. It was a pivotal moment in world history, bringing together 29 Asian and African nations, many of which were newly independent, to discuss common concerns, solidarity, and cooperation amidst the backdrop of the Cold War and colonial legacies.
2. The Brandt Commission, formally known as the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, was established in 1977 under the chairmanship of former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt. The commission aimed to address the growing economic disparity between the Global North and Global South and to promote sustainable global development.

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published its report³ that outline the North-South distinction. Also, a Brandt line was developed as a way of showing how the world was geographically split into relatively richer and poorer nations (Rupesinghe, 1983). According to this model: Richer countries are almost all located in the Northern Hemisphere, with the exception of Australia and New Zealand.

Poorer countries are mostly located in tropical regions and in the Southern Hemisphere. This view of development implies the Western view on progress and modernization that the Global North advances as the best way and subsequently the newly independent countries adopted this model as their national ideology for their development. This view is reflected in the report of the south commission named 'The Challenge to the South'⁴, in which it highlighted this North-South divide. The report referred the third world as the South and asked the countries in the South to cooperate with each other. The report is concerned with the people of the developing countries as well as for the world that it should become a more just and secure habitation for all countries and all peoples. The purpose stated for this report is to contribute to the success of this endeavor so that countries in the south may determine their own destinies while playing a full part in humanity's development and in enhancing the security of its common heritage (South Commission, 1990: 09). Similarly, in this way Global South is a "new paradigm of development" as prescribed by UNDP project of 2003, "Forging a Global South". This report uses the term "south" for the developing countries. It rests on the fact that all of the world's industrially developed countries (with the exception of Australia and New Zealand) lie to the north of its developing countries. The term does not imply that all developing countries are similar and can be lumped together in one category. What it does highlight is that although developing countries range across the

spectrum in every economic, social and political attribute, they all share a set of vulnerabilities and challenges⁵. The project is intended for the South to take command of its own future. Rather than await succor from the North, the countries of the South must cooperate with one another in fostering the overall development of the South.

Along with it by the late 1990s, some major transformations started to occur witnessing the rise of China with other developing countries such as India, Brazil and South Africa. This rise of new powers is now affecting the global relationship such as between great powers, the global South and developing countries and thus creating new pattern of regionalism and regionalization. The objective of this paper is to explore the idea of Global South through its institutional arrangements such as BRICS and underscore the internal contradictions within the imagination of this rise of new South. The research intends to explore the feasibility of Global South in today's neo-liberal competitive international political economy and in the age information and communication.

Global south:

Though the category of South is emerged during 80s and 90s. Many theorists relate it with the concept of third world. Arif Dirlik's, "*Global South: Predicament and Promise*", traces the emergence of the concept of Global South historically with attention to its antecedents in the popular term of the 1960s and 1970s, "Third World". He argues that though "Third World" is no longer a viable concept geopolitically and as political concept, it may still provide an inspiration for similar projects that may render the Global South into a force in reconfiguration of global relations (Dirlik, 2011). He discusses the UNDP project of 2003, "Forging a Global South", which can be

3. North-South: A Programme for Survival (1980): This was the primary report outlining strategies to reduce global inequalities and promote cooperation between developed and developing nations. The second report "Common Crisis: North-South Cooperation for World Recovery" (1983), this follow-up report analyzed the global economic challenges of the early 1980s, focusing on the debt crisis, unemployment, and stagnation in the developing world.
4. The South Commission, chaired by Julius Nyerere, released its report titled "The Challenge to the South" in 1990. The report emphasized the need for developing countries to focus on self-reliance and strengthen South-South cooperation to address shared challenges. It criticized the global economic system for perpetuating inequalities and underdevelopment in the Global South and called for reforms in trade, finance, and technology transfer. Highlighting the importance of unity among Southern nations, the report urged them to collaborate in reducing dependence on the Global North and to assert a collective voice in global decision-making. This report remains a significant document advocating for economic justice and equitable development.
5. <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/china/docs/Publications/UNDP-CH-PR-Publications-UNDay-for-South-South-Cooperation.pdf>.

described as a new paradigm of development. This project is intended for the south to take command of its future. Rather than await succor from the North, the countries of the south must cooperate with one another in fostering the overall development of the South. This is termed as the South-South cooperation. It is a decentralized cooperation, which is open to cooperation with countries outside the South in what is termed as “Triangular cooperation”. He argues that here what is important is the fact that South must invent itself and acquire visibility on the global scene in an assertion of its autonomy or partial autonomy. The south as it invents itself must also invent economic alternatives to neoliberalism if it is to achieve autonomous development within the confines of global capitalism (Dirlik, 2011). Similarly the South Commission in 1990 published its report named *The Challenge to the South*, which is a valuable statement about development strategy, south-south and south-north relation. This report defines the south as the place that exists on the periphery of the North, where peoples are poor, their economies are weak and defenseless and the destiny of these countries are vulnerable to external factors and lacks functional sovereignty. The commission task is to propose ways by which the South could surmount these crises, start growth with the process of sustainable development (South Commission, 1990).

The challenges in front the nations of the South are to mobilize and deploy the resources in a more effective manner so that they can energize their development. Policies need to be changed; institutions needs to be reformed and new mechanisms were to be created. Also the South must recognize that its growth impulses must be found in its own economies along with the principle of self-reliance. The report also enlarges upon the flaws in the development experiences where post-1945 economic growth in the south did not lead to an adequate transformation or to greater equity and social cohesion. It criticizes the trickle down theory for not raising the income and productivity of the poor or to promote fairer distribution of the benefits of growth (South Commission, 1990).

It proposes a three part agenda for the South. First, concerns the domestic policy within the national setting. Though there is very much diversity in economies of the South, still there is a need to formulate certain principles and objectives to guide the development course of all countries. Second, focus on collective self-reliance to strengthen cooperation among the members of the South

and reinforce their capacity for growth. Finally, the solidarity of the South.

Rise of new South and BRICS:

Li Xing in his “*Understanding the Hegemony and the Dialectics of the Emerging World Order*”, offers a new framework for interpreting the transformation of international political economy and advances the re-conceptualizing and re-theorizing of the international order since the 2008 financial crisis, with a special focus on the rise of BRICS (Xing, 2016). He uses the methodological approach of continuing importance of “hegemony” as a conceptual tool for thinking and analyzing politics and policies of international relations and political economy today at different levels, global, regional, and local. He acknowledges the fact that the present international order is under American leadership in post-war order and was built on American liberal internationalism. However, after the end of cold war American hegemony has been under constant readjustment (Xing, 2016). This led US to establish a new form of hegemony termed transnational liberalism, which is grounded on market. However, what US has ignored is the fact that market-based hegemony can be a double-edge sword: it also opens upward possibilities for the rise of other countries, including non-liberal states since of their comparative advantage in the competitive areas of labor, resources, culture, development policy and the role of the state (Xing, 2016: 06). Therefore the success of BRICS countries lies not only in the role of free market about also governed market *i.e.* state capitalism.

Xing argues that there is crisis in the international order on four counts *i.e.* First, Crisis of functionality (means nation-states and international institutions are unable to deal with global crisis in an effective and collective manner), Second, Crisis of scope (means it is beyond the capacity of nation-state and international institutions to resolve a vast range of global problems), Third, Crisis of legitimacy (means the world has lost confidence in the leadership and legitimacy of the current order led by the hegemon and the core principle states to manage global affairs and Finally, Crisis of authority (*i.e.* the rise of China, BRICS and the emerging world has increased their decision making role to challenge the structural power occupied by the core states) (Xing, 2016: 10-11). Due to this crisis we can see the rise of other emerging powers such as China, BRICS which now

redefining the relations of upward mobility among the core, semi-periphery and periphery countries in the era of globalization and transnational capitalism.

Like Xing, Dirlik also hopes that Global South as idea points to one form of alternative global alliance. To him the UNDP Global South project has coincided with renewed activity in which societies of the South, have taken initiative from the World Social Forum to the formation of Group of 20 in 2003, representing powerful southern societies such as China, India, and Brazil etc. The South in cooperation with the radical forces in the North has played an important part in global political activity from protests against the WTO to protest against the War in Iraq (Dirlik 2011). Therefore for Dirlik, China and India can provide a leadership role in the South and therefore a number of powerful societies have the reason to align with Global South-China, India, Brazil and South Africa for forging a Global South and it will help in forming a global alternative alliance.

Ray Kiely in his *The BRICs, US 'Decline' and Global Transformations* focuses on geopolitics and addresses the question of whether the new south is transforming the international order. He traces the history of the rise and fall of the third world since 1945 with the Bandung Conference in 1955, formation of NAM in 1961, Formation UNCTAD in 1964, oil price rises of 1973-74 and NIEO in 1974-75. However the rise of new south can be traced with the emergence of new powers in the context of the long boom of the 1990s. Though G77, UNCTAD, and NAM continue to exist, but to some extent these have been displaced by new alliances and a new context. These new alliances are like IBSA and more importantly BRICS. IBSA was established in 2003 with the aim to 'contribute to the construction of a new international architecture; bring their voice together on global issues; deepen their ties in various areas' as well as opening itself up to "concrete projects of cooperation and partnership with less developed countries." However the most significant alliance is BRICS not only because of the size of the countries that make up its membership but also because of the question of whether these countries challenge the existing international order, and specifically US hegemony and development dominated by neoliberal prescription (Kiely, 2015: 158). He also expands the role of China in this new south framework where China sees itself as a leader of and for the Third world. Since China is a major aid donor to the developing world, and this is seen as being part of a long tradition of leadership of the

Third World. Also in 2011 White Paper on aid China distinguishes between Chinese aid and western aid, where aid by China helps the recipient countries build up their self-development capacity, imposing on political conditions and with adherence to equality, mutual benefit and common development. Also China is playing leading role in development of trade relations between various parts of the south. For example: the rate of growth of developing world exports has increased from 9% of world trade in 1960 but as much as 42% in 2008. Also the share of China in Latin America's exports increased seven-fold from 2000 to 2010 (Kiely, 2015: 160).

Sunanda Sen (2017) highlights the recent eighth summit in 2016 in India, the BRICS had taken an initiative to set up a new financial architecture. She argues that in order to avoid the International Monetary Fund (IMF) type of loan conditionalities and tackle the dominance of the United States (US) dollar in global finance, the new institutions set up by the BRICS are expected to provide a much needed change in the global financial architecture. These institutions include the New Development Bank (NDB), the BRICS-led Contingency Reserve Fund (CRF), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (Sen, 2017: 25). The member countries also agreed to reduce the prevailing non-tariff barriers and set up an independent credit rating agency "based on market-oriented principles," with the aim to dilute the dominance of the three big US-based rating agencies—S&P, Fitch, and Moody's. Along with it one major decision was the possible use of local currencies in the intra-BRICS trade and this decision will help the members countries not only to lowering cost but also increase trade and demand within the member states while avoiding shocks from exchange rate volatility, especially for member countries like China with its large trade balances in US dollar. Sunanda Sen argues that this decision will help in five major ways. First, settlements will no longer rely on the dollar or other major currencies as unit of transactions, the exchange rate fluctuations across major currencies will not impact the cross rates between the individual BRICS currencies as long as these are kept frozen with forward contracts renewed over time. Second, arrangements to use the bi-lateral trade surpluses within the BRICS by those with trade deficits would generate additional demand within the member nations by creating new channels for intra-BRICS trade. Hopefully, this will stimulate the real economy in terms of output and employment. Third, the transfer of surpluses

to meet deficits can even be treated as a loan, to be adjusted by other transactions of the NDB. Fourth, trade surpluses earned by individual members (say China) will remain within the BRICS as investment and will not be used as assets in US dollar, avoiding sources of vulnerability and Finally, BRICS may devise ways and means to channelize capital flows in a manner which strengthens its institutions and generates real demand, say with infrastructures via the newly formed AIIB, rather than be used in activities of a speculative nature (Sen, 2017: 27).

Limitations:

Since we discussed the category and rise of new south, here I would like to come the possible limitation or contradictions that exists in the imagination of this new south with its institutional apparatus of BRICS. As far as category of South is concerned we discussed the report of the South commission. This report gained response from all over the world. Various responses were compiled in the book *Facing the Challenge: Responses to the Report of the South Commission*⁶. Here I'll discuss some of the responses. One of the responses registered is by Rajini Kothari's *Towards a Politics of the South* where he argues that the challenges that South faces today will have to be met in an institutional and political framework altogether different from that existed before in 1960s till 80s. He recognizes the fact that development in South has been a complete failure in the last 30 year. He proposes for a development, which meant fulfillment of both needs and aspiration of the people, to be realized at level and in locations where people lived and not something handed down by some superstructure. This will allow them to draw upon their own traditions and knowledge system along with imported ideas for what they were worth. This will prevent them from new inequalities that the modern concept of development brought into being. The basic challenge that countries of the South faces are internal and not external. But there

is only one aspect in which the global impact must be fully assessed and faced *i.e.* the ideological fixations and technological fixation, both undermine the political process which could response to democratic upsurge around the world. This will led to gradual erosion of the autonomy and sovereignty of independent nations. For Kothari, challenge of the South is fundamentally political and the countries of the South will have to overcome their differences and plural identities and refuse to be individually co-opted by the North or by corporate capitalism⁷ (South Centre, 1993: 90). Therefore the task is to is to take a different path different from the previous and reaffirm the need to delink from the global market place. By adopting a autonomous and democratic path, the countries of the South would harness its energy and then it would in a position to start North-South dialogue.

However as far as BRICS is concerned its criticism came from various peoples. For example Patrick Bond and Ana Garcia's *BRICS: An Anti-Capitalist Critique* discusses the framework of contemporary international scenario where one can see relative economic decline of the US, Europe and Japan and on the other hand rise of an emerging bloc comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS). He argues that this bloc demand 'seat at the table' rather than to 'overturn the table' and hence help to collaborate in holding them up. He discusses various evidences such as: The BRICS' stated intention to create a New Development Bank with capital of US\$50 billion, and an IMF style Contingent Reserve Arrangement with US\$100 billion, given the role of neoliberal finance ministers in their conceptualization, these were celebrated in Washington as complementary to, not competitive with, the existing multilateral financial power structure, Chinese and Indian economists occupy a second tier of the bureaucracies in the World Bank and IMF etc. (Garcia and Bond, 2015).

But along with this there is countervailing evidences as well such as: Several members of the BRICS have resisted demands by Western countries to impose stricter

6. "Facing the Challenge: Responses to the Report of the South Commission" is a follow-up document to the South Commission's original report, "The Challenge to the South" (1990). Published in 1993, this book compiled reactions and analyses from various scholars, policymakers, and experts on the recommendations made in the original report. It sought to evaluate how the proposals for South-South cooperation and development strategies were received and implemented, and it addressed the ongoing challenges faced by the Global South in an increasingly globalized world. This follow-up work was published by the South Centre, which was established in 1991 as an intergovernmental think tank to continue the mission of the South Commission. The book provides insights into the progress and hurdles in achieving the goals outlined by the commission.

7. *Facing the Challenge: Response to the Report of the South Commission* (Zed Books: 1993), p.90

intellectual property controls. Geopolitically, some BRICS leaders boldly challenged Washington after revelations of espionage by whistleblower Edward Snowden, the BRICS implicitly supported Russia in the conflict over Crimea, for which the G7 imposed sanctions and expelled Moscow etc. These evidences suggest two possibilities of BRICS. First, China and Russia occasionally adopt 'inter-imperial' stance against the western powers. Second, BRICS project has much in common with the Western status quo regarding the stabilization of the financial world, in generating additional capacities of 'lender of last resort' and in stabilizing multilateral governance (Garcia and Bond, 2015: 03). Also the BRICS countries promote an extractive, high-carbon economic model, which threatens to amplify the catastrophic environmental and social destruction of advanced capitalism. Therefore, this economic and political domination of the BRICS' less-developed neighbours and others is a growing concern, leading critics to postulate the incorporation of sub-imperialist BRICS into world capitalism.

For the analysis of BRICS, they employ four lenses that analyze it at four different levels. First, BRICS from above *i.e.* head of state, corporates and elite allies. At this level one can identify three positions *i.e.* BRICS as anti-imperialist, as sub-imperialist and as inter-imperialist. Second, BRICS from middle consists of academic forum, intellectuals, trade unions and NGOs claiming that BRICS will increasingly challenge global injustices. Third, BRICS from below which include grassroots activists whose vision run local to global and finally, pro-west business.

Similarly Ray is not too optimistic about the future of this new South. He argues that this rise of new south is limited and US remains the dominant power in the international order. To him China's rise is based on its self-interest rather than by solidarity with the rest of the world. Even its aid policy is more concerned with access to raw materials than the development of the periphery. To prove its point he uses the analysis of Achin Vanaik and Vijay Prashad, where Vanaik argues that first, the emerging powers as leaders of the new South, they "use their membership of the G77 and similar groups to project themselves as representatives of the interests of the poorer developing countries, the better to leverage pursuit of their national interests in negotiations within that club. Second the continued fact of US leadership, the ability to project a social-political-cultural model that is potentially generalizable, thus serving as an aspirational model world-

wide as well as within the quintet (Kiely, 2015: 172). On the other hand for Prashad For Prashad, BRICS as a project of Global South is limited for various reasons such as: First, it can be considered as neoliberalism with southern characteristics, Second, it has not been able to create a new institutional foundation for its emergent authority, Third, it has not endorsed an ideological alternative to neoliberalism and Finally, it has no military power. To him BRICS is an initiative of the "south from above" that is limited in its own capacity.

Conclusion:

The meaning behind the Global South, which is based on geographic regions with underdeveloped economies, began after colonization. It was later globalized after the expansion and development of BRICS nations which include China, India, Brazil, and South Africa. The Global South symbolizes economic, political, and social growth of Global South countries. However, this growth has many challenges like the existence of BRICS as an institution. Although BRICS has the potential to oppose the present international domination, it has also formulated into a multilayered and often contradictory system, facing critiques from its adoption of neoliberal strategies to its promotion of established capitalism. In this case, BRICS provides some as self-sufficient while others critique it as a system of sub-imperialism. Addressing the success of Global South, especially BRICS rests on solving issues such as internal disputes, aligning individual goals with mutual desires, and creating an alternative to the super power world that exploits developing nations. Therefore, Global South relies on BRICS to establish a gainful system for everyone while refusing to accept superiority from other powers.

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