

A comparative overview of Brazil and South Africa's BRICS Agendas, 2011-2017

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Abstract

This paper presents a comparative overview of Brazil and South African diplomacy towards the BRICS group in the period 2011-2017. Using the conceptual framework from the regional power studies, we present Dilma's Rouseff (2011-2016) and Zuma's (2009-2018) diplomacy towards BRIC/BRICS, seeking to understand their roles and contributions in broadening the group's thematic agendas. In addition, we also present a timeline of the BRICS creation and institutionalization throughout its annual summits. The main sources of this research were both Brazil and South Africa's online archives and documents on foreign affairs, as well as the specialized literature from the International Relations and Political Science field. We conclude that both Brazil and South Africa's diplomacies towards the BRICS were part of the relational dimension of both regional powers in search for international protagonism. On the other hand, at the systemic level, it was a matter of bringing innovation to the South-South Cooperation field, promoting multilateralism, and contributing to the construction of a more diverse and inclusive international order.

Keywords: Brazil; South Africa; BRICS; Regional Powers; Comparative Analysis.

Introduction

The international context that emerged from the 2000s allowed greater room for a modest international protagonism to Brazil and South Africa's diplomacies, given the reinforced role of regional powers and the growing rhetoric of an emerging "Geopolitical South" in international relations.

The concept of "Geopolitical South" seeks to highlight a political and autochthonous addition to the definition of the "South", beyond the traditional economic and geographical criteria. The idea of adding the adjective "geopolitical" to qualify the word "South" denotes a caveat on identities and contexts of regional insertion, that is, the existence of diversities in the forms of production of politics from cultural, historical, and material identities (Braga; Duarte, 2021).

The already 'traditional' concept of the "Global South" produces a homogenous image about this belonging, and one usually created by the 'other' - that is, the perspective that powerful actors have on countries of the South - rather than reflecting a self-constructed image. Consequently, the concept of the Global South, as well as others that have been created "from the outside", in addition to echoing a specific worldview, can simplify perspectives of countries that have very peculiar and distinct international insertions, regional environments, and socio-political and historical dynamics. From the perspective of the Geopolitical South, this historical perspective is relevant, but it has to be politicized by the political actors who formulate foreign policy (Braga; Duarte, 2021).

In 2001, the BRICS acronym was conceived by the economist Jim O'Neill, of the investment bank Goldman Sachs, in the study "Building Better Global Economic BRICs", to designate the group of countries made up of Brazil, Russia, India, and China, characterized as emerging economies destined to occupy a position of growing relevance in the world economy. In that sense, how did that acronym end up creating a multilateral group that went through an institutionalization process and emerged as one of the main voices and players of the Geopolitical South?

The 2008 financial crisis shook the international economic system and triggered a crisis in the economy of central emerging countries. Initiatives such as the IBSA Forum and the BRICS were the effective results of political concertation arising from the Geopolitical South rhetoric, which questions the Western monopoly on the definition of norms, the decision-making process, and the functioning of the main international institutions and organizations, such as the UN and the Bretton Woods system institutions, i.e., the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (Braga, 2018).

This paper aims to present a brief overview of the Brazilian and South African diplomacy agenda towards the BRIC/BRICS and how they contributed to its institutionalization process. In the first section, we present a timeline of the BRICS Summits that explains both the BRICS creation and institutionalization. And it also demonstrates the main discussions about the African continent during each meeting. In the following sections, we present Dilma Rousseff's (2011-2016) and Jacob Zuma's (2009-2017) diplomacies towards the BRIC/BRICS, seeking to understand their roles and contributions in broadening the group's thematic agendas.

The main sources for this research were the specialized literature in the field of International Relations and Political Science in both countries. As well as the use of data retrieved from the online archives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty), in Brazil, and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), in South Africa, that contains data on Dilma Rousseff's and Jacob Zuma's agenda towards BRICS, respectively.

Brazil and South Africa as Southern Regional Powers

Emerging powers have attracted increasing attention in the international political arena, mainly within the bloc formed by the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). In this article, we assume that the two main units of analysis – Brazil and South Africa – are considered southern regional powers. Therefore, it is worth highlighting some conceptual and theoretical considerations over that concept, especially regarding the relational dimension of those regional powers.

As Braga (2018) points out, developing countries attain the status of regional powers by the preponderance of material and ideational power they excel in their regions, and, as a result, they play a relevant role in global governance. They combine forces to compose a reformist agenda in the international system and strengthen their position in the North-South dialogue (Nel, 2010). In this sense, countries such as India, Brazil, and South Africa, for example, are committed to ensuring the redistribution of power, wealth, and privilege in the global economy, and, at the same time, they seek recognition. Flesmes and Wojczewski (2010) explain the distinctive place of regional powers in the South:

The positions of Southern regional powers such as Brazil and India, located on the one hand between the center and periphery of the current world system and the other hand at the nexus of international and regional politics, demand particularly complex foreign policy strategies (Flesmes & Wojczewski, 2010).

Therefore, the duality of being a regional power while having aspirations at the systemic level can lead to potential tensions, as the two levels may require different courses of action (Prys, 2012).

The analysis based on the concept of Regional Powers can be guided by two dimensions: the positional dimension, through which it is possible to compare material capabilities (such as geographical capabilities; demographic capabilities; economic capabilities – total GDP, GDP per capita, Gini index, trade flows, investment flows –; and military capabilities) and the relational dimension, through

which it is possible to analyse the ideational resources of power and the interactions of the Regional Power with the other actors of the international system (Batista, 2017).

Another brief conceptualization that further supports our understanding of Brazil and South Africa as southern regional powers is the debate on the International Development Cooperation (IDC) agenda. According to Milani and Klein (2020), IDC can be defined as a political field that articulates a set of policies of states, international organizations, and non-governmental actors, as well as norms and criteria that orient their actions, and the common belief that development cooperation is the best tool to mitigate contradictions and inequalities generated by capitalism.

SSC has its roots in the multilateral activism that emerged after the Bandung Conference in 1955, the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, and the First United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964. At the outset of the twenty-first century, boosted by the Chinese, Indian, Turkish, and Brazilian economic reactivation, SSC and its narratives of solidarity and horizontal relations among developing countries were revitalized. In 2012, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in its resolution 67/39 decided to upgrade the multilateral relevance of SSC and to strengthen the special unit created within the United Nations Development Program (UNDP): the special unit to promote technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC), that became the UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) (Milani & Klein, 2020)

In the case of SSC, the most powerful countries from the South have also established primacy in this field. China, India, Brazil, Turkey, and South Africa, for instance, associate SSC with the promotion of their economic diplomacy, but also with their foreign policy interests, such as the building of multilateral coalitions of support, such as the BRICS and IBSA, leadership in international agencies (WTO, WHO, FAO) and reform of global governance structures and mechanisms (Milani & Klein, 2020)

In this sense, on the analysis that is produced in this article, we consider the development of the BRICS agenda by Brazil and South Africa as part of the relational dimension of the study of a Regional Power. Therefore, they are seen as regional powers in search of international protagonism, through the promotion of multilateralism, and political articulation in the South.

A timeline of the BRICS Summits: the group creation and institutionalization

In 2006 the first step towards the creation of the informal mechanism that came to be known as BRIC took place. During the 61st United Nations General Assembly, the four foreign ministers of Brazil, Russia, India, and China met at the initiative of the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov. At this first meeting, it was clear, therefore, that Russia and Brazil had the greatest interest in the dialogue mechanism (Silva, 2013). Chancellor Celso Amorim himself (2011) notes that the informal, poorly structured meeting was practically restricted to greater interaction between him and Lavrov. One year later, the 2007 foreign ministers' meeting was the result of a Brazilian initiative. During the meeting, a decision was made - viewed with some reservation by the Chinese - to convene a future meeting in one of the countries (Amorim, 2011).

Fonseca JR gives us a good picture of the creation of BRIC. In the early 2000s, with the frustration and inability of Western countries to lead the formation of a new arrangement, there was a lack of definition in the existing order, or, in the words of the author, there was a "[...] great demand for order and little supply" (Fonseca, 2012, p.15). BRIC emerged, therefore, in an attempt to give multipolar contours to the system - not in a radical way, but improving its legitimacy conditions (Fonseca, 2012).

However, it was between 2008 and 2009, with the financial crisis, that the BRIC growth potential became even more evident. With the slowdown in the economy of developed countries and a gradual economic recovery of the BRIC, there was a strengthening of identity among the four emerging nations. And it is precisely in the context of the crisis that the 1st BRIC Summit was held in 2009 at Yekaterinburg, Russia, having the economic and financial crisis as the main agenda.

This first summit inaugurated the cooperation at the level of Heads of State and Government of the BRIC countries. The objective of the meeting was to reinforce the coordination of the four countries in themes related to the reform of world governance, especially in the economic-financial plan (G-20, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank). The meeting also advocated for greater representation of emerging economies in international financial institutions, where directors and executives should be appointed through an open, transparent, and merit-based process. Finally, in addition to the release of the first Summit Declaration, the document "*Perspectives for Dialogue between Brazil, Russia, India, and China*" was also created, guiding the next steps of the BRIC articulation (Sapientia, 2018).

In the first joint statement made by the governments of Brazil, Russia, India, and China in Yekaterinburg in 2009, Africa was not explicitly mentioned in the joint statement, however, the countries acknowledged the realities that developing countries were facing with the 2008 global economic crisis. The second BRIC summit, hosted in Brasilia in 2010, expanded on the initial discussions of the first joint declaration that developing countries remain a priority, however, African countries were only briefly mentioned regarding the fight against poverty (Muresan, 2019).

In 2010, Brazil was responsible for hosting the 2nd BRIC Summit. At this meeting, the BRIC heads of state emphasized political concertation. The Brasilia Summit was, therefore, an important space for dialogue on the need to reform economic institutions. In addition to defending issues related to the reform of the global financial system, the meeting's agenda included new cooperation themes. During the meeting, the BRIC leaders signed a cooperation agreement to facilitate the financing of energy and infrastructure projects. In addition, development banks signed an understanding to study ways to expand lending among the BRIC (Itamaraty, 2019)

In summary, it is possible to argue that the first two summits were framed in a moment of internal tactical improvement of the group, in search of greater international prestige, through the joint political articulation of the four states, until it was possible to transform this group of countries into a new political-economic-diplomatic entity, which was able to create its institutions.

By 2011, in the multilateral sphere, a process of greater institutionalization of the BRICS happened alongside the entry of the South African state, during the 3rd BRICS Summit in Sanya, China. South Africa's formal entry into the then BRIC was of important value for the political expansion of the BRICS, contributing to reinforcing the discourse of building a multilateral international order, with the inclusion of a representative of the African continent in the group (Berringer & Belasques, 2020).

On this occasion, BRICS reaffirmed the need to reform global governance, including the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The Sanya Declaration also mentions topics such as economics and finance; condemnation of terrorism; the use of renewable energy and the peaceful use of nuclear energy and, finally, the commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and the eradication of hunger and poverty (Itamaraty, 2019). The declaration also presented an opinion on the security situation in the North and West of the African continent, particularly Libya, and pointed to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) framework as a roadmap for infrastructure development in Africa and as a reiteration of sustainable growth and poverty eradication (BRICS, 2011).

The fourth summit, held in India, in the city of New Delhi in 2012, had the theme “The BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Security and Prosperity”. The summit advocated for nominations of representatives of developing countries for the presidency of the World Bank, reiterating that the heads of the IMF and the World Bank should be appointed through an open, transparent, and merit-based process. Discussions also began on the establishment of the New Development Bank. To promote trade among the BRICS countries, an agreement was signed to facilitate the granting of credit in local currency (Itamaraty, 2019). The Delhi declaration stated that “(...) we attach the utmost importance to economic growth that supports development and stability in Africa, as many of these countries have not yet reached their full economic potential” (BRICS, 2012).

At the following summit, hosted by South Africa in the city of Durban in 2013, the central theme was “BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration, and Industrialization”. Durban closed the first cycle of BRICS summits, with each country hosting a meeting of Heads of State and Government. On this occasion, inclusive and sustainable development and the reform of global governance institutions were addressed. This summit marked the beginning of the BRICS external dialogue exercise to promote greater cooperation with emerging economies, developing countries, and relevant international and regional organizations (Itamaraty, 2019).

The Durban Declaration stated that is noteworthy to note how within the framework of the NEPAD, the BRICS leaders would support African countries in their industrialization process through stimulating foreign direct investment, knowledge exchange, capacity-building, and diversification of imports from Africa. They also acknowledge that infrastructure development in Africa is important and recognized the strides made by the African Union to identify and address the continent’s infrastructure challenges through the development of the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), the AU NEPAD Africa Action Plan (2010-2015), the NEPAD Presidential Infrastructure Championing Initiative (PICI), as well as the Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plans. Therefore, the BRICS leaders would seek to stimulate infrastructure investment on the basis of mutual benefit to support industrial development, job-creation, skills development, food, and nutrition security and poverty eradication, and sustainable development in Africa (BRICS, 2013).

In 2014, the 6th BRICS Summit was held in Fortaleza, with the theme of inclusive growth and sustainable solutions. At this meeting, there was an important step towards the institutionalization of BRICS. On this occasion, it was created both the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) and the New Development Bank (NDB), popularly known as the BRICS Bank (Itamaraty, 2019).

As pointed out by Vasconcelos (2018), the creation of the CRA and the NDB served not only to meet the particular demands of member states but also fulfilled the function of serving as examples of the BRICS vision for the constitution of a new architecture of international finance. However, the new BRICS institutions represent a process of conflicting subordination vis-à-vis the Bretton Woods institutions, since they do not break with them, but neither do they passively associate with them (Vasconcelos, 2018).

The Contingent Reserve Arrangement, in turn, would work along the lines of a monetary fund of the New Development Bank, which had reserves of US\$ 100 billion, allocated by the BRICS member states, which could be used in case of liquidity crises or pressures on the balance of payments. It is worth noting that, although created by the five members of BRICS, the NDB provides in its resolution loans to other states and also for the accession of new members, provided they are members of the UN (NDB, 2014; 2017a). Finally, it should be noted that the Bank’s contributions are directed to both public and private initiatives, with the aim of financing projects that fall under the themes of sustainable development and infrastructure, such as renewable energy, mass transport, sanitation, and irrigation (NDB, 2014).

During the 6th BRICS Summit, the Fortaleza declaration praised the efforts of the UN, African Union (AU), and regional blocs such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), CPLP, and Southern African Development Community (SADC) in promoting development cooperation. In addition, it was decided that the Regional Centre of the New Development Bank for Africa would be based in South Africa (BRICS, 2014).

In Ufa, Russia, during the 7th BRICS summit in 2015, the meeting approved the agreements establishing the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement. During the 7th Summit, the “Strategy for the Economic Partnership of BRICS”, also known as the “BRICS Strategy” was approved. The BRICS Strategy provided guidance as well as the framework for the BRICS cooperation, paving the way for further elaboration of sectoral development strategies, programs, and roadmaps by the members to be then implemented under the leadership of respective signatories. In addition, agreements were signed on cultural cooperation and cooperation between the Development Banks of the BRICS countries and the New Development Bank.

During the UFA summit, the security situation of African countries was emphasized in particular, and the BRICS expressed their encouragement towards Ethiopia with its upcoming financing for development conference (BRICS, 2015)

Held in India, in the city of Goa, in 2016, the 8th BRICS Summit theme was “Building Inclusive and Collective Solutions”. The summit discussed global economic recovery, addressing issues such as fiscal and social responsibility, NDB development, attracting investment, fighting terrorism, and economic growth (BRICS, 2016).

The Goa declaration resulting from the 8th BRICS summit highlighted the importance of the role of the African Union in shaping the development of the African continent with the creation of Agenda 2063. In addition, the declaration pondered on the steps taken to address security situations across the continent, as well as addressing other African initiatives, such as the Addis Ababa dialogue on international taxation issues (BRICS, 2016).

The 9th BRICS summit was held in China in the city of Xiamen in 2017. The theme of the summit was “BRICS: Stronger Partnership for a Brighter Future”. At the meeting, the BRICS Action Plan for Innovation Cooperation 2017 - 2020 was signed, and the creation of the BRICS Tuberculosis Research Network was endorsed.

In addition, the BRICS Action Plan on Economic and Trade Cooperation, the BRICS Strategy for Customs Cooperation, and the Memorandum of Understanding between the NDB and the BRICS Business Council were signed. The 9th Summit also optimistically discussed African development and human security through AU initiatives. The statements also debated the need to deepen investments in African countries and developing countries (BRICS, 2017).

In 2018, the 10th Summit was held in South Africa, in the city of Johannesburg, with the theme “BRICS: Collaboration for inclusive growth and shared prosperity in the 4th Industrial Revolution”. At the summit, an agreement was signed regarding the creation of the Headquarters of the Regional Office in the Americas of the New Development Bank, to be installed in Sao Paulo, Brazil. At this summit, the BRICS leaders also signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the Regional Aviation Partnership and created the BRICS Innovation Network, “iBRICS” (Itamaraty, 2019).

It is possible to recognise, throughout the holding of all the summits mentioned, that the BRICS have undergone a process of institutionalisation and thematic enlargement.

Bond and Gacia (2015) have proposed that while analysing the BRICS one can organize it through three different views: BRICS from above (the position of some government and business bodies), BRICS from the middle (the position of some academics, think tanks, and some NGOs), BRICS from below (grassroots social movements in struggle in the countries, which can create common bonds of transnational struggle and solidarity). In this article, the Brazilian and South African agendas will be detailed by a mixture of the first and second views.

Brazil and the 'Assertive and Active' Foreign Policy: Strengthening relations within the South (2003-2010)

One of the main milestones in Brazil's relationship with its regional surroundings in the twenty-first century was the foreign policy development of the government of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010), especially its emphasis on cooperation with Southern countries. This 'Assertive and Active' foreign policy - as it became notoriously known - sought greater international prominence to foster their socio-economic development and mitigate structural dependencies (financial, business, and technological) through multidimensional diplomacy, marked by concomitant action at the multilateral-global, regional and bilateral levels (Alves, 2018).

One of the starting points of this foreign policy was the fact that the Brazilian government recognized itself as a developing country that still faced serious economic and social vulnerabilities. Therefore, there was an effort to strengthen Brazil's international insertion and position to overcome the external vulnerabilities that limited its full development. Added to this, the context in which this policy was formulated that allowed the combination of two dimensions, both the emergence of systemic opportunities and national viability, which created conditions for an autonomous foreign policy (Lima & Pinheiro, 2018).

One of the main fronts of action of this foreign policy was the strategy of including alliances with non-regional partners, especially from the second term of Lula's government. This strategy, as observed in the analysis made by Cepaluni and Vigevani (2011), also served to increase bargaining power with the central countries, something that was represented during the Lula governments by diplomatic articulation in the G20 and G4, as well as coalitions such as the IBSA Forum and the BRICS.

BRICS agenda under Dilma Rousseff's government

The foreign policy of Rousseff's government has moved forward considerably under the framework of continuity with Lula's predecessor government. However, as Dilma's foreign minister Antonio Patriota (2021) points out "continuing does not mean reproducing the previous policy automatically, without modulation or creativity" (Patriota, 2021, p. 3).

In this sense, President Dilma had her particular vision of international relations, which was a reflection of being the first woman to preside over Brazil, but also because of her fight for democracy, being a victim of torture during the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985), her academic and professional experience, focused on economic and energy issues, as well as her humanist values.

In short, with this in mind, she would therefore commit to the promotion of human rights and gender equality (expressed, for example, by the change of vote in the condemnation of Iran in the Human Rights Council) and her concern to preserve and expand Brazil's efforts at integration in South America. Furthermore, Dilma viewed with a certain skepticism the prospects of the Doha Round, as well as the interest in establishing relations of cooperation, trade, and scientific and technological exchange with the poles of the emerging multipolar world (Patriota, 2021).

Last but not least, Brazil under Dilma's administration had an enthusiastic adherence to various forms of interregional concertation, such as IBSA, BRICS, South America-Africa Summit (ASA), the summit of South American-Arab Countries (ASPA), G20 meetings, and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), in addition to engagement with the United Nations (UN) and the importance attributed to the environment and the promotion of peace (Alves, 2018).

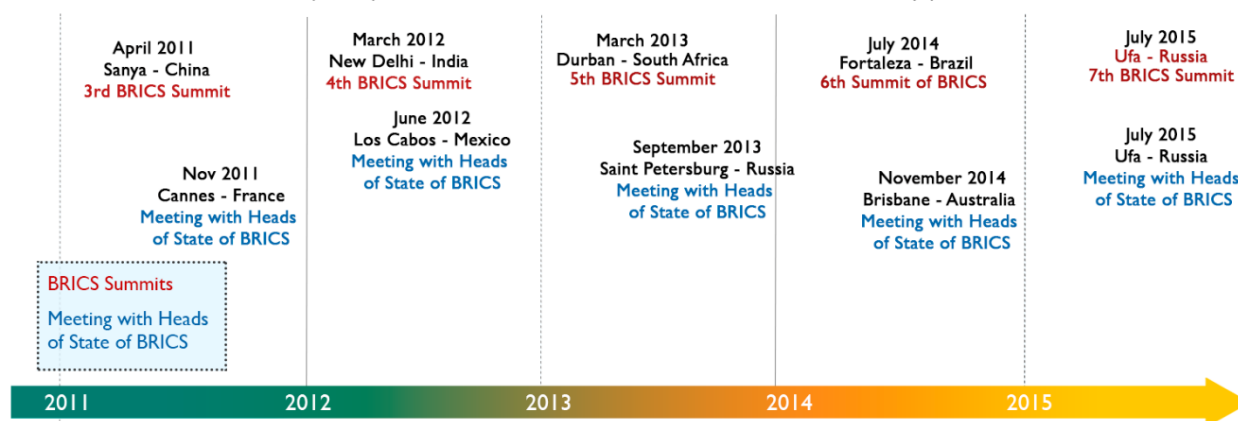
Therefore, during the Dilma administration, Brazil continued to play a central role in political forums, as a platform for promoting multilateralism and defending a more representative order that also included the countries of the South. The priority axis of relations with other regional powers continued to be through the activities carried out mainly within BRICS frameworks.

The dynamism and initiatives within the BRICS group during Rousseff's government were quite significant. Between 2011 and 2014, in terms of participation, Rousseff joined all summits, meetings, and gatherings related to the mechanism, and took advantage of opportunities to strengthen bilateral coordination with all the member countries. A summary of Rousseff's trips to BRICS events can be seen below:

Figure 1: Chronology of Dilma Rousseff's Presidential Diplomacy in the BRICS (2011-2015)

CHRONOLOGY OF DILMA ROUSSEFF'S PRESIDENTIAL DIPLOMACY IN THE BRICS (2011-2015)

Main international missions for participation in BRICS-related events between 2011 and 2015, by place and event.



Source: Own elaboration based on Braga (2017).

Dilma brought some interesting topics to the BRICS agenda, during her speeches on these opportunities, such as the "fight against terrorism and the attention to human rights", with a greater emphasis on the Brazilian proposal of Responsibility while Protecting (RwP), the "Sustainable Development" agenda and the importance of including social topics on international agendas (Alves, 2018).

On the fight against terrorism and the attention to human rights topic, during the 4th BRICS Summit, in 2012, Dilma further emphasized the need for the use of preventive diplomacy as a strategy to reduce the risk of armed conflicts and the loss of human lives. Rousseff stated that the Brazilian government repudiates violence and human rights violations, and at the same time is against any rhetorical escalation of violence and any policy of blockade that is not defined within the framework of international law and the United Nations (Braga, 2017)

In addition, she also noted the need for the BRICS country to discuss the international norm of responsibility to protect (R2P), having in mind the previous proposal of responsibility while protecting

(RwP), made by Brazil at the opening speech of the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (Braga, 2017).

The concept of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), created by UNGA Resolution 60/1, was structured on three pillars. This resolution recognized the obligation of every nation-state to protect its population from gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law (first pillar) and emphasized the duty of the international community to assist societies that fail to achieve this goal (second pillar). However, the document also provided that, should peaceful means prove inadequate and insufficient, the international community itself would be empowered to take appropriate collective security measures, including the use of force, to enforce its goal (third pillar) (Lopes; Saliba, 2016).

The BRICS countries agreed on the general matter of “rethinking” R2P, as one can see in their Summit statements. The debate was intensified by the growing instability in the Middle East, due to the Arab Spring uprising in 2010-2011, which led to other serious humanitarian crises - e.g., Syria - and the expansion of the Islamic State and the outbreak of violence in Mali. (Rinaldi; Pecequilo, 2021). Examples of that rethinking include Brazil’s proposal of Responsibility while Protecting (RwP) as a way to temper R2P; the frequent calls by South Africa for greater investment in conflict resolution through political dialogue; and the China-led proposal of the idea of “Responsible Protection” (Abdenur, 2016). These points of view indicate that the BRICS countries have some common goals in terms of international security, which may help to develop joint positions and initiatives on specific topics in the areas of the BRICS international security agenda that are considered the least resistant.

Regarding Sustainable Development, in 2014, Dilma stated that the BRICS countries have a lot to debate on the environment and sustainable development agendas. During her opening speech at the 6th BRICS Summit in Fortaleza, Brazil, Dilma pointed out how the discussion on inclusive and sustainable growth was steered by the negotiations of the post-2015 development agenda. An important example of the Brazilian initiative was the organization of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – the Rio+20 conference –, which had strong collective support from the BRICS and resulted in the creation of the document “The Future We Want” that served as the base for the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Braga, 2017).

South Africa’s agenda towards the BRICS under Zuma’s government

Zuma, who took office in the context of the 2008 global economic and financial crisis, saw in the rapprochement with other powers of the South, such as Brazil, India, and China, an alternative to the resumption of economic growth and a way to strengthen South Africa’s position as a regional power. Furthermore, he saw in the political articulation of groups such as IBSA and BRICS an opportunity to guide South Africa’s development jointly with its regional surroundings and coordinated by the states. Its foreign policy - guided by Ubuntu diplomacy - sought to associate domestic development with that of its region. Bilateral relations with African countries were intensified and regional integration was promoted, which became the focus of his government’s African Agenda. From 2010 onwards, Zuma was instrumental in securing South Africa’s inclusion in the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) group after trips to Beijing, Brasilia, Moscow, and Delhi in support of South Africa’s inclusion (Van Onselen, 2012).

Partnerships with countries of the South were critical to advancing not only South Africa’s own development needs but also that of Africa and to create political, economic, and social convergence for the fight against poverty, underdevelopment, and the marginalisation of the South. Therefore, South Africa continued to promote the strengthening of South-South cooperation and supported the Agenda of the South through the BRICS; India, Brazil, South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA); Forum

for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC); Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC); India-Africa Forum; NAM; G77; and other South-South fora (DIRCO, 2012).

In this sense, South Africa's foreign policy objectives concerning its membership in the BRICS could be summarized in three broad points:

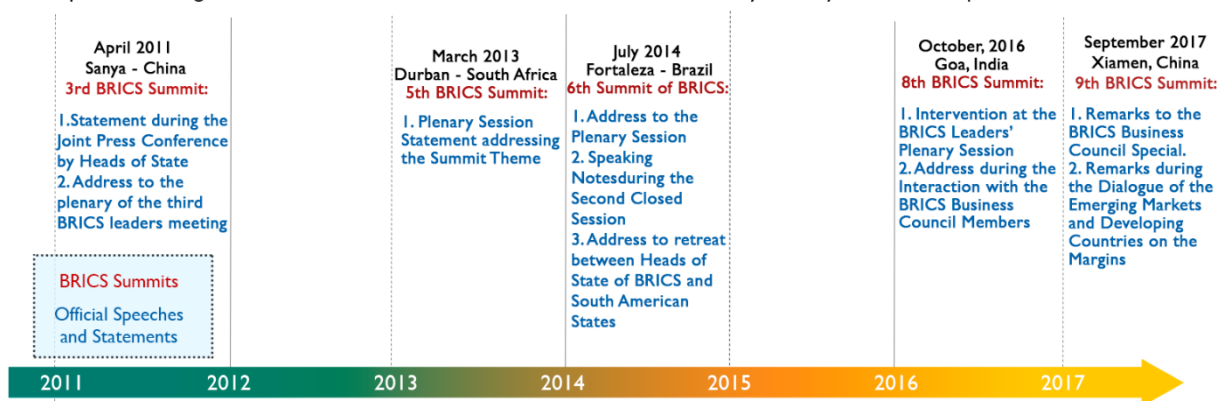
to advance the country's national interests as outlined in the President's State of the Nation Address; (ii) to promote its regional integration programme and related continental infrastructure programmes; (iii) to partner with key emerging world actors on issues related to global governance and its reform (PMG, 2013, p. 1).

Zuma had moderate presidential diplomacy regarding his participation at BRICS Summits and side-events or informal meetings. His main speeches happened during the BRICS Summit, with his absence during the 2012 and 2015 Summits. A summary of Zuma's trips and main speeches during BRICS Summits can be seen below:

Figure 2: Chronology of Jacob Zuma's Presidential Diplomacy in the BRICS (2011-2017)

CHRONOLOGY OF JACOB ZUMA'S PRESIDENTIAL DIPLOMACY IN THE BRICS (2011-2017)

Main speeches during BRICS Summit and related events between 2011 and 2017, by country location and speech theme



Source: Own elaboration based on DIRCO (2021).

By using data retrieved from DIRCO annual reports between 2012 and 2017 (DIRCO, 2012; DIRCO, 2013; DIRCO, 2014; DIRCO, 2017), we can also present some outcomes of South Africa's membership and rapprochement with the BRICS.

As the result of holding the 2013 Summit, South Africa steered the BRICS agenda towards the creation of three new important initiatives: i) the BRICS Leaders-Africa Dialogue Forum within the proposal of the BRICS Plus initiative; ii) the launch of the BRICS Business Council (BBC); and iii) the launch of the BRICS Think-Tanks Council (BTTC) (DIRCO, 2012; DIRCO, 2013).

One of the main contributions held by South Africa was the BRICS Plus initiative. First introduced at the Durban Summit, it was intended to assist African developing countries to gain more access to BRICS members, to form their economic cooperation alliances that hopefully would lead to economic growth and development to the countries in the South, adding inclusivity and cooperation between African countries and BRICS (Sidiropoulos et al. 2018; Sempijja; Diko, 2020).

The BRICS Plus initiative would be strengthened through the establishment and solidifying of political dialogue between invited African leaders and BRICS, during their Summits. In a recent study held by Diko and Sempijja (2020), the authors further emphasized that the BRICS Plus initiative

allowed South Africa to push for African countries to have access to BRICS members. In addition, the initiative aims to strengthen economic cooperation, promote economic growth and development in African countries, and provide African countries with another way to pursue it than the traditional ones from the North and its financial institutions (Sempijja; Diko, 2020).

Another important achievement that took place in Durban, in 2013, was the creation of the BRICS Academic Forum and the organization of the BRICS Think-Tank meetings. Those initiatives were coordinated in consultation with several South African departments and institutions, such as the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the Higher Education South Africa (HESA), and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), and had as the final result the establishment of a BRICS Think-Tanks Council (DIRCO, 2013)

The BTTC, which represents the respective think-tanks of the five countries in the BRICS, first met in Stellenbosch on 11 and 12 November 2013. The declaration committed the think-tanks, in the first instance, to a) form a platform for the exchange of ideas among researchers, academia, and think-tanks, b) to convene the annual BRICS Academic Forum; and c) by making policy recommendations and giving guidance to the BRICS leaders for consideration (DIRCO, 2014)

Finally, it should be noted that South Africa's rapprochement with the BRICS need also take into account the fact that South Africa perceived the countries of the group as important investors and catalysts for development on the African continent, especially China. The BRICS countries remain the main sources of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) among emerging investors (DIRCO, 2017). With South Africa's inclusion in the grouping, trade relations with most BRICS countries have had improved. South Africa's trade with BRICS partners has increased from R268 billion in 2011 to R529 billion in 2019 (DIRCO, 2020).

Another more practical example, in terms of results, is in the field of cooperation. Since the creation of the New BRICS Development Bank in 2014, in five years, the Bank has approved 65 infrastructure and sustainable development projects, totaling around US\$21 billion. Of this total, nine projects, valued at about US\$3.4 billion, have been approved for South Africa (DIRCO, 2020).

South Africa also had benefited from the opening of the New Development Bank's Africa Regional Centre (ARC) in Johannesburg in 2017. This is the BRICS Bank's interface with the African continent and is focused on identifying and preparing projects to make more bankable projects possible (DIRCO, 2020).

The ARC's initial emphasis was on the identification and preparation of sustainable infrastructure and sustainable development projects in South Africa in line with South Africa's National Development Plan adopted by the Government as a blueprint for future economic and socio-economic development strategy for the country. The Bank's loans seek to enhance and complement the available founding sources in South Africa and the region (NDB, 2017b).

Final Remarks

After this overview of the Brazilian and South African agendas towards BRICS, we can assume that BRICS played different roles in the international arena and brought a variety of benefits to the countries and their societies. But we can also point out that the investments in that political concertation arena – during Dilma's governments in Brazil, and Zuma's in South Africa – became a commitment to the model of development allied with democracy, valuing social participation in the formulation of public policies. In this sense, Brazil and South Africa contributed to help the institutionalization process of the BRICS, as well as to give voice to the "BRICS from below" players.

With the creation of the BRICS Academic Forum, the BRICS Civil Society Forum, also known as the People's Forum on BRICS, the BRICS Business Forum, different players from each of the BRICS countries held meetings and produced reports that reached the leaders and main players of the organization.

In a sense, while Brazil used the BRICS Summit and meetings to propose and promote the need for deeper discussions on norm-making and to establish a well-articulated and coordinated position on several serious issues on global governance reform, South Africa admission to the group emphasized the role of South Africa as a gateway for investments and the need for more South-South Cooperation projects in the African continent. In that sense, South Africa's commitment to the BRICS Plus initiative was an important landmark, but it needs further investments and results.

Besides, South Africa's inclusion into the BRICS legitimised the group in terms of representation, making sure that all leaders from all regions of the world are included. Without a participant from the African continent, the developing countries were not all included in the forum (Asuelime, 2018).

Over the last decade, the BRICS nations have increased their financial and technical assistance to developing countries, and established distinct projects of economic cooperation, especially through South-South cooperation with low-income countries. The impact on low-income countries through trade, FDI, and development financing is significant, and coherent with the BRICS aim of striving for more political influence in the world (BRICS Think Tanks Council, 2015).

On the other hand, at the systemic level, the BRICS initiative brought innovation to the South-South dialogue and strengthened the autonomy of these countries in comparison to the traditional countries of the North. But above all, we identify that both Brazil and South Africa's commitment to BRICS were envisioned and part of the rise of southern regional power-seeking for an international protagonism.

Furthermore, these political articulations have boosted the proposition of new agendas and the pooling of creative efforts to manage international crises. In other words, they have enhanced the possibility of reforming global governance so that it benefits not only the national interests of states but also the desires of their societies (Waisbich, 2013).

In conclusion, it is still difficult to see the BRICS as an institution that would deeply challenge the existing international order, but the agenda in defense of the reform of international institutions, which may reflect a new configuration of international power and increase the participation of BRICS countries in international decision-making processes, has been a constant in the Summit declarations (Carvalho, 2018).

At a time where the Bretton Woods international organizations suffer from a growing lack of legitimacy, initiatives to expand spaces for dialogue and to promote international cooperation, such as the BRICS-plus and outreach dialogues, are welcome, as they promote multilateralism and contribute to the construction of a more inclusive international order.

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