

Abstract

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Title: S-Factor in BRICS: Prospects Opportunities and Challenges

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The world has undergone a strategic transition with brief period of unipolarity coming to an end marked by 'Chindia, as a major game changer. The world is witnessing the decline of Atlantic era followed by the advent of Asian century. Scholars like Samir Amin believe that there is a need for middle powers like China, Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa to have their place in the concert of major powers.. BRICS stands for the regional grouping which comprises the countries like Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa. It was till 2010 that the membership of the forum was confined to only four member states. However, it was only in the year 2010 that the third BRICS summit signalled the transformation of this grouping to BRICS with the joining of South Africa. According to President Jacob Zuma, South Africa's participation in BRICS has been marked by increased trade and investment opportunities as well as political benefits such as increased voice in the international sphere.

South Africa has been increasingly engaged in the recent transition in the global balance of power and has emerged as a middle power. Presently, South Africa enjoys the membership of the United Nations, African Union, and New Partnership for African Development, G20, G77, IBSA, and SADC. Besides USA and Japan, South Africa emerged as the third largest share holder of the African Development Fund. What appears is that South Africa's membership of the BRICS forum reinforced neo liberalism marked by, the markets becoming increasingly liberalized across the African continent with trade and investment becoming the driving force. The theoretical paradigm employed in analyzing South Africa's engagement with the BRICS is

the Soft Balancing strategy which is directed at the increase in bargaining power of developing states and enhanced cooperation between them.

South Africa is geostrategically vital as far as key interests of BRIC countries are concerned. South Africa's inclusion into the BRICS gave it a more global structure, by serving its long term ambition of strengthening its foothold within the African continent and thereby was portraying themselves successfully as Africa's partner within the realm of South-South cooperation. Brazil, China, India and Russia have already entered the dynamics of power within the African continent by actively engaging in Africa and thereby challenging the western hegemony. While China has evolved as the largest trading partner with Africa ousting US, Brazil and India ranked as the 6th and 10th largest trading partners within the continent respectively. What needs to be noticed is that South Africa's previous interaction with India, China and Brazil through groupings such as IBSA and BASIC on climate change negotiations resulted in engendering trust between them. Moreover, South Africa's diplomatic influence in forums like UN, AU acted as a catalyst for its assertiveness for the BRICS over faster growing Nigeria, Egypt, Indonesia and Turkey.

Research Questions

This research proposal seeks to advance the following set of research questions.

Q1. What are the prospects, opportunities and challenges of South Africa's participation in BRICS for the country and the continent?

Q2. How far BRICS membership has been successful in playing a pivotal role in strengthening South Africa's position as a regional hegemon?

Q3. What are the opportunities and challenges South Africa's membership throws open for the BRICS?

Q4. How the admission of South Africa into BRICS has will affect IBSA?

These questions form the part of a bigger theoretical framework concerning the ways in which soft power balancing can structure international relations and how multilateral alliances have impacted foreign relations. Interdependence is what has influenced the dynamics of contemporary International Politics greatly. Thus the domain of international relations is dominated by the emergence of economic and strategic regional blocs.

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis will be subject to verification:-

H: (i) South Africa's membership of BRICS has helped it obtain the status of a rising power in the purview of the world community and it is one of South Africa's key foreign policy accomplishments.

(ii) South Africa's membership of BRICS has played a fundamental role in strengthening South Africa's position as a regional hegemon within the African sub continent.

(iii) Despite the country's small GDP, South Africa's inclusion in BRICS globalised the grouping by providing it geographical diversity and thereby enhanced the narrative of South-South Cooperation.

(iv) In spite of South Africa's admission into BRICS, IBSA will not be rendered obsolete rather it will help strengthen BRICS.

The study will be guided by this hypothesis. South Africa's admission to the BRICS will provide South Africa a critical opportunity to accord to the central issues of global governance, democracy, conflict resolution, security, reconstruction, and development.¹ South Africa has emerged as a rising regional hegemon as a consequence of its ability to exercise influence over its neighbouring states. Firstly, South Africa maintains superiority in Sub Saharan Africa. Secondly, through its position in the African Union, BRICS, SADC, G20 it has lobbied for the continent's interests and thus has taken lead as an African leader in the international political sphere. Finally, the country has been actively engaged in providing development assistance, humanitarian assistance and has a compelling record of providing assistance in multilateral peacekeeping operations and institutional capacity building during post war reconstruction.

Methodology:-

Qualitative research and inductive reasoning with its emphasis on the primary and secondary data will be most suited for conducting this study. Documents including official documents, official files, letters, statistics, news papers and journals would serve as an effective and reliable source of data in terms of analysing various policy perspectives adopted by South Africa, BRICS as well as other African states as well as their impact and implications. Various official and Government documents available at the official website of the BRICS, Official websites of various BRIC summits, and the website of Department of International Relations and cooperation: Republic of South Africa would be carefully studied, scrutinized and analyzed as they would help in the reconstruction of events and give information about

¹ Oliver Stunkel.(2013). South Africa's BRICS membership: A win-win situation. African Journal of Political Science and International Relations. Vol(7),No.(7).