Harsh V. Pant

The BRICS Fallacy

The term BRICS—referring to the association of emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—dominated the headlines in March 2013 as Durban hosted the annual group summit. South African President Jacob Zuma suggested that the nascent organization's leadership has "firmly established BRICS as a credible and constructive grouping in our quest to forge a new paradigm of global relations and cooperation."[1] The meeting resulted in a much-hyped proposal to create a joint BRICS development bank that would finance investments in developing nations.

Notwithstanding the pomp and ceremony in South Africa, the BRICS grouping has begun to lose much of its sheen. Reports have even emerged detailing its impending demise. For example, the U.S. Conference Board released a global economic outlook in November 2012 that called into question the BRICS miracle, arguing that the "low hanging fruit" from cheap labor and imported technology has already been picked.[2] The report said that China's double-digit expansion rates will soon be "romantic memory" as growth will fall dramatically over the next few years, with investment returns going into "rapid decline" and an aging crisis hitting the country hard. India will also see a fall in its growth rate by 2018, from 5.5 percent to around 4.7 percent. The report underlined that "as China, India, Brazil and others mature from rapid, investment-intensive 'catch-up' growth, the structural 'speed limits' of their economies are likely to decline."[3] Prominent economic analysts such as Ruchir Sharma have also suggested that growth rates in Brazil, Russia, India, and China

Harsh V. Pant is Reader in International Relations in the Defense Studies Department at King's College London. He is also an Associate at the Centre for Science and Security Studies at the India Institute at King's College London, and is an Adjunct Fellow with the Wadhwani Chair in U.S.–India Policy Studies at CSIS. His most recent books include *The U.S.–India Nuclear Pact: Policy, Process and Great Power Politics* (Oxford University Press) and *The Rise of China: Implications for India* (Cambridge University Press). He can be contacted at harsh.pant@kcl.ac.uk.

Copyright © 2013 Center for Strategic and International Studies
The Washington Quarterly • 36:3 pp. 91–105
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2013.825552

were falling sharply with some significant implications for the ability of these states to shape the global balance of power.[4]

The BRICS grouping has already begun to lose much of its sheen.

A relative decline in growth rates can certainly explain this rapid turnaround in the fortunes of the much-hyped BRICS, but much more lies behind this debacle than a simple economic failure. Despite their best attempts, the BRICS, even during their heydays, failed to leverage their growing economic might into effective diplomatic clout. The reason lies in the very structure of the group.

Overhyped from the Start

Focus on the BRICS began in 2001. Back then, the group only included Brazil, Russia, India, and China—the BRICs (South Africa was added in 2010). It all started with a November 2001 Goldman Sachs research paper titled "Building Better Global Economic BRICs," written by Jim O'Neill. He predicted that "over the next 10 years, the weight of the BRICs and especially China in world GDP will grow," and went on to suggest that "in line with these prospects, world policymaking forums should be reorganized" to give more power to BRICs.[5] After first suggesting that the BRIC economies could collectively rival the G-7 (the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, and Japan) in share of global growth by 2050, the assessment changed to conclude that the BRIC economies could rival the G-7 by 2032. The term "BRICs" soon became a brand, "a near ubiquitous financial term, shaping how a generation of investors, financiers and policymakers view the emerging markets."[6] The BRIC states soon realized the importance of this change in global perceptions about them, and used it to structure a new group to underline their growing heft in global politics and economics. This was accomplished despite differing domestic political and economic institutional arrangements of these states.

The first formal summit meeting of the BRIC group was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in June 2009. The Yekaterinburg summit called for "a more democratic and just multipolar world order based on the rule of international law, equality, mutual respect, cooperation, coordinated action, and collective decision-making of all states."[7] Since then, the joint statements of the various BRICS summits have repeatedly underscored the need for a realignment of the post-World War II global order that is based on the untrammeled supremacy of the United States.

Though the global financial crisis negatively impacted all the BRICS economies, their banking sectors performed relatively well and the real GDP growth in China and India remained strong. The BRICS bounced back swiftly with the support of domestic demand.[8] It has been suggested that "in a post-global crisis world largely shaped by financial instability and weak growth in major economies, the BRICS countries have a remarkable opportunity to coordinate their economic policies and diplomatic strategy not only to enhance their position as a grouping in the international economic and financial system, but also to be a stabilization factor in the world economy as a whole."[9]

The BRICS debacle is not just because of economic failure but the group's very structure.

Representing around 40 percent of the world's population and nearly a quarter of its economic output, the BRICS have not been shy to show off their newfound global heft. China surpassed Japan in 2010 to become the second-largest economy in the world, and Brazil overtook the United Kingdom in 2012 to emerge as the sixth. The economic profile of the BRICS nations has continued to grow, with some suggesting that they collectively could become bigger than the United States by 2018, and by 2050 could even surpass the combined economies of the G-7 states.

The 2011 BRICS summit in Sanya, China, focused on the governing structure of international financial institutions. The summit communiqué demanded that the global financial architecture "should reflect the changes in the world economy, increasing the voice and representation of emerging economies and developing countries."[10] This fell in line with the longstanding demand of these rising economic powers for the restructuring of the global financial architecture to make it more representative.

Among the more specific actions and recommendations emerging out of the BRICS agenda are an agreement for development banks in BRICS countries to open mutual credit lines denominated in local currencies; a warning over the potential for "massive" capital inflows from developed nations to destabilize emerging economies; and support for "a broad-based international reserve currency system providing stability and certainty."[11] The status of the U.S. dollar faces competition as the leading global reserve currency—Russia and China are keen to challenge the hegemony of the greenback, and the two in 2010 agreed to engage in non-dollar denominated bilateral trade. The New Delhi summit in 2012 operationalized these ideas.

The BRICS have also begun talking of a BRICS development bank, a stock exchange, and attempts to boost intra-BRICS trade (which is likely to reach \$500 billion by 2015).[12] With an initial capital of \$50 billion, the BRICS seek to use the development bank to mobilize resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in developing countries. As such, the idea has received backing from the IMF and the World Bank.[13] With this initiative, the BRICS are not only trying to frame the agenda for global economic governance, but can use it as a bargaining chip to gain greater representation and voice if reforms of the global financial architecture remain stuck.

Despite proposing the bank, in New Delhi the BRICS leaders were only able to announce the start of formal talks on its constitution. The 2013 Durban summit agreed to establish the bank with capital "substantive and sufficient for the bank to be effective in financing infrastructure."[14] Members also agreed to set up a $100 billion currency stabilization fund to hedge against future volatility in international markets. However, further talks remain far from conclusive, with differences over the bank's exact role and how it would receive funding. There was no agreement on whether all five members should contribute equally or whether the contributions should reflect the economic disparities between member states. The hope now is that these issues would be resolved soon.

Illusions of a Global Convergence

Clearly, these moves are part of a broader pattern whereby the emerging powers are trying to coordinate their efforts on the global stage. With the United States under the Obama administration appearing preoccupied with its internal troubles and the Eurozone mired in a debilitating economic crisis, the international system is increasingly feeling a vacuum. This presents an ideal opportunity for the BRICS to finally emerge as major global players.

At the international systemic level, the BRICS have found a convergence of interests by working together on climate change and global trade negotiations as well as demanding global financial institutions to be restructured to reflect the economy's shifting center of gravity. They share similar concerns about the international dominance of the United States, the threat of terrorism from religious fundamentalist and ethnic movements, and the need to prioritize economic development. They have repeatedly expressed concern about the U.S. use of military power around the world, and were opposed to the war in Iraq. Such actions were merely a continuation of the desire to contest U.S. hyperpower since the end of the Cold War.

The BRICS states favor a multipolar world order where U.S. unipolarity remains constrained by the other poles in the system. They zealously guard their national sovereignty, and have been wary of U.S. attempts to interfere in what they see as the domestic affairs of other states. These countries took strong exception to the U.S. air strikes on Iraq in 1998, the U.S.-led air campaign against Yugoslavia in 1999, the U.S. campaign against Saddam Hussein in 2003, and the 2011 Western intervention in Libya. They argue that these actions violate sovereignty and undermine the authority of the UN system. They also share an interest in resisting interventionist foreign policy doctrines such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) emanating from the West, particularly from the United States, and display conservative attitudes on the prerogatives of sovereignty.

A variant of BRICS, called BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China), came together at the 2009 Copenhagen Summit on climate change to block measures for environmental protection advocated by the West. For example, they have strongly resisted efforts by the United States and other developed nations to link trade to labor and environmental standards—a policy that would put them at a huge disadvantage vis-à-vis the developed world, thereby hampering their drive toward economic development. They have committed themselves to crafting joint positions in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and global trade negotiations in the hope that this might increase their leverage over developed states. These states would like to see further liberalization of agricultural trade in developed countries and tightening the rules on anti-dumping measures. They have fought carbon emission caps proposed by the industrialized world. There is also a growing impatience among BRICS member states with the pace of reforms in international financial institutions. The 2012 Delhi declaration expressed concern over the slow pace of implementation of IMF's plan on quota and governance reforms.

Despite these shared goals, convergence among these states has largely remained rhetorical so far. For example, Brazil, Russia, China, and India all abstained on the UN Security Council resolution authorizing a no-fly zone over Libya as well as "all necessary measures" for protecting Libyan civilians from Col. Moammar Gadhafi's forces.[15] But there were significant differences in their individual approaches to the Western intervention. China and Russia's abstention meant a de facto "yes"—their veto would have killed any UN action, so an abstention meant that they were willing to let the West proceed against Libya, albeit with limits. The abstentions by India and Brazil, however, combined with South Africa's vote in favor of the resolution, underline the real challenges facing both the BRICS as a coherent group and the emerging global order. The democracies found it difficult to have a common voice as they struggled with tough choices in trying to strike a balance between their values and strategic interests in crafting a response.

It has been suggested that precisely because BRICS states hold different points of view on global issues, the existence of the BRICS group provides these states with a platform where they can learn from each other, helping in the transition toward a multipolar global order.[16] That may well happen sometime in the future, but meanwhile, for all the rhetoric emanating from annual BRICS summits, emerging ground realities are increasingly becoming difficult to ignore.

Reality Bites

The BRICS story has started to lose its luster. Growth rate estimates for all five have steadily declined. Compared to 7.5 percent growth rate in 2010, Brazil's economy grew by only 2.7 percent in 2011, making it the laggard among the four original BRIC nations.

It was never obvious why South Africa, with a population of 40 million and an economy one-twentieth the size of China, was added to the BRICS group in the first place—apart from the fact that China wanted South Africa in, as China views South Africa as an access point for the whole African continent. Not only is South Africa's economy much smaller compared to the others, South Africa's influence on the rest of the African continent remains tenuous at best. Despite its entry into the BRICS grouping, South Africa stands apart because its economy, population, and long-term economic prospects do not make it a natural peer of the other members. It is also very likely that Nigeria might overtake South Africa to emerge as the largest African economy before the end of the decade.

Where the Russian economy grew by 4.3 percent in 2011, the IMF has predicted that Russia's GDP will grow by only 3.7 percent in 2012 and 3.8 in 2013.[17] The Russian economy continues to perform reasonably well by world standards, but structural problems will continue to inhibit Russia as a serious economic powerhouse. There is a lack of confidence in Russia among both domestic and foreign investors, with capital flight plaguing the economy.[18]

In 2012, the IMF lowered its forecast for China's growth to 8 percent, which would be the economy's worst performance since 1999.[19] Though by the end of 2012, there were signs that the downturn in the Chinese economy was bottoming out, the dependence of the Chinese growth model on investment and exports remains acute, and attempts to rebalance the economy have been tentative at best. Lower economic growth might well be necessary for the Chinese economy to adjust and move toward a more sustainable growth trajectory.[20] It is now widely accepted that the pace of future growth is likely to remain well below those seen in recent times.[21] Moreover, a study by Nomura Securities has found that China's financial-risk profile today is very similar to those of Thailand, Japan, Spain, and the United States on the eve of their financial crises, as a rapid build-up of financial leverage and elevated property prices portend a decline in potential growth.[22] China's financial leverage is the highest among the emerging economies, leading some to suggest that the world's second-largest economy is headed for a hard landing.[23]

India has been described as the "most disappointing" of the four original BRIC nations, its economic reforms program losing traction under a weak and inept government over the last three years.[24] The Indian rupee is the worst-performing currency in the emerging markets. Global credit rating agencies have threatened repeatedly over the last two years to downgrade India's sovereign credit rating to junk if it fails to put its fiscal house in order. In 2011, the fiscal deficit overshot the target of 4.6 percent by 1.2 percentage points. Underscoring the sharp slowdown that the Indian economy has undergone since early 2011, when it was expanding at more than 9 percent, the nation's economic growth dropped to its slowest place in a decade in the fiscal year ending March 2013.[25] The government is struggling to push through economic reforms in order to attract foreign capital, but the opposition to reforms remains strong even within the ruling Congress Party. It was toward the end of 2012 that the Indian government managed to announce some reform measures, such as opening the supermarket and aviation sectors to foreign investors in order to dispel a sense of policy paralysis in New Delhi, but that is widely viewed as not enough.

The problems of good governance and rising socioeconomic inequalities continue to pervade all five economies. Corruption continues to plague all the BRICS, and the difficulties in navigating the global taxation and legal regimes make it difficult for potential investors to commit long term.

While the BRICS will continue to grow, future growth will prove less remarkable than it has been so far. O'Neill himself seems to have moved his attention from the BRICS to the MISTs—Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, and Turkey. Indeed, these new fast-tracked economies are attracting the attention of global investors.[26] The demand in BRICS was crucial in helping the global economy recover in the initial years of the financial crisis. But the present trends make it highly likely that the BRICS will not be able to sustain the high growth rates that were supposed to make them the building blocks of the post-American world. Actually, persisting troubles like real estate and inflation cause worry that the epicenter of the next global economic shock will come *from* the BRICS themselves.[27]

Persisting troubles raise worry that the next global economic shock will come *from* the BRICS.

The China Factor

Fluctuating economic trends, however, are not the only or even the most important contributor to the dysfunction of the BRICS idea. The structural disparity between China and the rest of the BRICS members remains the core issue.

China's rise has been so fast and so spectacular that others are still trying to catch up. China's dominance makes the very idea of a coordinated BRICS response to the changing global balance of power something of a non-starter. The Chinese economy is now not only the second-largest in the world, but it is larger than all the rest of the BRICS economies combined. Exports between the BRICS nations amounted to around $282 billion in 2012, with China accounting for almost 38 percent of exports among the members.[28] Economies such as Brazil and Russia that depend on selling raw materials to China have seen their economic growth decline to 1 percent and 3.5 percent in 2012, respectively, because of the slowing of the Chinese economy.[29] There are fears, for example, of the BRICS bank becoming dominated by China. Unequal contributions to the proposed $100 billion Contingency Reserve Arrangement (CRA) might mean China's economic power overwhelms the institution, especially if China's proposal to sponsor some of Brazil's and South Africa's initial contributions to the CRA is accepted. Such a Chinese presence makes others nervous, leading them to hedge their bets by investing in alternative alliances and partnerships, even as China's rapid accretion of economic and political power has made it difficult for it to make friends.

A structural disparity remains between China and the rest of the BRICS members.

China's manipulation of its currency has resulted in significant problems for the manufacturing sectors of other emerging powers. India, Brazil, and South Africa all have expressed their disenchantment with Beijing's economic policies at various times. Chinese exports have decimated a number of industries in Brazil, South Africa, and India—New Delhi has even imposed anti-dumping duties on a range of Chinese goods. China's dominance of the intra-South trade remains overwhelming, with other emerging powers struggling to get a share of the pie. This, in turn, has stoked economic nationalism in the non-China members of BRICS.

As economic ties between China and Brazil have grown from $6.7 billion in 2003 to nearly 75 billion in 2012, frictions between the two have also risen. Brazil views China as an unfair competitor, accusing China of dumping diverted exports from Europe while charging Brazilian manufacturers steep non-tariff barriers when they try to export to China.[30] Brazil is worried about the influx of investment and cheap imports from China and has been very vocal in criticizing Beijing for undervaluing the Yuan. To protect its manufacturing industry, Brazil has started levying import tariffs on some industrial goods, mainly directed at Chinese imports. Brazil is also wary of China's growing economic profile in South America, which Brazil considers its own sphere of influence. Thus, China is not only killing Brazilian industries but threatening Brazilian exports in third markets.[31]

Russia and China remain united in their aversion to the U.S.-led global political order. Though coordination continues in scuttling Western policies, as has been the case on Iran and Syria recently, it remains a partnership of convenience. Russia is also worried about its growing economic disparity with China. Russia's failure to develop its Far East has allowed China to gain a toehold in this strategically important region and has put Beijing in the driver's seat in defining the Asian security landscape. Russian former Finance Minister Aleksei Kudrin has openly warned that if Russia fails to become a "worthy economic partner" for Asia and the Pacific Rim, "China . . . will steamroll Siberia and the Far East."[32] As China's military might surpasses that of Russia in the coming years and it emerges as the dominant force in the Asia–Pacific, Moscow will have to assess its own policy in the region. There are indications that it is already hedging its bets by reaching out to other regional states, including Japan and Vietnam, which are also increasingly troubled by China's rise.[33] And even though China is the largest buyer of Russian conventional weaponry, many in Russia see this as counterproductive: China could emerge as the greatest potential security threat to Russia, worse than what the United States could ever become. Moscow may like to think that its ties with Beijing are based on quality, but the relationship is increasingly becoming one-sided with Russia now a junior partner and China dictating terms.[34]

Sino–India ties have also witnessed a steady deterioration over the last few years with no signs of a thaw any time soon. For example, while their overall bilateral trade is worth $55 billion, India's trade deficit with China rose to $23 billion in 2012.[35] Despite the public pronouncements of partnership by the two sides, New Delhi remains skeptical of China's intentions. Beijing's refusal to acknowledge India's rise and its lack of sensitivity on core security interests is leading to pushback.[36] Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has acknowledged that "China would like to have a foothold in South Asia and we have to reflect on this reality . . . It's important to be prepared."[37]

South Africa's relations with China have also not been as wrinkle-free as is often made out in the popular media. Concerns have been rising that China's economic power is strangling South African manufacturing while locking up vital resources for years, as the flood of Chinese finished goods to Africa has created a large trade imbalance.[38] Textile mills in South Africa have closed down under the onslaught of inexpensive Chinese imports, leading to public protests. In a somewhat surprising outburst, former South African President Thabo Mbeki warned in 2007 that Africa risked becoming an economic colony of China if the growing trade imbalance between the continent and the Asian dragon was not rectified soon.[39] South African companies view growing Chinese penetration of the African market with alarm as they are the ones losing out in their own backyard.

Despite all the talk of American decline, the United States remains the most important partner for all five states individually. And if BRICS nations continue to scuttle Western policies at the UN, like those against Syria and Iran, it is out of sheer mutual convenience. The present structure of the international system gives the United States enormous advantages in its dealings with the rest of the world because of the multidimensional nature of its power. This gives the United States a certain indispensable quality in so far as other states are concerned because it has much to offer, be it military protection, economic development, or even the force of its ideas—and that too on its own terms.

While Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa have tried to engage the United States in various forms, they have found it difficult to overcome their distrust of each other. And as China becomes more powerful, the others might be more willing to balance it, maybe even with the United States, than join its bandwagon to create a global equipoise to U.S. power.[40] The political and economic costs of countering U.S. power are not only too high, but the very idea of counterbalancing the United States is unrealistic for non-China members of the BRICS, given the rapidly evolving distribution of power in the global system. In this context, strong partnership with the United States becomes an important way of keeping China's ambitions in check.

As a consequence, given the centrality of the United States to the present global political and economic order—as well as the more proximate threat from China—Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa will continue to resist joining the Chinese political and economic sphere. Not only do the BRICS member states have to travel a long distance before they can overcome their mutual distrust, but the faster-than-expected rise of China has made it imperative for Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa to seek alternative arrangements to manage the consequences of China's rapid ascendance.

A Trend Taken to Illogical Extremes

Even as the BRICS member states come to terms with a rising China, a fundamental contradiction lies at the very heart of BRICS as a political idea. China and Russia have little incentive to seek a change in the global political institutional fabric. They have a stake in preserving the status quo, while the remaining three—India, Brazil, and South Africa—are struggling to enter the hallowed confines of great power politics, and as such seek a redistribution. This struggle is reflected in the debate over restructuring the permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

The BRICS have called for "comprehensive reform" of the United Nations to make the body "more effective, efficient, and representative."[41] However, China remains one of the biggest obstacles to changing the permanent membership of the Security Council. The veto-wielding powers of China and Russia have an impact on global policies that Brazil, India, and South Africa can only aspire to. Not surprisingly, it's U.S. President Barack Obama—not Hu Jintao or Vladimir Putin—who promised India that he would help in this goal during his visit to New Delhi in November 2010.[42]

While the BRICS want greater responsibility on economic issues, in political and security affairs they remain reluctant to share any burdens. They have not been able to fashion a coordinated response to various global challenges as is reflected in their divergent positions at the UN. In another example, despite being dissatisfied with the global financial institutional fabric, the members of BRICS failed to collectively challenge the Western dominance of the IMF and World Bank during the 2012 leadership changes of these institutions. The candidacy of France's Christine Lagarde went unchallenged, and they failed to propose a common candidate for the presidency of the World Bank. Unless the BRICS can articulate a common vision on global issues, they will remain unable to set the global agenda and discourse.

It is also important to recognize that the BRICS' conception of global order fundamentally diverges from the liberal vision of Western states. As Sciences Po professor Zaki Laidi argues, the BRICS "are concerned with maintaining their independence of judgment and national action in a world that is increasingly economically and socially interdependent."[43] As a result, on critical global issues, the BRICS have been satisfied proffering banalities as opposed to proposing serious policy choices.

The BRICS have been satisfied proffering banalities as opposed to serious policy choices.

On Syria, for example, the group argued that "global interests would best be served by dealing with the crisis through peaceful means that encourage broad national dialogues that reflect the legitimate aspirations of all sections of Syrian society and respect Syrian independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty."[44] The BRICS have continued to argue for respecting Syrian sovereignty and have refused to support any resolution against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Before the Durban summit, Assad publicly urged the BRICS leaders to help stop the violence in his country. In response, the BRICS final communique after the Durban summit conveyed "deep concern with the deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation," and "condemned the increasing violations of human rights and of international law" but refrained from taking any sides.[45]

Similar muddled thinking guides statements on Iran. The BRICS suggested that the member states "recognize Iran's right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy consistent with its international obligations, and support resolution of the issues involved through political and diplomatic means and dialogue between the parties concerned, including between the IAEA and Iran and in accordance with the provisions of the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions."[46] Even on Afghanistan, an issue that is of direct relevance to three members—Russia, India, and China—all that the group has been to affirm so far is a "commitment to support Afghanistan's emergence as a peaceful, stable and democratic state, free of terrorism and extremism, and underscore the need for more effective regional and international cooperation for the stabilization of Afghanistan, including by combating terrorism."[47] With such a lack of seriousness on display, is it any wonder that the rest of the world remains unconvinced about the ability of the BRICS to shape the global order?

Beyond the question of global leadership, it is not readily evident if BRICS are even considered leaders in their own neighborhoods. All, including China, continue to face significant challenges within their own regions. China's ham-handed assertiveness in its neighborhood is producing a backlash, seen in a loose anti-Chinese coalition emerging in East and Southeast Asia. India's dominance of the South Asian landscape makes it a natural target of resentment from its smaller neighbors. Brazil's leadership in South America is not accepted by other states in the region, as is reflected in Argentina's rejection of the Brazilian candidacy for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. Russia's neighbors still chafe at the memory of Soviet behavior during the Cold War, while South Africa has been found wanting in tackling challenges in its own backyard (such as the Libyan crisis).[48]

The growing fascination with BRICS is partly an offshoot of the discussion on the emerging "post-American" world where many commentators argue multipolarity is likely to be the norm.[49] Yet, while BRICS may have growing economies and the idea may have morphed into a nascent political concept, it is not entirely clear if it translates into power at the global level. Their contribution to the global order remains tentative at best and problematic at worst. They have so far not been able to create institutions that would help them to consolidate and leverage their clout on the global stage. Even if the BRICS get their economic act together, which seems unlikely, the group will not be able to turn that strength into a unified political force. Furthermore, the dominance of China makes most of the goals articulated by the BRICS states wobbly. The point of this coalition was always to show that the balance of power is shifting *to* emerging countries and *away* from

> The BRICS contribution to global order remains tentative at best and problematic at worst.

the West's historical dominance, but a multipolar world isn't the same as China just trying to tilt the balance of power toward itself.

The narrative surrounding the rise of BRICS is as exaggerated as that of the decline of the United States. The tectonic plates of global politics are certainly shifting, but their movements are yet not predictable. As a result, BRICS will remain an artificial construct—merely an acronym coined by an investment banking analyst—for quite some time to come.

Notes

1. Pascal Fletcher, "BRICS 'Big Five' find it hard to run as a herd," *Reuters*, March 27, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/27/us-brics-summit-idUSBRE92Q0UE20130327.
2. "Global Economic Outlook 2013, January 2013 Update," The Conference Board, available at http://www.conference-board.org/data/globaloutlook.cfm.
3. "Global Economy to Slow Further in 2013," The Conference Board, press release, November 13, 2012, http://www.conference-board.org/press/pressdetail.cfm?pressid=4647.
4. Ruchir Sharma, "Broken BRICs," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2012, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138219/ruchir-sharma/broken-brics.
5. Gillian Tett, "The story of the Brics," *Financial Times*, January 15, 2010, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/112ca932-00ab-11df-ae8d-00144feabdc0.html.
6. Ibid.
7. Andrew E. Kramer, "Emerging Economies Meet in Russia," *New York Times*, June 16, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/17/world/europe/17bric.html?_r =0.
8. *The BRICS Report* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012): pp. 79–102, http://www.fazenda.gov.br/sain/destaques/Brics_Report.pdf.
9. Ibid, p. 168.
10. "Full text of the Sanya declaration of the BRICS leaders meeting," Xinua.net, March 14, 2011, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-04/14/c_13829453.htm.
11. Ibid.
12. "BRICS targets $500 billion intra-group trade by 2015," *India Today*, March 28, 2012, http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/brics-targets-$500-billion-intra-group-trade-by-2015/1/179822.html.
13. Theresa Robles, "A BRICS Development Bank: An Idea Whose Time Has Come?" RSIS Commentaries, No. 210/2012, November 14, 2012, available at http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/Perspective/RSIS2102012.pdf.
14. Dani Rodrik, "What the World Needs from the BRICS," Project Syndicate, April, 10, 2013, http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/the-brics-and-global-economic-leadership-by-dani-rodrik.
15. UN Security Council Resolution 1973, SC/10200 (2011), March 17, 2011, http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10200.doc.htm.
16. Oliver Stuenkel, "Why BRICS Matters," E-International Relations, March 28, 2012, http://www.e-ir.info/2012/03/28/why-brics-matters/.
17. "EBRD Predicts Russian Economic Slowdown in 2012–13," Ria Novosti, October 26, 2012, http://en.rian.ru/world/20121026/176925713.html.
18. Sergei Guriev, "Russia is not a place you would want to do business," *Financial Times*, June 20, 2013, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/fe1f61e8-d993-11e2-bab1-00144feab7de.html#axzz2YeAMceAZ.

19. Aaron Black, "IMF Lowers China Growth Forecasts, Warns of Risks," *Wall Street Journal*, July 16, 2012, http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2012/07/16/imf-lowers-china-growth-forecasts-warns-of-risks/.
20. Michael Schuman, "China's Economic Slowdown: Why Stimulus Is a Bad Idea," *Time*, July 26, 2012, http://business.time.com/2012/07/26/chinas-economic-slowdown-why-stimulus-is-a-bad-idea/.
21. Bettina Wassener, "Chinese Economy Expanded at End of 2012, Data Shows," *New York Times*, January 17, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/19/business/global/chinese-economy-picks-up-steam-in-last-quarter.html.
22. Zhiwei Zhang and Wendy Chen, "China: Rising risks of financial crisis," Asia Special Report, Nomura Global Economics, March 15, 2013, available at http://pg.jrj.com.cn/acc/Res/CN_RES/MAC/2013/3/15/cb9c260d-ada0-4ad6-a211-95923c36c7a7.pdf.
23. Minxin Pei, "The Politics of a Slowing China," *Project Syndicate*, July 6, 2013, http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/the-impact-of-slow-gdp-growth-on-chinese-politics-by-minxin-pei.
24. Sujata Rao, "India: the BRIC that has disappointed – Goldman's O'Neill," *Reuters*, December 6, 2011, http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/12/06/investment-summit-oneill-idINDEE7B50AA20111206.
25. Mukesh Jagota, Prasanta Sahu and Anant Vijay Kala, "India Slashes Forecast on Economic Growth," *Wall Street Journal*, December 17, 2012, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324407504578184580479341850.html.
26. Eric Martin, "Move Over BRICS, Here Come the MISTs," BusinessWeek, August 9, 2012, http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-08-09/move-over-brics-dot-here-come-the-mists.
27. Antoine Van Agtmaal, "Think Again: The BRICS," Foreign Policy, November 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/10/08/think_again_the_brics.
28. Joe Leahy, Andrew England and Victor Mallet, "Reality Bites for Emerging Market Reliance on China's Growth," *Financial Times*, June 1, 2013.
29. Ruchir Sharma, "BRICS summits are so last decade," *Times of India*, April 1, 2013, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-04-01/edit-page/38163584_1_brics-bank-global-trade-axis.
30. "Seeking Protection," *The Economist*, January 14, 2012, http://www.economist.com/node/21542780.
31. Samantha Pearson and Joe Leahy, "Cheap Asia Imports Hit Brazil's Industries," *Financial Times*, April 20, 2011, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/e7206ccc-6b71-11e0-a53e-00144feab49a.html#axzz2QeB9zdmx.
32. Cited in Stephen Blank, "Toward a New Chinese Order in Asia: Russia's Failure," The National Bureau of Asian Research, Special Report 26, March 2011, p. 11, http://www.nbr.org/publications/element.aspx?id=494.
33. Mitsuru Obe, "Japan, Russia to work on ties," *Wall Street Journal*, September 6, 2012, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390443686004577635220864309202.html.
34. Georgy Bovt, "China's Favourite Junior Partner," *The Moscow Times*, March 27, 2013, http://www.themoscowtimes.com/mobile/article/477608.html.
35. "India's trade deficit with China widens to $23 billion," *Economic Times*, November 11, 2012, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-11-11/news/35048364_1_iron-ore-exports-india-china-joint-economic-group-trade-target.
36. For a detailed discussion of the challenges facing India as a consequence of the rise of China, See Harsh V. Pant, *The Rise of China: Implications for India* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

37. Alistair Scrutton, "India PM warns China wants foothold in South Asia," *Reuters*, September 7, 2010, http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/09/07/us-india-china-idUSTRE6860NU20100907.
38. Faeeza Ballim, "South Africa and China in awkward embrace," *Mail and Guardian*, July 20, 2012, http://mg.co.za/article/2012-07-19-south-africa-and-china-in-awkward-embrace.
39. Yaroslav Trofimov, "In Africa, China's Expansion Begins to Stir Resentment," *Wall Street Journal*, February 2, 2007, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB117036261569895256-search.html.
40. See William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24, no. 1 (Summer 1999), p. 28.
41. "BRICS Summit: Delhi Declaration," Council on Foreign Relations, March 20, 2012, http://www.cfr.org/brazil/brics-summit-delhi-declaration/p27805.
42. Scott Wilson and Emily Wax, "Obama endorses India for UN Security council seat," *The Washington Post*, November 8, 2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/08/AR2010110807129.html/.
43. Zaki Laidi, "The BRICS Against the West?" Sciences Po, CERI Strategy Papers, No. 11, November 2011, http://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr.ceri/files/n11_112011.pdf.
44. "BRICS Summit: Delhi Declaration," Council on Foreign Relations, March 20, 2012, http://www.cfr.org/brazil/brics-summit-delhi-declaration/p27805.
45. "Joint Statement of the Fifth BRICS Summit in Durban," Council on Foreign Relations, March 27, 2013, http://www.cfr.org/emerging-markets/joint-statement-fifth-brics-summit-durban-march-2013/p30341.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Eusebius McKaiser, "Mind the UN–AU Gap," *New York Times*, January 18, 2012, http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/18/south-africa-must-recognize-its-role-in-african-union-problems/.
49. For a cogent exposition of this argument, see Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).