

“Recognizing key differences between the rising and the established powers is the first step toward building a coherent and balanced international order.”

Making Room for Rising Powers

AMRITA NARLIKAR

In 2003, the investment firm Goldman Sachs predicted that, within less than 40 years, the economies of the so-called “BRIC” nations—Brazil, Russia, India, and China—could together exceed the output of America, Japan, Britain, Germany, France, and Italy combined, in US dollar terms. Since then, considerable hype has surrounded the BRIC phenomenon. Growth projections vary, and disputes have erupted between those claiming that the emerging markets will remain the powerhouses of the world and others pointing to a recent economic slowdown even in these countries. Arguments continue even about the category itself. Were the original BRIC countries right to expand their grouping to South Africa (creating the current BRICS)? Does Russia really deserve to be in it?

While the attention to the rise of new powers is timely, the focus of much of the commentary over the past decade has been misguided. Indeed, the crucial issues posed by the global power transition now under way have little to do with the debates that have dominated popular media.

SIGNIFICANT BAGGAGE

First, the emphasis on their economic prowess frequently leads observers to ignore the fact that most of the new powers of the present day (Brazil, India, China, and South Africa) are fundamentally different from the established Western powers. Today’s rising powers share significant historical baggage, which includes their struggles against colonialism, and also their role as “rule-takers” in the postwar international system. They have historically been associated with the

global South, and have to varying degrees used this association to claim positions of influence in international affairs. India, via its leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement, was particularly effective in the use of such a strategy during the Cold War; Brazil and China, too, were active in collective movements involving other developing countries.

Such memories die hard. Hence, even as their economic size has grown, the new powers have continued to espouse visions of global order that often challenge the established norms championed by the United States and the European Union. Their shared memories, which involve at least some us-versus-them attitudes toward the liberal West, provide a vital cementing force for the Southern coalitions in which the rising powers operate today. Besides embracing the BRICS acronym for leader-level summits, they have formed such groupings as the cross-issue IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa) and BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) in climate change negotiations. In the World Trade Organization, too, four of the five BRICS countries (that is, minus Russia) have frequently worked in alliances with other developing nations.

Even with their remarkable growth trajectories, moreover, these are countries with low per capita incomes. The fact that they occupy much lower rungs of the development ladder means that their interests do not always align readily with those of the developed countries. And the rising powers bring with them not only very different *interests* to the negotiating table, but also very different *ideas* of global order. Just how much these differences matter is indicated by multiple deadlocks afflicting different international regimes.

These stalemates are not simply over questions of authority—that is, who gets to make decisions. The latest round of global trade talks stalled for 12 years, until a December 2013 breakthrough, de-

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spite the WTO's reform of its decision-making process to include Brazil, India, and China at the high table of negotiations. Because differences between the rising and established powers can run deep, making international forums more inclusive will not automatically create consensus. Expanding the Group of Seven to include Brazil, India, China, and South Africa, for example, does not necessarily mean that its new members will embrace the burdens of international responsibility that the EU and the United States want them to.

BURDEN SHARING

If simply giving a place and voice to the rising powers will not suffice, and in fact increases the risk of recurring deadlock and instability in the international system, how might global governance be reformed to better reflect the changing balance of power and also retain its effectiveness? A key difficulty is that, even though Brazil, India, and China have repeatedly demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the existing global order, none of them offers a clear alternative to it. The argument between the rising and established powers thus often deteriorates to accusations by the latter of free riding, and a defense by the former that they do not wish to contribute to the provision of *certain* public goods.

The solution perhaps lies in a mechanism I call "Reform for Responsibility," or RfR. Economic size should be treated as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for membership in key decision-making forums. Rather, the rising powers would need to signal their commitment to share the burden of certain international responsibilities, in return for which global institutions would be duly reformed. The rising powers would be well within

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their rights to assert that they do not buy into the values that some existing international responsibilities reflect. But they would then be expected to clarify, if not these public goods (such as free trade in its proposed form, or climate change mitigation through binding commitments), then which alternative public goods they would be willing to provide.

The gains from an RfR trade-off would be large and mutually beneficial. Not only would such an arrangement address the issue of burden sharing—a significant problem in the context of the established powers' relative decline. It could also inject fresh ideas into the international system, ideas for improving both its fairness and its efficacy.

BARGAINING STRATEGIES

Amid the attempts to group emerging markets into BRIC- or BRICS-like acronyms, it is all too easy to forget some key differences that divide these states. Given genuine contestation and uncertainties within and among the rising

powers regarding the kind of global order they would seek to establish—and also a considerable likelihood of misperception of their intentions by the EU, the United States, and others—an understanding of the rising powers' negotiation cultures becomes critical.

Derived from dissimilar negotiating traditions, the bargaining strategies of the rising powers exhibit significant differences. Relative to Brazil and China, for example, India shows the greatest willingness to use a strategy, often across issue-areas, that insists on shifting value from the North to the South, that often holds the North's issues hostage until it has first conceded to the South's demands, and that tends to resort to threats and penalties.

From *Current History's* archives...

"It is the fundamental error of security-minded zealots that they put their trust in such things as secrecy, or weapons, or numbers. But none of these things can be relied on unless the spirit of the people is stout. The prodigious contest between Nazi Germany and Britain should have taught us that it is the free mind and the free spirit that triumph over all the weapons of secrecy, of hatred, and of fear."

Henry Steele Commager "The Right of Dissent," October 1955

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China, in contrast, reserves this type of strategy for areas that it identifies as core interests.

Brazil tends to use this strategy the least, and even when doing so, often masks it by appealing to technical detail rather than explicit nay-saying. Given its self-representation as a bridge-building power, Brazil is likely to be a more pliable negotiating partner than India, and also a mediator when negotiating with recalcitrant rising powers.

Awareness of these negotiation differences can expand the scope for bargaining. For example, India's tendency to moralize and its flexible view of time can be misinterpreted as aggressive negotiating tactics. A closer inspection reveals that India's characteristics as a difficult negotiator, including its moralistic framing of issues and low susceptibility to externally imposed deadlines, are embedded in the country's negotiation culture and not necessarily associated with conflictual bargaining.

The WTO ministerial conference at Bali in early December 2013 brought the importance of these differences, and of understanding them, to the fore. The meeting produced an agreement to lower bureaucratic trade barriers, import tariffs, and agricultural subsidies. From the outset, India's chief negotiator made it clear that his country's demands on food security were "nonnegotiable." He persisted in this position even in the face of impending isolation and international opprobrium. Ultimately, as many negotiators were losing all hope, a deal was reached. India accepted a compromise, albeit one very much on its own terms. Yet, had the Americans and Europeans accepted India's initial declarations at face value—that is, as nonnegotiable—or refused to extend the conference deadline, the talks likely would have failed. Notably, considerable credit for this small but significant success in breaking the WTO's 12-year

deadlock must go to its Brazilian director-general, Roberto Azevedo. It was a diplomat from the most mediatory of the rising powers who was finally able to broker a compromise.

Recognizing key differences between the rising and the established powers is the first step toward building a coherent and balanced international order. Global institutions need to adopt transparent mechanisms that facilitate burden sharing on terms that both the rising and established powers can embrace, or at the very least, live with. RfR provides such a mechanism. Meanwhile, for the established powers, knowledge of the new powers' different negotiating traditions might serve as vital ammunition. More important, a better understanding of these traditions could widen the scope for international compromise, and thereby boost prospects for stability and peace. ■

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"The war and the issues in terms of which it was fought threw unpleasant light upon existing American practices. The revelation of the effect of racism on a Europe dominated by Nazis was shocking and led to a general reappraisal of the situation in the United States. It was uncomfortable to fight against totalitarianism and for the four freedoms abroad while glaring departures from the democratic ideals survived at home."

Oscar Handlin
"Desegregation in Perspective"
May 1957

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