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Citation

The concept of a middle power in international relations: distinguishing between emerging and traditional middle powers[1]

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ABSTRACT *This article seeks to develop a distinction between emerging and traditional middle powers as a means to giving the concept of a middle power greater analytical clarity. All middle powers display foreign policy behaviour that stabilises and legitimises the global order, typically through multilateral and cooperative initiatives. However, emerging and traditional middle powers can be distinguished in terms of their mutually-influencing constitutive and behavioural differences. Constitutively, traditional middle powers are wealthy, stable, egalitarian, social democratic and not regionally influential. Behaviourally, they exhibit a weak and ambivalent regional orientation, constructing identities distinct from powerful states in their regions and offer appeasing concessions to pressures for global reform. Emerging middle powers by contrast are semi-peripheral, materially inegalitarian and recently democratised states that demonstrate much regional influence and self-association. Behaviourally, they opt for reformist and not radical global change, exhibit a strong regional orientation favouring regional integration but seek also to construct identities distinct from those of the weak states in their region.*

Middle powers are states that are neither great nor small in terms of international power, capacity and influence, and demonstrate a propensity to promote cohesion and stability in the world system. Despite problems of classification, a consensus has developed that states such as Australia, Canada, Norway and Sweden are middle powers. However, that consensus on middle-power identification is being undermined by the recent inclusion of such states as, among others, Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, Malaysia, South Africa and Turkey in the middle-power category.[2] However, this grouping of states as diverse as Brazil and Canada, or South Africa and Sweden together raises the issue of the usefulness of the middle-power concept and risks undermining the concept's analytical power. The aim of this article is to rescue the concept from increasing vagueness by drawing a distinction between traditional middle powers (Aus-

tralia, Canada, Norway, etc.) and emerging middle powers[3] (Argentina, Malaysia, South Africa, etc.).

According to Cooper, Higgott and Nossal,[4] middle powers are recognisable by their foreign policy behaviour. Middle-power foreign policy is not determined by the constitutive features[5] of middle-power states, or by their positions in the world system, although these features do shape their internationalism, however. It is instead, a product of contextually located deliberate action. Attempts at identifying middle powers focus on at least one, but more usually a combination, of the following characteristics: considerations of state capacity,[6] position in the world order,[7] the normative composition of the middle-power state–societal complex,[8] domestic class interests,[9] and the role and influence of foreign policy-makers. Despite similar ontologies, the theoretical preferences of authors become more apparent when considering the explanatory weight given to the aforementioned constitutive features of middle powers. Liberals (such as Cooper, Higgott and Nossal) emphasise agency in middle-power foreign policy, realists (such as Holbraad) focus on state capacity, whereas neo-Gramscians (such as Cox and Neufeld) privilege the position of middle powers in the global political economy and elite complicity in the neo-liberal project as explanatory variables (the approach favoured here[10]).

The problem with employing the criteria already mentioned in identifying middle powers have been discussed by Cooper, Higgott and Nossal.[11] Their solution is to identify middle powers by their foreign policy behaviour; that is, their proclivity for seeking multilateral solutions to international problems, for advocating compromise and for, in general, being part of the solution to problems at international level.[12] This does not render other strategies of identifying middle powers redundant. Rather, the aforementioned constitutive features of middle powers are important in informing middle-power internationalism, although regarding the links between the constitutive features of middle powers and their internationalism too causally would be going to far. There should remain room for agency, to account for why states with very similar features do not have similar foreign policies. David Black[13] has pointed to an unavoidably tautological element in the identification of middle powers; namely, that middle powers are identified by their foreign policy behaviour, which leads to the identification of similarities in the constitutive features of middle-power states, from whence the circle is completed by explaining middle-power foreign policy as shaped by these compositional features. In this article, differences in middle-power internationalism will be noted and the reasons for such differences will, after the fact, be located in the differing make-ups of emerging and traditional middle powers (see Table 1).

Characteristically, a relatively large proportion of middle-power foreign policy has a scope that extends beyond the immediacy of geography and direct self-interest. This seeming absence of self-interested foreign policy behaviour in which the gains are immediate and clear has led to an image of middle powers as good international citizens. However, middle-power self-interest can be located at a deeper and more dispersed level; that is, an interest in global

stability, controllability and predictability, a conservative strategy that has the effect of perpetuating the *status quo*, entrenching (and exacerbating) existing inequalities in power and wealth to their relative benefit. Furthermore, such a strategy contains a material dimension (in the economic sense) that largely falls outside the purview of the ontology of the more orthodox approaches (neo-realism and liberal institutionalism) to middle-power internationalism. Analyses of the Cairns Group[14] constitutes an obvious exception to the alleged blindness of orthodox approaches to global economic issues in middle-power foreign policy. However, these analyses do not problematise the free trade principles to which the Cairns Group sought international adherence, nor are they critical of the hegemonic power relations that sustain neo-liberal economic principles and middle-power complicity in this process. A greater focus on economic aspects of middle-power foreign policy has become pressing in the aftermath of the Cold War and the greater concern with economic well-being, the widened conception of security, the greater economisation of foreign policy, the rise of semi-peripheral emerging middle powers who are often on the short end of the stick in the current neo-liberal world order and the threat of global poverty and the increasing global equality to all middle powers.

This article will proceed by describing the similar foreign policy behaviour that has earned both emerging and traditional middle-power states the middle-power tag, with a few critical observations along the way. Then, in order to rescue the middle-power concept from increasing vagueness, we turn to a description of the constitutive differences between emerging and traditional middle powers, followed by a discussion of how these differences affect the behaviour of these two groups.

Middle-power states typically adopt an activist style in that they interfere in global issues beyond their immediate concern. Middle powers do not interfere in all situations of conflict, but they do interfere more than non middle-power states with similar compositional profiles. Middle-power foreign policy often focuses on conflict reduction (broadly understood) in the world system, by involving other like-minded states (in terms of the issue at hand) in an attempt to arrive at a workable compromise, usually through multilateral channels and institutions.[15] Despite some disagreements with the hegemon and other major states (especially over human rights issues[16]), middle powers do not challenge or threaten the global *status quo*—that is, the economic and military–political 'balance' of power—nor the desirability of liberal democracy, in any fundamental way. States that deviate from hegemonic orthodoxy cannot be conceived of as middle powers in the sense that the term is used in this article. Consequently, states excluded from the middle-power category are non-Western nuclear powers (e.g. China, India and Pakistan), alleged 'sponsors of terrorism' (e.g. Libya and Syria), economic deviants such as China and Cuba, and states for which the democratisation of the rest of the world is not a priority, such as PRI-governed Mexico[17] and most of the states in the Middle East.

Middle powers are stabilisers and legitimisers of the world order, whether in times of hegemony or not.[18] Middle powers are stablisers because their limited

Table 1. Distinguishing between emerging and traditional middle powers

	Traditional middle powers	Emerging middle powers
CONSTITUTIVE DIFFERENCES		
Democratic tradition	Stable social democracies	Relatively unstable, recently democratised with some very undemocratic aspects
Time of emergence as middle powers	During the Cold War	After the Cold War
Position in world economy	Core	Semi-periphery
Domestic distribution of wealth	Very equal	Highly unequal
Regional influence	Low	High
Origins of perceived neutrality	Regional ambivalence and relative unimportance	Regional self-association and significance
BEHAVIOURAL DIFFERENCES		
Regional orientation	Fairly low	Moderately high
Attitude to regional integration and cooperation	Ambivalent	Eager (often assuming leadership role)
Nature of actions to effect deep global change	Appeasing and legitimising	Reformist and legitimising
Purpose of international identity construction	Distance from powerful in region	Distance from weak in the region

capacity to bring about deep global change leaves them vulnerable in times of great global instability. They are legitimisers, because given their privileged positions in the global political economy (traditional middle powers) and regional political economies (emerging middle powers) they benefit relatively from the institutionalisation of (the inequality associated with) the current neo-liberal hegemony. But, true to their conflict-management proclivities, middle powers assist in making the ideology, values and practices of the hegemonic order that facilitate and mask global inequality appear more natural and universal.[19]

Orthodox approaches recognise the stabilising dimension of middle-power internationalism, whereby middle powers selectively and functionally display leadership on certain global problems. Middle powers are committed to 'orderliness and security in the world system'[20] realised through foreign policy niches of their choice. Middle powers often attempt to pre-empt, contain and resolve conflict between warring parties. But middle-power involvement is not limited to military–political conflict and instability. They also mitigate and manage more endemic instability with stronger economic origins,[21] such as that stemming from the neo-liberal project, for example, through relatively generous aid donation, reformist initiatives in response to the now defunct New International Economic Order and vocal support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Middle powers view international law as instrumental to securing their interests[22] and making global interaction more predictable. International organisation proffers middle powers with a forum in and through which to establish and enforce international law, or at a minimum, 'acceptable rules of conduct by all powers'. [23] Lacking the ability to effect global structural change, middle powers direct their foreign policy efforts at an interactional level,[24] for which multilateral arrangements are ideally suited. The multilateral cooperation that takes place in and through international organisation lends greater legitimacy to the normative arrangements established and perpetuated through these organisations.

The legitimising dimension of middle-power internationalism stems from the inability of these states to unilaterally and single-handedly shape global outcomes in any direct manner. This inability guides middle powers towards utilising and asserting themselves through international organisations, relying on the authority afforded these institutions in order to manage and maintain the prevailing world order. Liberal theorists recognise the legitimising role that middle powers play in the world system. Henrikson,[25] for example, approvingly remarks that international organisation provides middle powers with 'an appearance' of 'potency, neutrality and authority'. However, a shortcoming of the liberal approach is that it is not critical of the principles of the world order that middle powers assist in legitimising. A neo-Gramscian reading exposes international organisation as 'a means of stabilising and perpetuating a particular order. Institutions reflect the power relations at the point of origin and tend, at least initially, to encourage collective images consistent with these power relations'. [26] Middle powers, because of their limited capacities and through the

resultant channelling of their efforts through international organisation, legit-
imise these arrangements of institutionalised global inequality.

Some commentators are more optimistic about the possibility of international
organisation becoming a breeding ground for a counter-hegemonic project than
Robert Cox.[27] However, their optimism seems unlikely to materialise. Inter-
national organisation is more likely to effect incremental change in non-funda-
mental and disparate anti-hegemonic directions, if at all, for the following
reasons. It is unclear what kind of alternative world order counter-hegemonic
forces envision, save for saying that the world should be more just and equitable.
But even these notions are often vacuous, contested and/or abused. Counter-
hegemony often asserts itself in opposition to the clear fundamentals of the
current hegemonic order,[28] but by and large fails to offer clear and realisable
alternatives. At times when international organisations had been able to offer
(potentially) counter-hegemonic challenges, the strength and/or legitimacy of
these organisations were quickly undermined.[29] Representation in international
organisation is by states, which have been weakened by economic liberalisation
and deregulation, globalisation, and have increasingly been infiltrated by interna-
tionally oriented capitalist interests, leaving them in hardly the position (or
representative enough) to deal with some of the world's major problems, such
as starvation, growing inequality, environmental degradation, and so on. Further-
more, the class interests of elites representing states in international organisa-
tions, even those from potentially more transformation-minded states such as
emerging middle powers, dictate against them negotiating themselves out of
privilege.[30] States that do possess a relative capacity to press for a counter-hege-
monic agenda (e.g. Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa, etc.) are often regionally
dominant and as such, benefit from the rules of the hegemonic order *vis-à-vis*
weaker states in their region, even though they are in turn in a weaker position
vis-à-vis states in the core. While multilateral arrangements are unlikely to effect
a broad counter-hegemonic revolution they have been successfully utilised on
specific issues, such as the campaigns against apartheid[31] and the banning of
antipersonnel mines.[32]

A caveat should be offered so as to not overestimate the already limited
influence of middle powers. The increasing influence of transnational issue
networks[33] have in many instances usurped many of the roles traditionally
performed by middle powers, acting as the conscience of a global civil society
that sees foreign policy elites as being too closely knitted into the web of
conformity with hegemonic rules and the benefits derived from such conformity.
Examples of the increasing influence of transnational non-state actors on global
issues include groups concerned with the environmental protection, Third World
debt, landmines and globalisation. But, states remain important representatives
of their citizens, and in the case of poorer (middle-power) states, often the only
representatives. As such, closer cooperation between middle powers and transna-
tional issue networks are important in effecting more bottom-up change that does
not concur with the hegemon's wishes,[34] such as through the Ottawa process that
procured the ban on antipersonnel mines. The point is that the roles of

middle-power internationalism are changing with the advent of transnational issue networks and should be acknowledged, but these complications fall beyond the scope of this study.

We now turn to an attempt to clarify the middle-power concept in another way; namely, through a consideration of the constitutive differences between emerging and traditional middle powers and how these differences affect middle power internationalism.

Constitutive differences between traditional and emerging middle powers

Traditional middle powers are stable social democracies, whereas democracy in emerging middle powers is often far from consolidated, and in many cases only recently established,[35] with undemocratic practices still abounding. Furthermore, in emerging middle powers democracy often stands superimposed onto a society with deep social cleavages, whether in terms of class (e.g. Argentina, Brazil, South Africa) or ethnicity (e.g. Malaysia, Nigeria, South Africa), the popular contestation of these cleavages having been placed largely beyond the scope of polyarchical democracy.[36] Furthermore, democracy in some emerging middle powers often seems of a poorer quality than that found in traditional middle powers, considering, for example, commonplace human rights abuses in Nigeria, Malaysia and Turkey and one-party domination in countries like South Africa and Malaysia.

Traditional middle powers *qua* middle powers came to prominence during the Cold War. The insecure positions of smaller states powerlessly caught in the standoff between the two superpowers resulted in a foreign policy highly concerned with military and political issues. Emerging middle powers rose to assume their internationalist postures after the Cold War. The bygone insecurities of the Cold War meant the reduction of military and strategic concerns in foreign policy and a concomitant increased importance for economic matters. Global poverty-related problems have assumed increasing significance *vis-à-vis* the receding threat of nuclear annihilation, allowing space (and voice) for economically threatened states (with emerging middle powers often acting as the spokesperson for this group) to draw attention to the threat poverty poses for them (compared with the threat it poses for traditional middle powers).[37] This stands in contrast with the Cold War era when traditional middle powers highlighted the collateral military threat posed to them by their superpower neighbours (although they were not blind to economic matters[38]). The passing of the Cold War has also witnessed much lower tolerance for undemocratic regimes as the United States no longer has to placate its old alliance partners. Even so, it remains rather quiet on the undemocratic practices of many of its strategic partners, such as Saudi Arabia, Israel and China. However, generally speaking, liberal democracy has been posited as a principle all states are expected to move towards.

Traditional middle powers are highly egalitarian, with the social democratic welfare states of Norway, Sweden, The Netherlands and Denmark being among

the five most egalitarian industrialised states in the world, with Canada and Australia having the most equal distributions of wealth among (Anglo-Saxon) liberal democratic welfare states.[39] Emerging middle powers, on the other hand, often have notoriously skewed distributions of wealth. According to a World Bank study, the Deininger and Squire data set on income inequality,[40] the Gini coefficient for traditional middle powers hovers around the 0.3 mark, whereas the Gini coefficient for emerging middle powers such as Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, Malaysia, South Africa and Turkey clusters around the 0.5 figure.

Traditional middle powers are at the core of the world economy, whereas emerging middle powers are semi-peripheral. The citizens of traditional middle powers enjoy the highest quality of living in the world. Measured according to the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index (2002),[41] Norway (first), Sweden (second), Canada (third), Australia (fifth) and The Netherlands (eighth) are all among the top ten nations in terms of human development. According to the UNDP's classification, emerging middle powers, on the other hand, all fall into the 'medium human development' category (with the exception of Nigeria and Argentina).[42] The material equality and high standards of living within traditional middle powers suggests the integration of virtually all its citizens into the world economy. In contrast, the middle-income status of emerging middle powers, coupled with great income inequality, suggests that elites in these states are very well integrated into the world economy, with the parallel existence of huge pockets of 'internal South'.

Traditional middle powers are not powerful relative to the states in their geographic immediacy. This is in contrast to emerging middle powers that are powerful, and sometimes even dominant, regionally. The middle powers of Europe have small populations and economies compared with those of the European G7 members. Australia has a sizeable and highly developed economy, but its geographic isolation dissipates its regional focus and influence, as well as raising questions of self-identity. The Canadian economy is highly integrated with and dependent upon the gigantic American economy. In Africa, South Africa and Nigeria[43] dominate their respective regions economically. In South America, Brazil has the largest economy and Argentina the most developed economy (despite recent economic woes). In South East Asia, Malaysia has a more developed economy than any of its neighbours, with the exception of tiny Singapore.

Traditional middle powers appear rather ambivalent about regional integration and cooperation, whereas emerging middle powers are keen participants and often initiators of regional integration and cooperation. Laffan[44] points out that Scandinavian countries have been reluctant participants in post-war integration, preferring intergovernmental cooperation to supra-national integration. Before actually becoming a member of the European Union (EU), Denmark had twice rejected membership in a referendum (1972) and Norway still is not a member of the EU. Furthermore, of European middle powers, Sweden is also not a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. In terms of Australian foreign policy and orientation, there is also uncertainty about whether Australia

should view itself as an Asian-Pacific country or as a Western country. Judging from personal experience, Canadian identity often seems to be constructed in terms of how it differs from American identity, whatever these two 'identities' may be. Despite a love–hate relationship with the United States, Canada feared a dissipation of their special relationship with the inclusion of Mexico in the Free Trade Agreement through the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).[45]

Emerging middle powers are eager, and often leading, participants in regional structures. Nigeria was a dominant force in the creation of Economic Community of West African States; South Africa's trade surplus within both the Southern African Development Community and in the wider African market compensates for its trade deficit with the rest of the world; Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo and South African president Thabo Mbeki have been two of the most influential and active international promoters of the NEPAD aimed at improving Africa's dire economic situation; Malaysia has always shown a strong commitment to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and has proposed the creation of an East Asian Economic Grouping, later the East Asian Economic Caucus, which would include China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the ASEAN states but exclude the United States;[46] the construction of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) was the result of bilateral initiatives undertaken by Brazil and Argentina; and furthermore,[47] Argentina has sought the strengthening of the structures and normative responsibilities of the Organisation of American States, thereby becoming 'the diplomatic bridge-builder of the new American regionalism'. [48]

Thus far we have noted the constitutive differences between emerging and traditional middle powers in terms of democratic stability, the timing of their emergence as middle powers, societal cleavages, socio-political values, positions in the global political economy and attitudes to regional integration. Let us consider how the constituted differences affect the internationalism of traditional and emerging middle powers.

Behavioural differences between traditional and emerging middle powers

The position of middle powers in the global political economy, the 'complex of dominant values, social forces and institutions embedded in their own … state–society complexes',[49] as well as state-societal abilities in terms of diplomatic capacity and skills inform the internationalism of middle powers. However, these necessary features do not determine middle-power internationalism. One has to allow for a degree of agency, in terms of leadership by specific individuals and the exercise of a choice as to whether to become more involved in a certain foreign policy issue (i.e. niche diplomacy). Before considering how the internationalisms of emerging and traditional middle powers are informed by their varying constitutive features, it is worth noting the circumscribed existence of foreign policy agents in middle powers.

Ikenberry and Kupchan[50] trace the development of middle-power elite support

and acceptance of the norms and practices of the hegemon and the world order it seeks to impose by a strategy they have termed 'positive inducement'. Note the elite interests in the top-down dissemination of hegemonic values and practices and how their conformity with the international standards of hegemonic order provides domestic legitimacy. Ikenberry and Kupchan probably overestimate the relational aspect of hegemonic influence by neglecting the ideological dominance of the hegemonic discourse, but their point remains valid. It is worth quoting at length, describing 'positive inducement' as a process whereby:

> the hegemon initially uses economic and military power to induce elites in smaller states to change their policies, but the process eventually leads to legitimisation. At the outset of interaction hegemonic power is exercised … through coercion and inducements … It is only later that the normative order, into which the secondary nations have been forced or induced to participate, comes to be embraced as rightful … Two factors provide the impetus for legitimisation in the positive inducement model. First, entering into a subsidiary relationship with a hegemon requires compliant behaviour and, consequently, a diminution of de facto political sovereignty. Participation in the system thus threatens to undermine a [secondary] state's domestic legitimacy. The problem can be mitigated if the public of the secondary state sees the hegemon as legitimate. In other words, elites may embrace and espouse the norms articulated by the hegemon in order to enhance their own domestic legitimacy. Second, elites in secondary states may face a degree of cognitive dissonance because the policies they implement may not correspond with their beliefs. The dissonance can be reduced if the norms that guide policy came to correspond more closely to practice.[51]

As mentioned, traditional middle-power societies are among the most egalitarian, a practical expression of the prevalence of socially entrenched welfare and humanist values.[52] It has been argued that the propensity of traditional middle powers for donating high ratios of development aid is an international extension of the deeply entrenched welfare and humanist values that have underpinned the domestic redistributive policies evinced by the Scandinavian welfare state in recent decades.[53] Traditional middle-power foreign aid is a transposition of domestic approaches to economic justice and equality to the international sphere. However, the mere presence of societal values is not enough to account for the traditional middle-power aid practices. One also has to take into account the strength of social democratic parties in Scandinavia and The Netherlands. All traditional middle powers are generous donors of official development assistance (ODA), but a further distinction between liberal democratic middle powers (e.g. Canada and Australia) and more social democratic middle powers (e.g. Sweden and Norway) is possible. Against a background of declining ODA, social democratic middle powers have remained the most generous donors of ODA,[54] with Denmark, Norway, The Netherlands and Sweden occupying the four of the top five positions (Luxembourg is the fifth). Their contributions were significantly more generous that those of the Anglo-Saxon liberal democratic welfare states.[55]

The generous donation of aid can be viewed as one more example of being a good international citizen, although even this is more hegemonically induced

than it may appear, especially in light of Ikenberry and Kupchan's[56] 'positive inducement' model quoted earlier. Furthermore, foreign aid has the effect of appeasing and averting demands for fundamental change in the global economy, working on a similar principle as the extension of the welfare state to poorer classes to dissipate revolt from below in a national setting. Emerging middle powers do not have the material resources to donate aid on a scale similar to that of traditional middle powers. Limited resources steer emerging middle powers into attempting 'heroic'[57] international interventions.[58]

As used to be the case with traditional middle powers during the eras of Lester Pearson and Olaf Palme, statesman-like interventions from leaders in emerging middle powers aim at raising the international profile of their countries along with seeking domestic legitimisation by gaining international approval for foreign policy initiatives. During the initial appearance of states as middle powers, the role performed by national leaders seems disproportionately important compared with later in the lifespan of middle powers. Once a state has established an identity as a good international citizen both domestically and internationally, leaders adopt a lower profile as their states proceed to perform more 'routine' functions (although this should not imply a total absence of influence from traditional middle power leaders altogether).

In the construction of a middle-power identity by leaders from emerging middle powers, it is useful to consider the international prominence of leaders such as Argentina's Carlos Menem, Brazil's Fernando Collor de Mello, Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad, Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo, South Africa's Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki. In the case of South Africa, Nelson Mandela rather unsuccessfully mediated (attempted to mediate) many high-profile international conflicts, such as the Palestinian conflict, the Lockerbie situation, the Northern Ireland conflict, the war in then Zaire, and so on. As South Africa's moral power was asserted through the Mandela persona, the Mbeki era saw a move towards more routine mediation tasks, such as hosting talks between the conflicting parties in the Democratic Republic of Congo and between the Israelis and Palestinians, as well as building support for NEPAD.

In contrast to traditional middle powers, emerging middle-power societies display some of the most unequal domestic distributions of wealth in the world. Material inequality is often superimposed onto ethnic cleavages (e.g. Brazil, Nigeria, Malaysia and South Africa). As history testifies, achieving democracy in (deeply) divided societies has often been a hit and miss affair. Deep divisions in societies indicate and fuel undemocratic practices and values. Gaining international approval for the fledgling democratic government in emerging middle powers legitimises the democratic project *vis-à-vis* (strong) undemocratic elements in their societies. International approval is acquired by conforming to the expectations of various external groups through internationally visible foreign policy behaviour, typically of the 'heroic' kind. Although these practices are often contradictory, it serves the purpose of appeasing various national constituencies and keeping them aboard the democratic project. Increasingly, the democratic project has become divorced from its popular impetus towards a

form of democracy William Robinson has termed 'polyarchy' (in reference to Robert Dahl's notion of limiting 'inputs' into the democratic system). Polyarchical democracy mitigates the racial problems within some emerging middle-power states as it places the parallel class divisions beyond the purview of procedural parliamentary decision-making and influence while recognising the formal equality of all its citizens.

Dictated by their semi-peripheral status, compared with the core position of traditional middle powers in the global economy, emerging middle powers favour greater reform to global economic rules and structures. However, the reform preferred by emerging middle powers is reformist and not fundamental, given that semi-peripheral economies still hold a competitive advantage over peripheral states, especially over those in their immediate geographical vicinity.[59] In this regard, Brazil has embraced the subregional project embodied in MERCOSUR, while resisting hemispheric integration for fear of its powerful position being usurped by the United States. It has sought refuge in the safety in numbers of MERCOSUR offering a front against pervasive American power.[60] The semblance of solidarity among developing states provided by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) provides emerging middle powers (which often fulfil leadership roles within these organisations) with the opportunity of gaining access to the markets of developing states[61] masked by rhetorical references to South–South cooperation and Third World solidarity. As a result emerging middle-powers states adopt reformist positions at the most radical, although they do occasionally challenge hegemonic rudiments, thereby strengthening ties with the minnows in their geographic immediacy and in South-dominated international organisations. The rules of the hegemonic order can also be used against the North, such as when the Helms–Burton act was brought before the World Trade Organisation[62] and the Cairns Group appealed to the principles of free trade.

A way of contrasting the internationalism of these two groups of middle powers is viewing the emerging middle-power orientation as 'reformist', whereas that of the traditional middle powers is 'appeasing', as shaped by their different positions in the global political economy. Appeasement suggests the pacification and containment of potential threats to world order, an agenda less radical than that of emerging middle powers that prefer greater reform whereby they would benefit *vis-à-vis* states in the core of the world economy. The logic of their structural dominance at the core of the world economy militates against traditional middle powers making deep concessions to the interests of peripheral countries. However, the structural self-interest of traditional middle powers is tempered by strong humanitarian values in their state–societal complexes. However, as mentioned, the reform desired by emerging middle powers is not fundamental, as they in turn benefit from their preponderance over states in the periphery of the world economy. Furthermore, fundamental challenges to the global economic structures are undermined by the constrained position of

(economically privileged) governing elites, seeing little alternative to the pervasive neo-liberal ideology, as well as their own elite class interests.

Since the end of the Cold War, spheres of influence have come to acquire greater economic connotations and fewer geo-political ones. Emerging middle powers, which assumed their middle-power roles largely in the aftermath of the Cold War, focus more strongly on their immediate regions than do traditional middle powers by, for example, assuming the lead in processes of regional integration, the same which cannot generally be said of traditional middle powers. Traditional middle powers are not economically dominant or more economically advanced *vis-à-vis* their geographical neighbours. This fact, coupled with the position of traditional middle powers in the core of the world economy and their membership of hegemonic organisations (e.g. the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the G8, etc.), provide them with some (dissipated) influence on a more global level that results in these states having a much stronger 'internationalist' orientation. On a regional level, emerging middle powers seek to exploit their dominance on the one hand (especially economically), but on the other hand they attempt to smooth over the destabilising effects of their regional dominance. However, this does not mean that a regional orientation is lacking among traditional middle powers. All traditional middle powers are situated in one of the three major economic blocs (NAFTA, EU and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) with the resultant integration making a greater regional focus among traditional powers unavoidable, albeit that they are fairly minor partners in these economic blocs. Furthermore, traditional middle powers do sometimes interfere in their own regions, as examples of Australian peacekeeping troops in East Timor and Scandinavian initiatives regarding pollution in former East bloc countries testify. Similarly, emerging middle powers do not just focus their attentions on regional leadership, but they also assert themselves through membership (and often leadership) of South-dominated and/or oriented global associations, such as various United Nations organs (e.g. UNCTAD and the General Assembly) and NAM.

The perception of being neutral in a conflict and having a reputation as an 'honest broker' enables middle powers to mediate in conflicts as third parties. What is the source of perceived middle-power neutrality? Traditional middle-power neutrality derives from its regional ambivalence (stemming from a fear of being subsumed by a regionalist project over which they have little influence and control), mentioned before, but also from its relative regional insignificance, while remaining broadly aligned with the hegemon. By specialising in certain niches of international conflict management, or just behaving as a good international citizen, traditional middle powers are able to establish some international identity independent of the dominant states in their region.

The perceived neutrality of emerging middle powers derives from their strength within their regions and their regional self-association, which undermines the impression that they are mere hegemonic proxies. From outside their regions, emerging middle powers are perceived as relatively neutral courtesy of their regional significance and the wider constituency they are perceived to

represent, as well as their relatively stronger links with the core, thus mediating between the narrower regional interests of weaker states in their proximity and system-wide hegemonic demands. Emerging middle powers typically walk this tightrope by assuming leadership positions in South-dominated international organisations. In some cases, the hegemon even welcomes opposition from emerging middle powers, as the hegemon can later draw on this semblance of emerging middle-power independence to assist in legitimising the hegemonic project with regard to other issues.[63] Ironically, by performing typical middle-power tasks, emerging middle powers seek to construct an identity more removed from the regions that give them their relative international visibility and influence. In South Africa this tendency is noticeable in the example of South Africa seeking debt relief for other Southern African states, but not for itself.[64] A reason for South Africa distancing itself from other Southern African states becomes apparent if one considers, for example, the negative effect the recent faltering of democracy and civil order in Zimbabwe has had on the South African currency, currency values often being determined more by perception than reality. Turkey is another example of a country trying to establish a certain distance from some of its Islamic neighbours, countering Western orientalism so as to enable greater association with the EU.

Conclusion

Emerging and traditional middle powers conform to the middle-power role by their legitimising and stabilising actions that enable a smoother functioning of the global order, sometimes in support of the hegemon, sometimes in its absence. Despite the many described similarities between emerging and traditional middle powers, numerous significant differences exist. The end of the Cold War has resulted in global economic issues assuming greater prominence, which has created a favourable environment for semi-peripheral states seeking to raise issues of global economic equality and justice, limited as their perspectives on these issues may be.

What this article has sought to accomplish was to indicate a need to distinguish between two groups of middle powers—emerging and traditional—thereby reducing the vagueness of the middle-power concept, which has ac-companied the appearance of emerging middle powers in the global arena. However, many areas remain open to investigation. As emerging middle powers seem to have created a post-Cold War niche in propagating the increased inclusion in the world economy for the developing countries, what will be the future niches for traditional middle powers? To date, there exists a dearth of in-depth studies on some of the emerging middle powers, notably Nigeria and Brazil. Furthermore, the relationship between middle powers and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) need to be studied. More specifically, are INGOs usurping many of the roles previously performed by middle powers? How can an alliance between the forces of global civil society, INGOs and middle powers be created, facilitated and sustained in achieving a more peaceful

and equitable world beyond the mere assuagement of potential disruptions of the current world order? Finally, is there a likelihood of seeing the rise of leader states whose foreign policies are more removed from those that legitimise and maintain the current hegemonic order, as middle powers typically do?

Notes and references

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1. An earlier draft of this article was presented at the Conference of the South African Association of Political Studies, University of Durban-Westville, South Africa, 5–7 October 2001.

2. For such a wider application of the middle power concept, see, for example, the contributions to A. F. Cooper (ed.) (1997), *Niche Diplomacy: Middle Powers after the Cold War* (New York: Macmillan), as well as J. van der Westhuizen (1998), 'South Africa's Emergence as a Middle Power', *Third World Quarterly*, 19 (3), pp. 435–456, and two pieces by P. Nel, I. Taylor and J. van der Westhuizen (2000), 'Multilateralism in South Africa's Foreign Policy: The Search for a Critical Rationale', *Global Governance*, 6 (1), pp. 43–60 and P. Nel, I. Taylor and J. van der Westhuizen (eds) (2001), 'Reformist Initiatives and South Africa's Multilateral Diplomacy: A Framework for Understanding', *South Africa's Multilateral Diplomacy and Global Change: The Limits of Reformism* (Aldershot: Ashgate).

3. What is understood in this article as '*emerging* middle powers', the term taken from Van der Westhuizen, Cooper calls 'a *putative third wave* of middle powers' whereas Black refers to these states as '*rising* middle powers'; Van der Westhuizen (1998), *ibid.*, pp. 43–60; A. F. Cooper (1997), 'Niche Diplomacy: A Conceptual Overview', in Cooper (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 16; D. Black (1997), 'Addressing Apartheid; Lessons from Australian, Canadian and Swedish Policies in Southern Africa', in Cooper (ed.) (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 103.

4. A. F. Cooper, R. A. Higgott and K. R. Nossal (1993), *Relocating Middle Powers: Australia and Canada in a Changing World Order* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press).

5. 'Constitutive features' are understood as the ontological categories through which we understand, quantify and compare more abstract concepts, such as 'state', although the sum of the constitutive features cannot ever equal the whole.

6. C. Holbraad (1984), *Middle Powers in International Politics* (London: Macmillan).

7. R. W. Cox (1996), *Approaches to World Order*, with Timothy Sinclair (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press).

8. C. Pratt (ed.) (1990), 'Middle Power Internationalism and Global Poverty', *Middle Power Internationalism: The North-South Dimension* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press).

9. M. Neufeld (1995), 'Hegemony and Foreign Policy Analysis: The Case of Canada', *Studies in Political Economy*, 48, pp. 7–29.

10. Primary texts in the neo-Gramscian approach to the international relations are S. Gill (ed.) (1993), *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); and Cox (1996), *op. cit.* For examples of a neo-Gramscian approach to foreign policy, see Cox (1996), *ibid.*, pp. 241–75; Neufeld (1995), *ibid.*; and I. Taylor (2000), *Hegemony, 'Common Sense' and Compromise: A Neo-Gramscian Analysis of Multilateralism and South Africa's Post-Apartheid Foreign Policy*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Stellenbosch.

11. Cooper *et al.* (1993), *op. cit.*

12. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

13. Black (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 103.

14. For example, Cooper *et al.* (1993), *op. cit.*, pp. 83–115.

15. On the scope, style, focus, forms and forums of middle power diplomacy, see K. R. Nossal and R. Stubbs (1997), 'Mahathir's Malaysia: An Emerging Middle Power?', in Cooper (ed.) (1997), *op. cit.*, pp. 149–51; and Taylor (2000), *op. cit.*, pp. 71–3.

16. Consider, for example, the campaign by traditional middle powers for sanctions against apartheid South Africa, in Black (1997), *op. cit.*, pp. 104–7.

17. In 2000, the 71-year dominance of the Partido Revolucianario Institucional (PRI) came to an end. Under the PRI, Mexico did not behave like a typical emerging middle power. It resisted regional integration (particularly further to its south) and was explicitly not supportive of measures to advance democracy in

other countries; L. Bélanger and G. Mace (1997), 'Middle Powers and Regionalism: The Cases of Argentina and Mexico', in Cooper (ed.) (1997), *op. cit.*

18. Cox (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 243.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
21. Black (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 102.
22. Cooper (ed.) (1997), *op. cit.*, pp. 6–7.
23. Cox (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 250.
24. Bélanger and Mace (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 166.
25. A. K. Henrikson (1997), 'Middle Powers as Managers: International Mediation within, across and outside Institutions', in Cooper (ed.) (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 61.
26. R. W. Cox (1981), 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium*, 10 (2), p. 136.
27. For example, see F. H. Gareau (1996), 'International Institutions and the Gramscian Legacy: Its Modification, Expansion and Reaffirmation', *The Social Science Journal*, 33 (2), pp. 223–35; also P. Nel (1999), 'Approaches to Multilateralism', paper written for and delivered at the Biennial Conference of the South African Political Science Association, 29 June–2 July 1999, Saldanha, South Africa; and Taylor (2000), *op. cit.*
28. These clear fundamentals are neo-liberal economics, liberal democracy (polyarchy), conspicuous consumption, popular Western culture and 'possessive individualism' (in Crawford MacPherson's phrase).
29. In this regard, see E. Augelli and C. N. Murphy (1993), 'Gramsci and International Relations: A General Perspective with Examples from recent US Policy toward the Third World', in Gill (ed.) (1993), *op. cit.*
30. Nel (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 14.
31. Black (1997), *op. cit.*
32. Nel *et al.* (2000), *op. cit.*
33. P. J. Biersteker (2002), 'States, Sovereignty and Territory', in W. Carlsnaes, T. Russe and B. A. Simmons (eds) *Handbook of International Relations* (London: Sage) p. 169.
34. On the rise of this 'complex' or 'new' multilateralism, see Nel (1999), *op. cit.*; M. Schechter (1998), *Future Multilateralism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan); and M. Schechter (1999), *Innovation in Multilateralism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan).
35. For example, democratic elections finally happened in Argentina in 1983, Brazil in 1985, Nigeria in 1999 (after many interrupted attempts) and South Africa in 1994.
36. On the relationship between polyarchy and hegemony, see W. I. Robinson (1996), 'Globalization, the World System, and "Democracy Promotion" in US Foreign Policy', *Theory and Society*, 25, pp. 615–65.
37. During a statement at the United Nations in November 2001, South African president Thabo Mbeki was careful to acknowledge the significance of the 9/11 attacks on the United States and, in anticipation of the growing attention to issues we are currently witnessing, urged a recognition of global interconnectedness and identified global poverty and deprivation as 'the fundamental source of conflict in the world today'. T. Mbeki (2001), *Statement at the Debate of the Fifty-First Session of the United Nations General Assembly* (www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/2001/tm1110.html).
38. In this regard, consider the reformist engagement of traditional middle powers with demands from the South for New International Economic Order; Black (1997), *op. cit.*
39. This has been deduced from the Human Poverty Index-2, which measures the presence of poverty in industrialised states; United Nations Development Programme (2000), *Human Development Report 2000* (New York: Oxford University Press) p. 152.
40. World Bank (2002), *Deininger and Squire Data Set: A New Data Set Measuring Income Inequality* (www.worldbank.org/research/growth/dddeisqu.htm). For criticism of the Deininger and Squire data set, see J. K. Galbraith (2002), 'A Perfect Crime: Inequality in the Age of Globalization', *Daedalus*, 131 (1), p. 13.
41. United Nations Development Programme (2002), *Human Development Report 2002* (www.undp.org/reports/global/2002/en/indicator/indicator.cfm?File = indic_276_1_1.html).
42. United Nations Development Programme (2001), *Human Development Report 2001* (www.undp.org/hdr2001/back.pdf).
43. Nigeria's regional dominance becomes apparent when compared with the other fourteen members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In terms of population size and gross national income, the Nigerian figure exceeds the combined totals of the other 14 members of ECOWAS on both counts, as deduced from the World Bank (2003), *The World Development Report 2003* (New York: Oxford University Press) pp. 234–42. This 'natural' dominance is augmented by Nigeria's relative importance to the West (largely because of its rich oil deposits).
44. B. Laffan (1992), *Integration and Cooperation in Europe* (London: Routledge).

45. Cooper *et al*. (1993), *op. cit*., p. 107.
46. Nossal and Stubbs (1997), *op. cit.*
47. P. Cammack (1999), 'MERCOSUR: From Domestic Concerns to Regional Influence', in G. Hook and I. Kearns (eds) *Subregionalism and World Order* (London: Macmillan Press) p. 95.
48. Bélanger and Mace (1997), *op. cit*., pp. 172–3.
49. Black (1997), *op. cit*., p. 102.
50. G. J. Ikenberry and C. A. Kupchan (1990), 'The Legitimation of Hegemonic Power', in D. P. Rapkin (ed.) *World Leadership and Hegemony* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner).
51. *Ibid*., p. 57
52. D. H. Lumsdaine (1993), *Moral Vision in International Politics: The Foreign Aid Regime, 1949–1989* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) p. 121.
53. *Ibid*., p. 121.
54. As measured by the percentage of the ODA per gross national income.
55. From the period 1986–1990 to 2001, the ODA from members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has declined from 0.33 to 0.22 per cent of the ODA per gross national income. In 2001, Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden all donated more than 0.8 per cent of their gross national income as ODA, whereas Australia and Canada gave less than 0.3 per cent; OECD (2003), *Table 6a. ODA Performance of DAC Countries* (www.oecd.org/xls/m00037000/m00037866.xls).
56. Ikenberry and Kupchan (1990), *op. cit*., p. 57.
57. Cooper *et al*. (1993, *op. cit*., p. 28) distinguish between middle-power initiatives as falling somewhere on a continuum of intensity, the poles of which being 'heroic' initiatives and 'routine' initiatives.
58. Argentina donates a sizeable amount of food aid, but this is to be regarded as the dumping of agricultural surplus, rather than Argentinean benevolence.
59. J. van der Westhuizen, I. Taylor and P. Nel (2001), 'Of Rogues, Rebels, Renegades and Reformers', in Nel *et al*. (eds) (2001), *op. cit*., p. 116.
60. M. R. Saores de Lima (1996), 'Brazil's Response to the "New Regionalism" ', in G. Mace and J-P. Thérien (eds) *Foreign Policy and Regionalism in the Americas* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner) pp. 137–58.
61. A. F. Cooper (1998), 'The Multiple Faces of South African Foreign Policy', *International Journal*, Autumn, pp. 705–32.
62. Taylor (2000), *op. cit*., p. 211.
63. Nel *et al*. (2000), *op. cit*., p. 47.
64. On this issue, see J. van der Westhuizen (2001), 'In Debt we Trust: South Africa and the Global Debt Relief Campaign', in Nel *et al*. (eds) (2001), *op. cit.*