

EDITOR'S NOTE

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In a short period, the African continent became, from a situation of lesser relevance for the analysts, a region of higher strategic value. The complex academic understanding of this evolution is made difficult, in Brazil, for unfamiliarity towards the region and, in Europe, for the prejudiced vision. But, as a Brazilian diplomat stationed in the old continent once argued, “ignorance is more easily overcome than prejudice”. Thus, as a contribution to the debate, AUSTRAL dedicates this issue to the international relations of Africa.

The dynamic axis of the world system had already been gradually moving from North to South, from the center to the semi-periphery, a process that radiates shock waves to the periphery. With the Euro-American economic and financial crisis, started in 2008-2009, and the consequent deepening of diplomatic and military tensions worldwide, part of the traditional powers reacted against this evolutionary redistribution of spheres of power. Russia and China, however, have shown steadiness, while the Middle East and Latin America, with different intensities, are diving into a situation of uncertainty.

Africa, in turn, given its geopolitical position and its new vectors of international insertion, has become an extremely relevant locus for the repositioning of forces in global scale. It has been a space of hitherto low strategic density, where the use of limited resources can have an extended effect. In this continent, the economic pressures and the Color Revolutions (Regime Change) are less efficient, and the power projection by the North

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occurs in a traditional way: militarization, conflicts (with an old form but new content) and economic competition against the emerging powers for natural resources and investment zones.

This is because the BRICS, for two decades, have been increasingly present in the continent, accelerating the African development and reconfiguring the national and international power of the continent's nations. Even the United States, which had shown little interest towards Africa until then, became present and active, in an expedited manner. The fight against "terrorism" in the Sahara, the establishment of AFRICOM (Africa Command), the reestablishment of the Fourth Fleet in the South Atlantic Ocean and the increasing military, economic and political presence are some of the examples of this process.

The growing presence of China, India and Brazil in the African continent is also followed by that of Russia, Turkey, Iran and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, in addition to Cuba's permanent presence. Such phenomenon occurred in parallel (and in an interactive way) with the affirmation of the new South Africa, Angola, Nigeria and Libya, and the launching of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU), both in 2002. Such events contributed to Africa's economic, social and political advances, as well as for a larger autonomy and diplomatic protagonism of the continent's nations.

The association of Africans with the emerging powers in international organizations and their connection with the new economic flows generated a challenging perception in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). This was associated with the geopolitical position of the continent, which embraces, equally, the maritime spaces of the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. For the traditional powers to breach the forming southern axis, it is necessary to control or, at least, influence the states of Africa.

The Western control over Northeast Africa is important to keep a position of flank that allows for monitoring the Indian Ocean and the Middle East, from which the United States flows back. And the shift of the US axis of interest to the oil of Brazil (pre-salt) and the Gulf of Guinea (which offer security facilities and low shipping cost), on the other hand, makes South Atlantic an important sphere for Washington. The natural resources and

political position of the South American and African nations make this ocean a space to which the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) seeks to project power.

NATO's intervention in Libya, the militarization of the Sahara on the pretext of "fighting terrorism", the renewed French interventions in several African nations and the growing US military presence across the continent (advisors, maneuvers, weapons supply) are indicators of the new dispute over Africa. How will the African nations and their emerging partners react? A new scenario is being drawn, with unpredictable consequences.

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NERINT, 15 YEARS

In August 2014, the Brazilian Centre for Strategy and International Relations (NERINT) at the Latin American Institute for Advanced Studies (ILEA) of UFRGS, co-editor of AUSTRAL, celebrates the fifteenth anniversary of its foundation. Its independent academic activity has been crowned with success, for the publication of 36 books, conducting dozens of national and international seminars and, above all, because it constituted the basis for the creation of undergraduate and graduate programs in International Relations at UFRGS. It also housed the Brazilian Centre for African Studies (CEBRAFRICA, formerly CESUL), which celebrates in the same month its nine years of existence.

The cooperation with specialized centers and academics from all continents represents, likewise, a milestone of its achievements. Moreover, its anticipatory vision of the global system transformation demonstrated its success in seeking an alternative (and difficult) path of affirmation in the field

of international studies. Few weeks before NERINT's fifteenth anniversary, the BRICS gathered in Fortaleza, Brazil, making important decisions, which converge with its research agenda.

Our deepest thanks to all research professors, graduate students and Scientific Initiation fellows who have collectively built this center, differentiated from the officialism and/or foreignism of some counterparts. In fifteen years of existence, NERINT has contributed to the diplomatic and academic renewal of Brazil and other developing nations. It has also sought to contribute to building a multipolar world of peace and economic and social development for all peoples.