

THE (RE)EMERGENCE OF THE BRICS AND THE REORGANIZATION OF POWER IN CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICS

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Introduction

World geopolitics and international relations underwent several transformations throughout the 20th century. Among the most important, the two great world wars and the rearrangement of the post-war world that followed, can be mentioned. The reorganization of the world system in the post-war period involved the *Pax Americana* and the making of a world order linked to the United States, in parallel with the rise of the USSR to the status of military and ideological power, disputing with the US the status of hegemonic power, in a bipolarity that disappeared with the breakdown of the socialist ideological bloc.

As the United States consolidated itself as hegemon (main hegemonic power)³, it had to deal with the consolidation of a systemic cycle of accumulation and its consequent downward trajectory. The first two decades of the 21st century marked the reemergence of other powers, with the resurgence of Russia and China: Russia recovering part of its sphere of influence in its surroundings, under the command of Vladimir Putin; and China consolidating itself as a global economic power, both playing an important role on the world geopolitical board. These countries took advantage of the gaps created by yet another structural crisis of world capitalism, materialized in the “crisis of 2008”, which consequences influenced the relative decline of

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³ Later on we will have a more detailed discussion on the issue of US “hegemony”.

the United States' ability to impose its majority will on the world system, as they have done since the end of World War II.

This essay aims to analyze the global geopolitical rearrangement that occurs in the wake of the US weakening, which allowed the emergence of the BRICS as a possible pole of power. To support this approach, World Systems Analysis (WSA) is used, developed mainly by Immanuel Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi. In addition to taking into account the geopolitical dimension, parallels are also drawn with the theories of international relations, in order to expand the explanatory potential of this analysis. As a related objective, it is possible to use all these instruments to assess the way in which the BRICS are articulating to face the pandemic of the new coronavirus. The Bank of the BRICS seems to establish itself, therefore, as a support pillar of the group and the main external financier of financial solutions to face the economic crisis that accompanies the global health crisis caused by Covid-19.

Thus, this work is divided into three sections. The first section seeks to interrelate the theories of geopolitics and international relations around the analysis of WSA. In the second section, the motivations and effects of the rearrangement of power in world geopolitics are addressed. Finally, in the last section, the roles played and the opportunities brought by the emergence of the BRICS in the international system will be highlighted, assessing how the new coronavirus pandemic influences this scenario.

Geopolitics and International Relations and The World Systems Analysis

The links between geopolitics and international relations could be foreseen by the presence of the geopolitical discipline in the curriculum of most international relations courses in Brazil. If this is due to the fact that the two fields of knowledge partially share the same phenomenon of study with regard to "power", there is another issue that brings them together: the interdisciplinarity of these fields.

Geopolitics was never raised to the status of a science, always lending itself to be an important knowledge for several areas, while international relations were consolidated late in the 20th century as an university course, bringing, even due to its late institutionalization, the non-pretension of being considered science and its multidisciplinary enterprise character (Starr 1991). Born in the 19th century, geopolitics experienced a relative decline after the end of World War II, as it was appropriated by the Nazis in their expansionist project. Given its resurgence since the 1970s, it continued to

be “an ‘itinerant theory par excellence’, in the sense of having entered a wide variety of disciplines and geographic regions” (Gökmen 2010, 141).

Deepening this observation, we have that geopolitical theories inform and/or are informed by international relations theories, in an ahistorical process, producing dialogues between different schools, starting from Hans Morgenthau’s statements, in which points of intersection between traditional geopolitics and classical realism can be discerned, up to Immanuel Wallerstein, with his *Analysis of World-Systems*, which was incorporated into the (neo) Marxism of international relations and to critical geopolitics in Taylor’s (1994) reading. Critical geopolitics also has very clear relations with the constructivist approach to international relations, in matters relating to the formation of international identity in the area of security and strategic culture (Mahmadou and Dijkink 2006).

Analyzing the contribution of geopolitics to international relations, Castro (2012), despite maintaining the focus of his analysis in the Nation-state, lists seven spatial dimensions that must be evaluated, from a geopolitical point of view, in addition to the mere question of power:

In the parameters of geopolitical studies linked to International Relations, it is not only necessary to assess the state’s military power. It is essential to mention, in addition, seven cardinal characteristics that, together with war power (hard power) and cultural power (soft power), reveal the projection of growth or the vulnerability of countries: location, total dimension, topography, climatology, the territorial cut (format), the demographic distribution and the national government (Castro 2012, 143).

On the intersections between these areas of knowledge, Teixeira Jr (2017, 152) points out that “geopolitics, Marxism and international relations would be found in the fruitful construction of critical knowledge about processes such as globalization, worldization and regionalism”. Therefore, we seek to understand, later, how geopolitics and international relations are found in WSA.

WSA emerged from the criticism of the social and economic analysis model used by the social sciences since the 19th century. Between 1850 and 1945, the most important intellectual cleavages among academics since the 19th century were: the past/present and the Western world/rest of the world. Within this logic, historians studied the past, while economists, political scientists and sociologists were responsible for studying the present.

History, economics, political science and sociology were focused on the Western world, while “Orientalists” and anthropologists studied the “rest of

the world”⁴. Until 1945, the boundaries between these disciplines were clearly defined. In the post-war period, according to Wallerstein, this model failed to account for the new reality that emerged with the process of independence struggles.

Under attack, the current model of analysis of the social sciences began to weaken. For Wallerstein, “the biggest change in global social science in the 25 years after 1945 was the discovery of contemporary reality in the Third World” (Wallerstein 2002, 231).

As a consequence, research in the Western world was divided into three domains, according to the new configuration of the modern world: the market (economy), the State (political science) and civil society (sociology). A new context opened up in the post-45 period, with the independence struggles. The former colonies tried to defend their political and cultural autonomy in the midst of national liberation struggles and in international events, such as the Bandung Conference⁵ in 1955. It was a process of reaffirmation and/or self-affirmation before the Western world, which was accompanied, on an intellectual level, by studies on these regions, Latin America, Asia and Africa.

In opposition to this movement, some sectors of the academy developed theories that justified the “delay” of the former colonies, with the idea of development in stages, as an evolutionary process. Thus, the Modernization Theory (MT) emerged, whose method of analysis was the systematic comparison between all States. MT started from the premise of a linear and universal model of development of all societies in the direction of economic growth. Thus, all former colonies would inevitably reach development by copying the “models of success” of the old metropolises, regardless of how each nation was inserted in the systemic structure of Capitalism.

Although for some analysts, WSA presents itself as an adaptation of MT, for presenting an explanation of the economic development process linked to the dynamic Center (rich countries), Periphery and Semiperiphery (underdeveloped countries) (Wallerstein 2002, 4), Wallerstein says that “[...] [the] “original intention of the analysis of world-systems [was] the protest against the modernization theory” [...] (Wallerstein 2002, 234). In this process, poor countries would have qualitative disadvantages in terms of exchange between products with little added value (raw materials, for example) and products with high added value (industrialized), from the most developed

4 Anthropologists studied “primitive” societies and Orientalists studied non-Western “great civilizations”.

5 The conference brought together countless countries in the then Third World that did not accept the bipolarity between the US/USSR as a way of dividing the international system.

nations (Center) of the capitalist world-system. The technological gap between nations would be the central point in the mechanism of economic and social backwardness and in maintaining this *status quo*.

The focus of the world-system began to be drawn, then, in the 1970s, with authors such as Samir Amin, André Gunder Frank and Theotônio dos Santos, “but it gains really great encouragement with the work of Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1980, 1989)” (Santos 2000, 55). The theoretical construction elaborated by Wallerstein, which in the international relations theories is framed in the neomarxist perspective (Nogueira and Messari 2005)⁶, has three important influences in its constitution: *Annales* School, Marxism and the Dependence Theory (Vela 2001).

As already mentioned, WSA emerged as a theoretical corpus that put MT in check and then, more fundamentally, the entire structure built by the social sciences since the 19th century. As proposed by Wallerstein, WSA should contain three axes. One would have to do with space, another with time, and with epistemology:

- 1) The World-System (not the Nation-States) is the basic unit of social analysis;
- 2) Nor are idiographic⁷ and nomothetic⁸ epistemologies useful for analyzing social reality;
- 3) The existence of discipline boundaries within the social sciences does not make any intellectual sense.

Wallerstein defined the world-system as [...] “[a] territorial division of multicultural work in which the production and exchange of basic goods and raw materials is necessary for the life of its inhabitants every day” (Vela 2001, 4). The world in which we are now inserted, that is, the modern world system, had its origins in the 16th century. This world system was initially located in only part of the globe, mainly in regions of Europe and the Americas, having expanded over the centuries to reach practically the entire global space. It is, and always has been, a world economy. It is, and always has been, a capitalist world economy (Vela 2001, III).

According to Wallerstein, the current capitalist world-economy (world-system) originated from the crisis of the feudal system and the rise of Western Europe to global supremacy, between 1450 and 1670. After the hegemony of Italian city-states and the Netherlands, there was the British ascendancy,

⁶ Although it has strands that are not always directly linked to Marx’s readings.

⁷ Necessarily linked to the creation of general laws of great explanatory scope.

⁸ It establishes general laws for the understanding of phenomena that can be reproduced. In general, it would correspond to hard sciences.

characterized by a continuous process of expansion, restructuring and financial reorganization of the capitalist world economy. The periods of financial expansion (financialization) were times when competitive pressures increased, both on governments, as well as on companies and trade. These pressures favored English industrial expansion, which remained in the global economic supremacy until the beginning of the 20th century.

After the British hegemonic collapse, the US emerged as the main economic power and, after the Second World War, reached technological and military supremacy during the Cold War, becoming the superpower after the collapse of the socialist bloc in 1989 and the end of the USSR in 1991. For Wallerstein, as in previous hegemonic periods, American hegemony tends to dissipate and be replaced by another. For this reason, it is necessary to analyze the rearrangements of power in world geopolitics.

The Rearrangements of Power in World Geopolitics

As already noted, the changes that took place in the late 20th and early 21st centuries demonstrate that the capitalist world-system is changing (Wallerstein 2001, 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Arrighi 1996, 2008). The 2008 systemic crisis, which affected the center of capitalism in an intense way, corroborates this perspective mainly from the perspective of geopolitics.

The 21st century presents a series of geopolitical scenarios that bring as a basic standard the relative weakening of the United States as a hard protagonist. The 21st century tends not to be the “American century” due to the serious problems faced by the US, not only in the economy, but also in the ideological dimension, which is another basis for the country’s acceptance as a natural world leader.

Even in the 20th century, the United States was not an isolated protagonist on the planet. The very idea of an American hegemony has been the subject of reassessment. Joseph F. Nye Jr., in his article *Is the American Century Over?* (2015), addresses this issue, indicating the term primacy as the most appropriate to designate the period. The existence of a socialist bloc between 1945 and 1989, coupled with the preservation of the Cuban and Chinese regimes, would put US hegemony in check. More precisely:

As we have seen, the term “hegemony” is a concept too imprecise to be used in the definition of “American century”. Sometimes, it means having a preponderance of power resources, sometimes the behavior of setting rules for others and, sometimes, getting the results you want. Because of this ambiguity, we cannot date when it begins or ends. Noam Chomsky further

argues that the “loss of China ‘was the first major step in the’ decline of America” or in that period when many others are on the rise. If there was ever an American hegemony, it would have been since 1945, when the United States had almost half of the world economy as a result of World War II, until 1970, when American participation in world output declined to its pre-war level of a quarter of world production. However, even during this period, the United States often failed to get what it wanted - as witnessed by the Soviet acquisition of nuclear weapons; the communist control of China and half of Vietnam, the stalemate in the Korean War, the Soviet suppression of the revolts in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Fidel Castro’s control over Cuba and so on. So, instead of “hegemony”, I prefer to use the terms “primacy” or “preeminence” because of the disproportionate aspect (and what can be learned) of each of the three sources of power (Nye Jr 2015).

For Wallerstein, the decline of the US began in the 1970s and occurred according to the logic that “(...) the economic, political and military factors that contributed to the prominence of the US are the same factors that will produce the imminent decline of the US” (Wallerstein 2004, 21). Historically, the prominence of the US began with the world recession of 1873, when its economy grew sharply at the same time as the British economy entered an inflection. In the period between 1873 and 1914, the US and Germany became the main producers of steel and chemicals, dominating industrial processes.

The search for primacy has become a natural process. World War II provided a privileged position for the United States, which did not directly suffer the catastrophic effects of the war. Its territory did not suffer any damage in physical-structural terms, unlike Europe and Asia. According to Wallerstein, the post-war US success as an hegemonic power caused its own decay to begin:

The success of the US as an hegemonic power in the post-war period created the conditions for its own hegemony to be undermined. This process can be captured in four symbols: the Vietnam War, the 1968 revolutions, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the terrorist attacks of September 2001. Each symbol adds to the previous one, culminating in the situation in which the United States finds itself today: a lonely superpower that lacks real power, a world leader that no one follows and few respect, and a dangerously adrift nation, immersed in a global chaos that can’t control (Wallerstein 2004, 25).

The four events pointed out by Wallerstein would represent each moment of the decline of American power, which bequeathed military spending in an increasing line and the ideological weakening of the capitalist system as the creator of a “free society”. Without the old Cold War clash, the

US was left alone on the global stage. With the entire focus of American foreign policy practically directed towards the Middle East, since the end of the Cold War, the White House has loosened its “control” over former less important areas of the planet, but which have gained some prominence on the international chess board because of the great communist “threat”.

The Barack Obama administration (2009-2017) tried to reverse this loss of ideological strength by seeking to use soft power⁹ as the easiest way to regain its prestige. But it did not prevent the emergence of new poles of power, such as the BRICS.

The (Re) Emergence of the BRICS and the (Post) Pandemic Scenario

Based on the decline of US influence in recent decades, the emergence of important players at the beginning of the 21st century and the questioning of their unilateral stances, the emergence of the BRICS represented a common perspective of a multipolar and multilateral world to face global problems. Despite the disbelief from part of the central core of capitalism, the BRICS gained geopolitical projection of great importance in the beginning of the 21st century. The states that make up this power bloc hold 26% of the territory, 42% of the population and 14% of world GDP, as well as contributing more than 50% of the increase in world GDP between 2005 and 2010 (Visentini 2015, 155).

For many conservative analysts, the BRICS did not have any possibility of organizing a common agenda that involved a major articulation on the international stage. The original proposal, made by economist Jim O’Neill, in 2001, through the *Building Better Global Economic* report, was a way of jointly analyzing such economies by the investment bank Goldman Sachs. Thus came the acronym for the four largest emerging economies in the world (Brazil, Russia, India and China), adding to South Africa in 2010, allowing the current configuration.

The inclusion of South Africa was of great importance for the group’s “globalization”, increasing its representativeness within the emerging world. According to Stuenkel,

South Africa’s inclusion was notable for three reasons. First, because it

⁹ Term created by Joseph Nye, professor at Harvard University, to designate the capacity of a State to ideologically and culturally influence other nations without using coercive means to succeed in defending its interests. It is the opposite of the concept of hard power.

weakened the importance of the civilizational aspect in international politics - after all, the BRICS originated, to use Samuel Huntington's definitions, five distinct civilizations. It is in this respect that the BRICS diverges more radically from the common alliances of international politics (Stuenkel 2017, 82).

Despite this expansion that took place in 2010 and sometimes it is suggested that other countries join the bloc (mainly through isolated Chinese initiatives), the hard core of the BRICS is in the so-called "strategic triangle" of the RIC (Russia, India and China). Brazil and South Africa enter more to fulfill the representation of regional powers in their (sub) continents. India could be classified under the same label, but it differs from Brazil and South Africa for its growth projections and for its strategic location with Eurasian partners. An analysis of GDP is not sufficient to demonstrate this discrepancy, as we see in table 1:

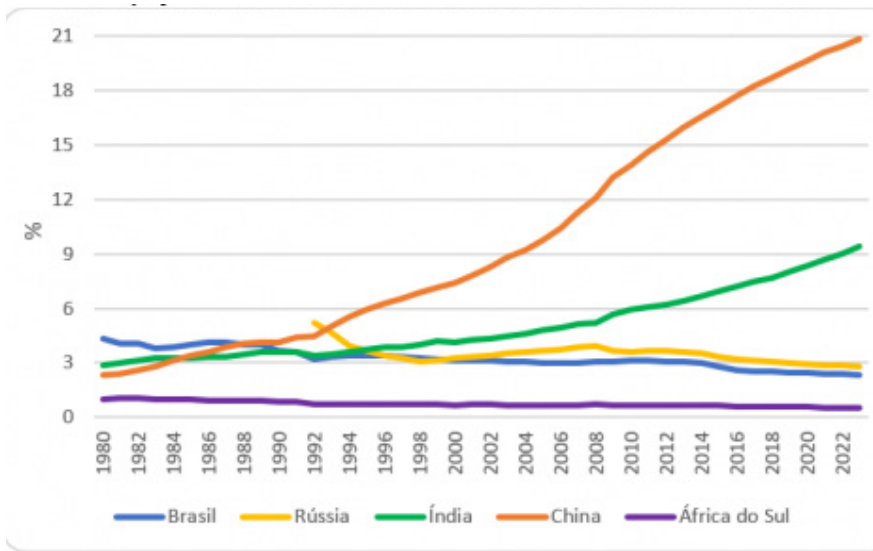
Table 1 - Gross Domestic Product - BRICS (2018)

STATE	GDP (nominal/ billions of dollars)
Brazil	1,885
Russia	1,658
India	2,719
China	13,608
South Africa	368

Source: Prepared by the authors with data from the World Bank (2020): <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>.

The distance from Russia, India and China to Brazil and South Africa can be better seen when analyzing the historical series of these growth indicators, as in graphs 1 and 2¹⁰: Graphic 1 shows a different pace of growth for the RIC, starting in the 2000s, in relation to the other countries of the bloc. Graphic 2 confirms this trend by demonstrating the pace of GDP per capita growth in the BRICS countries.

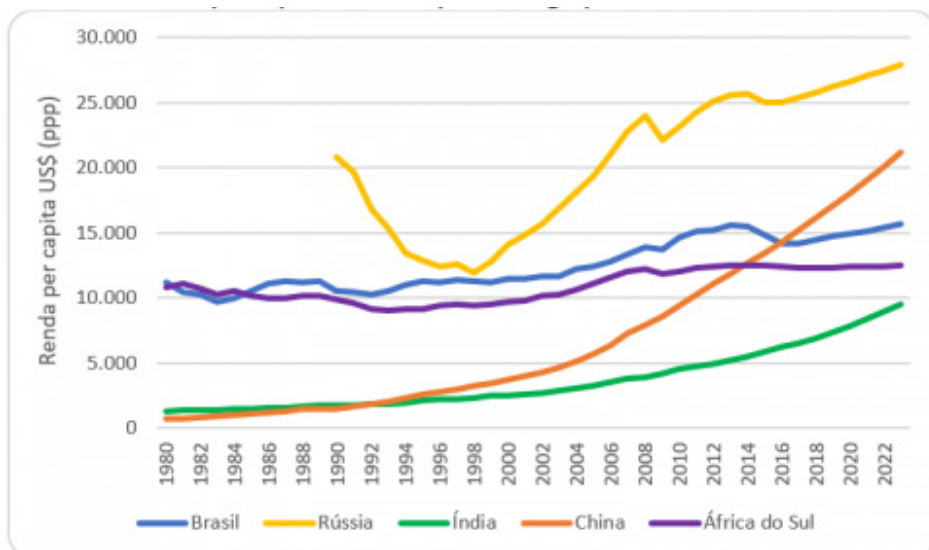
¹⁰ Reproduced by Alves (2018).



FMI. WEO, abril 2017 <http://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/datasets/WEO>

Graphic 1 - GDP share of BRICS members in world GDP (1980-2023)

Although India has a GDP per capita lower than all other countries, as shown in Graphic 2, it is projected a continued growth that will surpass Brazil and South Africa in the 2020s.



FMI. WEO. abril 2017 <http://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/datasets/WEO>

Graphic 2 - Per capita income of the five BRICS countries (1980-2023)

This same euphoria in relation to the future of the BRICS is not shared by the main theorist of World System Analysis. Immanuel Wallerstein addressed the group of emerging countries in two articles, in 2013 and 2016, showing concern about the bloc's geopolitical and economic aspirations (Wallerstein 2013, 2016):

The structural crisis of the world system is moving very fast, and in many ways uncertain, to assume sufficient relative stability to allow the BRICS, as such, to continue to play a special role, geopolitically or economically. Like globalization itself as a concept, the BRICS can become a passing phenomenon (Wallerstein 2013, 1).

China and Russia, the two most powerful countries in the BRICS today, face United States competition for areas of influence. Washington's aggressive rhetoric and economic measures against Beijing demonstrate Donald Trump's great concern for the country's economic and geopolitical development in recent years. Despite the decrease in its economic growth, Beijing has been increasing its economic influence in various parts of the world, either through the project *The New Silk Road* or through its activities on the African continent, for example. In addition to its companies competing on an equal footing with Westerners (Huawei, for example), China has been taking advantage of the geopolitical and economic loopholes created by the United States in recent years to increase its influence.

Moscow has been impacted by a series of economic measures that seek to weaken the Russian national project carried out by Vladimir Putin. This has occurred with greater emphasis since 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, given the possibility of a pro-Western government in Ukraine and at the doors of its territory. Washington, for example, has seen Moscow in recent years as a growing threat to American strategic interests:

Russia's geopolitical challenge in relation to the United States is also growing. Since Vladimir Putin returned to the presidency in 2012, Moscow has invaded and annexed Crimea; occupied parts of eastern Ukraine; deployed substantial military forces and undertook a relentless bombing campaign in Syria to support President Bashar al-Assad; significantly expanded its armed forces; carried out military exercises designed to intimidate the governments of Eastern Europe; interfered in Eastern European political systems; and threatened to cut gas for the most energy-dependent European states. Putin is a career intelligence officer deeply hostile to democratic changes in any territory close to Russia, paranoid about what he believes the US efforts are

to bring it down, and resentful of American domination of the post-Cold War world. He seems to consider it a personal priority to weaken the United States and combat American influence wherever he can (Blackwill and Gordon 2018, 1).

As China and Russia are the main protagonists of the BRICS, the weakening of both would represent the very decline of the bloc and its goals of building a new global governance in a multipolar and multilateral world. Wallerstein (2013) draws attention to the fact that geopolitics is not the only thing that matters, as we need to look at the domestic issues of the countries that make up the BRICS, the relations between the members of the bloc, and the relationship of the members of the group with countries outside the bloc.

Unlike Russia and China, which historically have a commitment to national unity, that is, a clear definition of the roles to be played by their States, Brazil does not usually recognize its attributions as a regional power. Brazilian participation in the BRICS fluctuated since Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016. Jair Bolsonaro's government still has an ambivalent stance towards the bloc.

Although he said, during the eleventh BRICS summit, held in 2019, in Brazil, that his government is interested in expanding business with partner countries, he did not fail to make a contradictory statement, in saying that "the foreign policy of my government has its eyes on the world, but first in Brazil" (Colleta and Mello 2019, 1). Despite this, at the same summit, the Brazilian president also declared that the bloc's interests coincide in the defense of a more inclusive global governance, and that its economic relevance is unquestionable and will continue to grow in the coming decades.

The Brazilian government needs to give stronger signals that protectionism and alignment with the United States are not so automatic as to compromise its commitments to the group, to overcome suspicions such as that exposed by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, then in the rotating presidency of the bloc at the tenth BRICS summit in South Africa:

If [Bolsonaro] acts against what the BRICS countries defend, this will be to the detriment of Brazil and Brazilians [...] He will join a BRICS family that is almost irrevocably committed to multilateralism, he will join a BRICS family that seeks to do things in a way that strengthens mutual benefit. If he starts pushing in a different direction, it will end up harming Brazil's interest (Agência Brasil 2018, 1).

In the relationship of BRICS countries with the rest of the world,

there is an evident concern about the direction of globalization and the effects on the US performance system, something that was made clear in the final declaration of the 2018 summit. In the final text it is said that

We recognize that the multilateral trading system is facing unprecedented challenges. We reinforce the importance of an open global economy, allowing all countries and peoples to share the benefits of globalization (Pamplona 2018, 1).

The 2019 Brasilia Summit's final declaration deepens the issue already exposed in Johannesburg of strengthening the multilateral trading system, exposing the defense of WTO rules, in addition to announcing the twelfth summit meeting for St. Petersburg, Russia, in July 2020 (BRICS 2019). This regular meeting is at risk due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the new coronavirus.

In the relationship between the bloc members, there is little expressive intra-block trade and few social results in countries that can be related to participation in the group, as shown by Lobato (2018), emphasizing that "this can be attributed to the difficulty of making commitments for national contexts very different with very different structures of social policy systems" (Lobato 2018, 2143). Low cooperation on issues that are not primarily economic could be seen in this pandemic context. There was a virtual meeting of BRICS ministers, other than those of health, but of foreign affairs, on April 28, 2020. Although it was announced that there were agreements on the defense of multilateralism, the advancement of BRICS cooperation, and the gathering of efforts in terms of global health in combating COVID-19, the effective measures were related to economic issues surrounding the BRICS Bank.

It is the economic initiatives, such as the New Development Bank (NDB), that point to a still growing intrablock concertation. The so-called BRICS Bank can still accelerate the institutionalization of the bloc, which until then functioned more as a forum for discussions than as a formalized institution.

The creation of the NDB was seen by some analysts as a timely reflection on the changes in world power, while others stressed the fact that the bank is yet another element illustrating China's global ambitions in terms of projection of power (Da Silva 2019). The creation of a possible competitor in the provision of financial resources on a more just basis than those offered by the IMF and/or the World Bank would alter the traditional center of monetary power configured since the end of WWII. As a consequence, the geopolitical center of power would be altered, accentuating the decline of the traditional core of capitalism. The consolidation of the NDB as a real alternative would

be an important gain for the Sino-Russian geopolitical architecture of creating another geoeconomic pole.

At a time when the world economy is suffering tremendous due to the spread of the new coronavirus that causes Covid-19 disease, causing a large number of infections and deaths and forcing the most diverse regions of the world to make drastic isolations of their population, international global cooperation acquires new importance, since, to face the crisis, the countries most affected, like Brazil, need financial assistance (United Nations 2020). The NDB reappeared with a prominent role in the pandemic context, being the one that offered the most advantageous perspectives of financial support to face the crisis, among the development banks that Brazil resorted to. In addition to the BRICS countries chancellors, members of the bank have held virtual meetings to develop financial solutions to face Covid-19. At first, the NDB made available, in April 2020, a US\$ 1 billion credit line for each country in the bloc. A further disbursement of US\$ 10 billion is expected to be divided between Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (Coletta 2020).

Table 2 - World production growth, 2018-2021

	Annual percentage change				Changes in the <i>World Economic Situation</i>	
	2018	2019 (a)	2020 (b)	2021 (b)	<i>Perspective</i> 2020	<i>Forecast</i> 2021
	World	3.1	2.6	-3.2	4.2	-5.7
Developed economies	2.3	1.9	-5.0	3.4	-6.5	1.7
USA	2.9	2.3	-4.8	3.9	-6.5	2.1
Japan	0.3	0.7	-4.2	3.2	-5.1	1.9
European Union	2.1	1.8	-5.5	2.8	-7.1	1.1
Economy in transition	2.8	2.2	-3.5	3.1	-5.8	0.6
Russian Federation	2.3	1.3	-4.3	2.9	-6.1	0.9
Developing economies	4.3	3.7	-0.7	5.3	-4.7	1.0
Africa	3.1	3.0	-1.6	3.4	-4.8	-0.1
Southeast Africa	0.9	-0.1	-3.5	2.7	-4.4	0.8
China	6.6	6.1	1.7	7.6	-4.3	1.7
India (c)	6.8	4.1	1.2	5.5	-5.4	-0.8
Brazil	1.1	1.1	-5.2	2.9	-6.9	0.6
Memorandum items						

	Annual percentage change				Changes in the <i>World Economic Situation</i>	
World Trade (d)	4.1	1.3	-14.6	9.4	-16.9	6.2
Global growth based on Purchasing Power Paritye (e)	3.2	2.7	-2.6	4.3	-5.8	0.9

a Partially estimated.

b UN DESA forecasts.

c Fiscal year basis.

d Includes goods and services.

e Based on 2010 benchmark.

Source: Adapted by the authors from World Economic Situation and Prospects as of mid-2020 (UN): https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/WESP2020_MYU_Report.pdf.

The analysis of table 2 allows to project the impact of Covid-19 on the economy of the BRICS countries. According to the UN data, the average global GDP forecast is -5.7%. China is the only country that manages to have a better result forecast than the global average.

The BRICS moves between the expectations of corresponding to half of the world GDP in 2030, as the most optimistic prospects before the pandemic assumed (Bittar and Krafuni 2019), and the estimated decline of 5% of the GDP of the bloc members, in 2020, as points out the Analytical Center of the Government of Russia (Golub 2020). Taking into account that the statistics of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund estimate about a 5% drop in World GDP for 2020, it can be assumed that the BRICS member countries have not suffered a great deal as a bloc, given the global scenario. China and India, in this sense, have good expectations for the recovery of their economy, offsetting the worse performance of Brazil, Russia and South Africa. The Covid-19 pandemic is another component in this geopolitical scenario in which the BRICS will have to demonstrate its ability to propose alternatives to the collapse of the world order, with a review of globalization, multilateralism, and the international trade regime.

Final Remarks

The BRICS tries to establish itself as an alternative to the reorganization of the world system. In this context of unforeseen circumstances, the BRICS has to deal with the demands for its affirmation as an institution and international power bloc, in addition to being subject to the systemic transformations engendered by the United States, which are struggling to maintain themselves in the midst of this half hegemony.

Although Wallerstein himself is skeptical about the future of the BRICS, his analysis of world systems provides content to assess the relative decline of the United States and the emergence of new power blocks that may fill the void left by the decline in the US primacy. The theoretical construction elaborated by Wallerstein, with the help of geopolitical and international relations theories, provides us with tools to analyze the BRICS beyond the formal aspects of power, in terms of hard and soft power.

The BRICS countries face the challenge to uphold an utopian proposal, that still maintains itself as difficult. However, if the much expected economic consolidation of the China, Russia, India strategic triangle comes into reality, this proposal could last. For that, it is necessary to increase the internal trade between the countries participating in the group and catalyze the effects of overflowing the benefits of being part of the bloc, especially with the expansion of the performance of the New Development Bank. In relation to Brazil, it is necessary to understand the extent to which the bloc's interests, expressed in the construction of a new global governance, more inclusive, defending globalization and multilateralism, coincide with Brazilian national interests. In the Brazilian discourse for the bloc, the synergy seems clear, which is not confirmed in the official statements outside the bloc, in which Brazil expresses ambiguities and contradictory interests in relation to its international insertion strategy.

Moving in a scenario of uncertainty, the BRICS seeks to be an actor capable of proposing alternatives in the midst of a collapsing order, in view of the rearrangements of power in global geopolitics. The countries that make up the group, called emerging countries, will need to (re) emerge in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic and its related crises, yet another destructuring element in this geopolitical board. The BRICS countries' capacity for economic recovery in relation to the rest of the world may foreshadow the bloc's future.

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ABSTRACT

The two first decades of the 21st Century were marked by the recrudescence of two powerhouses, Russia and China. Given their important role on global geopolitics, these two countries took advantage of the gaps resulted from yet another crisis on the structure of global capitalism, which influenced the relative decline of the United States capacity to impose its will on the international system as they had been able to do so since the end of World War II. This article's objective is to analyze the global geopolitical rearrangement due to a weakened United States which opened the possibility for the BRICS nations to emerge as possible sources of power. To reinforce this analysis, the world-systems perspective, (here on referred to as WSP) elaborated mainly by Immanuel Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi is used, as well as a geopolitical approach to provide a link to international relations theories. Therefore, this paper is divided on to four sections. The first one interrelates the geopolitical theories and those of the WSP. The second section is guided towards understanding the origins and fundamentals of the WSP. On the third section, an approach is made towards the motivations and the effects of the rearrangement of power on the world's geopolitics. Finally, on the last section, the roles and opportunities that have arisen from the emergence of the BRICS nations on the international system are presented.

KEYWORDS

BRICS; Geopolitics; World-System Analysis.

Received on July 26, 2019

Approved on October 31, 2020

Translate by Maria Gabriela Vieira