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Introduction

No one can contest the observation that the BRICS as a bloc appears to be an amalgamation of strange bedfellows. The common perception generated by this observation leads people to believe that such diversity acts as an impediment to the quest for enhancing national influence through the venue of an international organization such as the BRICS. Indeed, in this age of growing regionalism among emerging powers, the common model of strength through amalgamation seems to underscore the power of similarity in building coalitions that marshal greater influence for emerging nations in the world system. An amalgamation like the BRICS is fairly unique in that it joins nations that are widely dispersed geographically and could not be more different in terms of social, political and cultural traits. Can birds of different species fly together and function effectively as a flock? This article argues that indeed they can. The article argues that great diversity not only does ***NOT*** inhibit the effectiveness of the BRICS as a bloc, indeed it demonstrates that greater diversity in fact ***augments*** the effectiveness of the BRICS as a vehicle for generating soft power in the international system for these nations. In the case of the BRICS, more diversity leads to greater influence.

Summarizing the principal argument of this article, the BRICS as an international organization modifies the soft power of its member states through a number of processes, in this article we will focus on one such process: augmentation. [1] The process of augmentation enhances the soft power of each of the BRICS members in ways that have not yet heretofore been explored

[1] In a more extended analysis of compound soft power in international organizations, Gallarotti (2016) explores four sources: augmentation, layering, transitivity, and compensation.

in the context of power analysis applied to any international organization. The findings in this analysis suggest that such a process is able to augment soft power in the context of blocs made up of even extremely diverse memberships. In fact, diversity can make the soft power augmentation all the greater. Hence, in this case, the greater differences among the members make the bloc as well as each member stronger.

The power augmentation of diversity could also enhance the hard power of the member nations of the BRICS, but here we concentrate on soft power because the BRICS as a bloc is principally a manifestation of soft power: i.e., power through diplomacy.[2]

Soft Power Augmentation through Non-Differentiation: Making Diversity Work

To the extent that the BRICS nations can come together for the purpose of pursuing common interests that are not dependent on the particular character of each nation (political, social, economic), a process of functional "non-differentiation" manifests itself within the bloc. Very different nations can come together to effectively function as a diplomatic bloc. Non-

[2] The BRICS as a bloc embraces a power model that features multilateral initiatives grounded in taking a diplomatic role in universal causes as well as promoting widely regarded international laws and norms. Hence it is primarily a soft power broker. Its creation of harder power (i.e., creating or combining material resources-military or financial to enhance their global influence) is at this point in time a more minor function of the bloc. On the distinction between hard and soft power, see Gallarotti (2011). For a more extended analysis of the BRICS and soft power, see Gallarotti (2016) and Stuenkel (2016).

differentiation is especially important because in terms of individual soft power profiles the BRICS are indeed strange bedfellows.[3] Brazil's soft power emanates from a confluence of a history of pacifism (few armed conflicts), hard-power deficiencies (a relatively modest military and no WMD) and a vigorous foreign policy of leadership in multilateral organizations (Chatin 2016). South Africa boasts one of the most liberal constitutions in the world (one of the few to allow same sex marriage) and a liberal democratic transformation consecrated with the ascent of an international icon (Mandela) in a nation formerly reviled as a pariah among modern states. Its political transition in the 1990s coincided with a foreign policy, like Brazil, of extensive

[3] Soft power aside, the BRICS show great diversity across social, political, geographic, and economic dimensions; such that they do *prima facie* appear as strange partners. The importance of non-differentiation in building soft power challenges arguments (such as in Armijo 2007) that suggest that political diversity within the BRICS compromises its abilities to function effectively as a soft or even a hard power bloc. Indeed, history has shown that when common interests arise, even the strangest bedfellows make effective allies or compatriots. One recalls Churchill's famous quote about the merits of aligning with the devil if it meant fighting Hitler.

The acronym "BRICS" in fact was never originally self applied, but emerged from a set of studies by Goldman Sachs in the early 2000's. The studies suggested greater attention to investment opportunities in the larger emerging market nations as rising powers in the world economy, hence there appeared in these studies a perceived commonality within this group of nations in the eyes of the financial community. See O'Neil (2001).

multilateral engagement in order to achieve a status as an important soft power broker on the global stage (Van Der Westhuizen 2016). India's soft power is cultural and political. It boasts an epic culture and a site of four religions. It's Bollywood is the largest entrepot of filmmaking in the world. Its diaspora is 25 million strong. And it has persisted as the world's only stable democracy in a nation that is ethnically and politically fractured (Thussu 2016). China has built the most elaborate and systematic mechanism for marshaling soft power: the "charm offensive" covers everything from globally promoting Confucian thought to building networks of friendship with African nations from whom it imports raw materials. But even more than the other BRICS, the role of soft power (which is intended to feed the economic machine—i.e., secure sources of energy and markets for exports) is purposefully integrated with a hard power initiative that is intended to raise the stature of China as a great power (i.e., also feed the military machine). The Sun Zi (*Art of War*) dualism of "zheng" (direct means) and "qi" (indirect means) represents opposing strategies which synthesize into a strategy of smart or cosmopolitan power.[4] Hence the Chinese do not conceptualize soft and hard power as occupying distinct spaces, an ideology that no other BRICS nation shares to the same extent. The investments in soft power on the part of China are likely greater than the investments in soft power by the entirety of the other BRICS nations. Every instrument purposefully used by each the other BRICS is used by China, and most in greater quantity by China--China is even trying to build a film production capability that could compete with India and the U.S. Presidents Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping have fully embraced a soft offensive as a cornerstone of attaining a superpower status. In fact Presidential references to

[4] On smart and cosmopolitan power, see Nye (2011) and Gallarotti (2010).

Chinese soft power dwarf similar references in the other BRICS.[5] Moreover, no BRICS nation has been as perspicacious and thorough in coordinating a comprehensive and integrated strategy of soft power.[6] But more than the other BRICS, China envisions its soft power initiative as principally spearheaded by an ideological offensive, hence the central importance of the proliferation of Confucian Institutes throughout China and the world. This is an augmentation of a domestic initiative to fill the void left with the ideological decline of Communism by promoting Confucian values (which stress the roles of family, obedience, and authority), thus giving the CPC a greater buttress of ideological support (Zanardi 2016 and Kurlantzick 2007).

Russia shares many similarities to China in the nature of its soft power with respect to source. Like Chinese leaders, Russian leaders have underscored the importance of soft power in their foreign policy. Much of this soft power offensive has been to compete with Western soft power, and deliver a superpower image akin to that of the U.S. The Russian state has engineered a great many institutions and initiatives that would expose the world to Russian society, from the international TV station Russia Today to mega events like the Sochi Olympics in 2014 and hosting the World Cup in 2018. Russia has also been distinct in its attempts at regional soft

[5] The principal Confucian value of *ren* (benevolence or power of attraction) coincides perfectly with the modern concept of soft power (Zanardi 2016).

[6] This is no surprise, since the Chinese state is the most effectively centrally managed nation of the BRICS. Central planning is an administrative manifestation of their Party model in all its activities. A clear reflection of this in the context of soft power is the establishment of a leadership council to coordinate the activities of the many Confucian Institutes spread around the world (Zanardi 2016).

power dispersion through the Russotrudnichestvo, an agency dedicated to enhancing endearment from 125 million ethnic Russians and Russian speaking people residing in the former Soviet Union (Rutland and Kazantzev 2016).

In fact, this diversity and geographic spread of the BRICS actually enhance soft power augmentation among the members. If the members were more similar and/or geographically contiguous, such commonalities would often work against the influence of the members. The membership is so diverse with respect to the composition of foreign relations of each BRICS nation that it is difficult to see the organization itself as menacing in the way a more restricted organization like a regional alliance or economic bloc might be. The membership of Brazil, India and South Africa tone down the menacing aspects of two Cold War rivals with the U.S. Regional rivalries in Africa, South Asia and South America are diluted by the association with large power brokers outside of these regions.[7] Conversely, geographic spread creates an organization that can be embraced by the regional and non-regional allies of each of the members, which in this case creates a soft power dispersion that is truly global. The platforms they have chosen for overlap meetings and statements with universal international organizations, have compounded that global appeal. The fact that the BRICS contains both developing and developed nations, as well as Communist and democratic nations, renders it more appealing to groupings of countries that share each characteristic. In this case, you also have developing and developed nations

[7] There is strong beneficial cross-over for China in Africa with China's soft-power offensive on that continent. See Nelson (2013) and Kurlantzick (2007).

demonstratively promoting development.[8] But you concomitantly have large regional developing players promoting a capitalist agenda in supporting continued success in the coordination among the G-20. This promotes a pitch toward non-capitalist nations in transition as well as toward developed nations. Moreover, the BRICS have disassociated the organization from any specific military objectives aside from promoting international security.[9] This last point endears it to virtually all nations struggling against external or internal security threats, which in this age of terrorism means virtually every nation.

The non-additivity aspect of soft power dispersion from augmentation can manifest itself in a number of ways. The membership mix creates ample opportunities for complementaries, so that soft power arsenals are far more complete trough amalgamation in a bloc. Each member brings a soft power profile that can serve to complete the profiles of other nations. Admiration of the great superpowers Russia and China mixes nicely with the endearing empathy that India and Brazil garner from their developing status. The traditional great civilizations of India, Russia and China nicely complement the positive ingénue effects of Brazil and South Africa as young nations (ingénue effects are further discussed below). In this respect the BRICS generates

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[8] In fact the very first point of the first official communiqué by the organization underscored the importance of development. The ministers touted "the prospects of the BRIC dialogue based on mutual trust and respect, common interests, coincidence or similarity of approaches toward the pressing problems of global development." See BRICs Foreign Ministers' Communique (2008).

[9] Point 5 in the BRICS communiqué from their first formal meeting states, "The Ministers expressed their strong commitment to multilateral diplomacy in dealing with common challenges to international security." See BRICs Foreign Ministers' Communique (2008).

admiration for polar opposite soft traits. Additionally, the admiration that Brazil and South Africa attain by becoming role models of domestic democratic practices and values complements the international charm offensive of China. Hence there are manifold possibilities for complementarities with and between both domestic and international components of soft power.

But complementarities go beyond traits and show themselves in other ways. There is also temporal complementarily, for which diversity of membership is especially fortuitous for the bloc. Soft power profiles vary according to current policies and outcomes. At times specific nations may find their soft power waning (such as Russia and China at present, due to territorial disputes), but it is unlikely that the changes in soft power will be perfectly correlated, especially among a group as diverse as the BRICS. The more positive images of present domestic politics in South Africa and India serve as temporal counterweights to Russia and China's regional disputes and authoritarian regimes. In terms of financial portfolio theory, the best possible combination of risk and return on investments occurs when portfolios are composed of very different types of assets (i.e., extensive diversification is always best). Similarly, a diverse bloc such as the BRICS offers the best complementary mix of soft power profiles: their images are less likely to be correlated due to completely different geo-political environments (Thussu 2016).[10]

Beyond the important diplomatic statements that emanate from the meetings of the BRICS, the bloc's creation of the New Development Bank (NDA) and the Contingency Reserve Fund (CRF) in 2014 have generated an institutional manifestation of soft power. While the

[10] On what constitutes deep soft power and on diversification among power assets, see especially Gallarotti (2010).

capitalization of the two, although significant at one billion dollars each, is still modest with respect to the organizations they mirror (World Bank and IMF), the creation of development lending institutions outside of Western purview has served to reinforce a normative paradigm shift. While there will be some overlap in lending procedures, the NDA is not devoted to the politics or the economic models of the West in issuing or supervising infrastructural lending. Similarly, the CRF's governing principles reflect little of the Washington consensus, which suggests a rigid management of short term balance of payments relief. The guiding principles of these two institutions embrace a model of lending that is far more South-friendly and consequently opposed to the shackles of the Western model which undergirds the IMF and World Bank.[11] This is of immense importance in terms of image for the BRICS since the Western model has been vilified in the South. Also in this vein, the cumulative effect of a bloc creates compound hard power. And as has been made clear, hard and soft power are not incompatible, in fact they can compound and complement one another (Chatin and Gallarotti 2016). It is no surprise that nations that rank highly on soft power indexes also have the most hard power resources. This is because hard power provides the resources, presence and impact to enhance the foundations of soft power. In terms of hard power the BRICS collectively possess: 30% of global land, 43% of global population, 21% of the world's GDP, 17.3% of global

[11] Fourcade (2013) sees the formation of the BRICS as symbolically important in terms of the world economy. Its existence signals the importance of nations that were heretofore excluded from the core (G7), and it also builds soft currency for the challenge of the Beijing Consensus against the Washington Consensus.

merchandise trade, 12.7% of global commercial services, 45% of world's agriculture production, and 22% of global military spending (BRICS Strategy 2015).

Also in the context of hard and soft power complementarity, each member of the BRICS now has a diplomatic support group within each of the organizations in which it is a member. This bloc can be useful in setting agendas, creating a voting bloc, and/or generating a diplomatic wedge that can be used to promote the interests of each BRICS nation. This bloc empowerment works through different forms of power associations. Surely superpower backing gives Indian, Brazilian and South African diplomats greater diplomatic capital. But so too does the backing of developing nations generate diplomatic capital for the superpowers through legitimation. In terms of soft power dispersion this mix can work best when there is greater diversity, since the possibilities for complementarities rises as diversity grows. For example, joining Brazil and South Africa brings two leaders in the fight for cotton trade into the same diplomatic circle. Brazil has done much unilaterally to break down cotton subsides that a group of African nations have been historically keen on. In this respect, Brazil has functioned more as a leader in the African agricultural cause than South Africa, which has been relied upon to fill such a role for African nations in all organizations (Nelson 2016).

The BRICS Strategy for Economic Partnership (2015) also nicely reflects the means by which disparate and diverse actors can consolidate efforts to build a global power bloc. The Partnership aspires to a single presence that generates diplomatic and economic weight on the global scene. It is envisioned as working through extensive initiatives that coordinate policies and interests across both state and non-state actors. The document announcing the partnership mirrors an insightful view into the process of compounding power among disparate nations. The collective goals place large international issues in the purview of the bloc (especially

development, free trade, financial transparency, sustainable growth, poverty relief, human rights, and health), hence the bloc is making the business of the larger global community its own business, thus entrenching it more firmly as a key diplomatic force in larger global debates.[12] Indeed the BRICS are positioning the bloc as a leader in important international reform efforts that cover all major international issues: international financial regulation, IFI management, pushing regional solutions to global problems, trade, development programs, food security, and environment.[13] This engagement is showing a vigorous institutional augmentation in the form of engineered mission creep. This manifests itself in an expansion of bloc cooperation into a variety of governmental and non-governmental fora: informal meetings, sherpa meetings, research centers, seminars, think tank symposia, business forums, law forums, statistical cooperation, cultural forums, and greater cooperation in sports.[14]

Moreover, the Strategy underscores cooperation in energy, agriculture, innovation and natural resource production. While hardly oligopolistic, still the collective impact which the BRICS could muster in all four areas represents a large chunk of global share, hence the bloc assumes a greater ability to marshal diplomatic power as a result of collective influence in such areas. Other initiatives on intra-bloc export credits and innovation set up financial institutions to promote trade and innovation within the bloc, hence aside from the potential pooling of

[12] The BRICS as a bloc was especially influential in constructing broad financial planning in the G-20 in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis (BRICS Strategy 2015).

[13] This disposition toward leadership roles is apparent in the Joint Statement of the BRICS Second Summit in Brazilia in 2010 (BRICS Second Summit 2010).

[14] See especially the Sanya Declaration and Action Plan in BRICS Third Summit (2011).

resources, there is a possibility of increasing some resources through joint financing (BRICS Strategy 2015).[15] On a more regionally focused issue, the bloc initiative on solving the problem of political instability in the Middle East and North Africa has also demonstrated the power of amalgamative involvement in crucial international issues. A recent communiqué on the situation pushes solutions to problems in Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Israel/Palestine that well reflect one voice within a body of widely respected multilateral solutions (BRICS Deputy Foreign Ministers Meeting on the Situation, 2015).

Conclusions

The case of the BRICS generates important lessons for nations that are seeking to leverage their individual power through amalgamation in international organizations. First, ***opposites should attract.*** Nations should explore possibilities for collective power through diversity. In fact regional proximity and domestic similarities may limit the *reach* of the organizations nations build. If nations think of wider representation and complementarities, rather than the need to replicate themselves in blocs, the resulting associations may make a far greater diplomatic impact. You don't need common nations to promote cooperation, only common interests. Second ***bad fences make good neighbors.*** The BRICS have demonstrated that lowering barriers against friendship and accommodation among heretofore unaligned or marginally aligned nations can

[15] Once more, we see the natural interaction of soft and hard power. In this case greater control over hard resources places the BRICS in superior diplomatic positions over important issues within which it can utilize its softer resources (accommodation, cooperation, and leadership).

raise the individual and collective power of the bloc members significantly. Third, be open to ***tea and sympathy***. Even nations that have experienced strained relations can not only effectively work together in common ventures, but the joined experiences could forge better relations among nations that have experienced diplomatic tensions with one another. The BRICS have in fact served to provide a venue of proximity through which nations can leverage new and stronger bonds, while abating tense issues that have heretofore served as diplomatic roadblocks. Finally, ***don't judge a bloc by its members*.** The BRICS have shown that a bloc is more than an additive function. Indeed the sum is quite different from the sum of its parts because diversity creates opportunity for a greater and more complex division of labor and associations. International power is gained by acquiring the capacity to occupy different niches of power and opportunity in the international system. The BRICS diverse membership gives the bloc a cadre of players that can "fill the power space" in terms of using special characteristics to leverage the goals of the bloc across the globe.

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