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## A Specter is Haunting the West (?): The BRICS and the Future of Global Governance

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### ABSTRACT

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Western countries are living a period of fragmentation that is (probably) undermining their leadership in dealing with an accountable global governance. Regarding global governance, it has received some criticisms such as the one that identifies it with a theoretical and unclear definition of an illusory enlarged participation to global decision-making, but in practice an attempt to impose Western policies. Furthermore, emerging powers like the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) may undermine this dominance, and the very meaning of global governance itself, inaugurating initiatives that tend to promote their presence in Global South, the creation of parallel institutions, their soft power and the (apparent?) engagement in global issues, such as climate change. In this article, we first analyze the acquired weight of the BRICS, then we highlight the weaknesses of global governance and finally we try to understand what impacts BRICS may have on it.

### Introduction

A specter is haunting the West (?)—the specter of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), that represent one of the most important threat to a "consolidated" international system, deriving from globalization, under the predominance of Western countries both in an economic way (Stiglitz, 2002) and in global governance (GG) (Friedrichs, 2005). Currently, there are some important issues that are happening in the West world: it seems that Europe is struggling to find some unity, while US policies are creating more isolation and opening way to a more instable world, this is the case, for example, of the so-called "commercial war" and the decision to give up COP21 agreements on climate change previously taken in Paris in 2015.

In the meanwhile, the BRICS are devoting themselves to consolidating their presence (and their power) in much of the so-called Global South, to achieve greater cooperation to change current global governance, giving impetus to the reform of international financial institutions (BRIC, 2009), and give a new shape to their soft power by trying to gain more importance and accountability: it seems that despite the recent crisis that they have gone through, BRICS countries are claiming to improve cooperation in some important fields in order to cover a "gap" regarding their "charm power" (Stuenkel, 2016) backwardness.

Ironically, their strength to achieve more closed cooperation, seems to coincide with the vacuum left by Western countries, "distracted" by the above-mentioned issues, and in particular with the (prospective) "end" of Pax Americana (Layne, 2012). This could bring a number of consequences: 1) the end of US unipolarism and the transition to a multipolar world? 2) The end of Western hegemony and the switch to a Non-western world (Stuenkel, 2016) where the BRICS, led by China, could represent a new hegemony?

These are only few of the several questions that could raise from the current situation. In addition, this paper tries to answer above all these questions. Of course, it has not to be considered an exhaustive analysis, but an

interpretation of the international framework on the light of recent events, and a speculation on a possible scenario for the future. First, it is without doubt that BRICS countries have shaken the international order, and their claim to have a more decisive role in shaping GG (BRIC, 2009), is having its effects. So, more key questions are: is the BRICS an accountable bloc or does it have limits? Are the Western countries really declining and which consequence this could have on the future of GG?

This is a key moment in history that could give a chance to these “emerging powers” to occupy a more central role in the international framework. Of course there are multiple limits, for example we can consider the current situation in Brazil where the recently elected president, Jair Bolsonaro, announced that Brazil will leave Paris Agreements (Goodman, 2018) and will try to find more closeness to US (Spetalnick, 2018); the difference of interests manifested among BRICS (Lo, 2016); their still important dependence by fossil energies and coal that make them still “conservative” players in climate change (Basso and Viola, 2016); the absence of a consistent commonality of interests required to form a lasting coalition (Brutsch and Papa, 2013), and also the rhetoric beyond their discourses (Downie and Williams, 2018).

But there are several signals that indicate that BRICS countries could gain more effective closeness in key fields and that, even if they will not be able to cover leaderships gaps worldwide, they will surely give a different path to global order (Duggan, 2015): in the coming years, world economic and political agenda-setting will also depend on the moods of these countries if they will be really able to give an effective weight to their recent growth. At the same time, if they are able to overpass their limits and the rhetoric beyond their discourse and their internal differences (Ujvari, 2015; Lo, 2016), they could probably be able to challenge the Western hegemony (Stuenkel, 2016).

### **West vs BRICS?**

In any case, the impression is that the “specter” of the BRICS is already hunting the West. In fact, there are several signals that the power of these emerging countries is provoking a certain degree of “scare” in Western countries: for example US tried to stem the growing influence of the BRICS, and China in particular, with specific economic treaties aimed at limiting its economic influence such as the TTP (Trans-Pacific Partnership), a treaty from which US then withdrew (Gracie, 2016) and TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership). They tried to hit Russia with economic sanctions and by other diplomatic means such as the attempt to create more isolation around it after the “Skripal case”, in which also most of the EU countries aligned themselves with Britain and US (Stone, 2018) against Russia. However, there could be more examples, such as the US endorsement to Bolsonaro’s presidency, which could destabilize more the bloc, and so on. In conclusion, Western answer to BRICS raise seems to reflect the old roman lemma *divide et impera* (divide and conquer), i.e. create diplomatic and economic instability within the BRICS bloc in order to favourite a growing division among the member states, thus decreasing the impact that they could have on the future of global order.

However, behind this apparent homogeneity of intents by the West, there is instead a fragmentation among themselves. For example, there is a huge gap among European countries on the approach to be had with Russia (and with other BRICS countries such as China or India). In fact, after the “Skripal case”, Austria did not expel Russian diplomats, unlike of almost all the rest of other EU countries, while Greece did not want to take a clear line against Russia probably because of their bilateral relations (Coen, 2018). Furthermore, some Eastern European countries are opening to the Chinese market, from where they will probably receive more advantages than the European one, as shown by the warm welcome to the “Belt and Road Initiative” (Makocki, 2017). Moreover, some European countries have decided to be members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a China-led bank with a huge presence of BRICS members such as India (8.7% of total capital) and Russia (6.8% of total capital). The decision of being part of this financial institution irritated the US (Perlez, 2014). However, there is also an ambiguous situation in trade between EU and US, with the latter trying to approve protectionist policies, and EU divided on the approach to have in regard to US policies (Grunstein, 2019). Thus, it seems that in the West there are few and sometimes-ineffective strengths to find some unity: fragmented EU and US are trying to cope with the current global situation.

Just to summarize, it seems that emerging countries, such as the BRICS bloc, are gaining more decisive importance in the international arena, inaugurating policies aimed at covering those roles that the West seems to be in difficulty to deal with. We wonder what effect this situation will have on GG.

To answer to these questions, we first track the origins and the possible impact of BRICS, and then we analyse “what’s wrong” in GG by mapping, on the basis of theoretical supports by other scholars, the limits and gaps that it has at the moment, and why the BRICS could give a different impetus on it. In a second

moment we will analyse which influence BRICS are gaining in the world by taking as examples the importance of “parallel institutions”, their presence in other “peripheral” countries (i.e. the Global South), and which advantages they could obtain by promoting policies aimed at dealing with global issues, like climate change, in terms of soft power.

### ***The BRICS: Origin and Possible Impact***

In the last decade, BRICS countries have had a very significant economic growth (even if recently they are passing through a recession, as in the case of Brazil). The term BRICS (originally BRIC, when South Africa was not yet part of the group) was coined in 2001 by Jim O'Neill in the report, by the Investment Bank Goldman Sachs, entitled “Building Better Global Economics BRICs”, to describe the economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC). Subsequently, with the entry of South Africa (2011) the term officially became BRICS. Since then, their growth has caused great concern in the Western world because the BRICS have started to playing an increasingly important role in the international scenario, both from an economic point of view and from a decision-making one, and causing reactions (for example in terms of protectionism) that can be considered also as an attempt to defend Western countries, and US *in primis*, from this now threatening situation. However, this attempt is not only producing a commercial war (and, potentially, not only), but it is also creating a “vacuum of power”, fostering greater possibilities for other parts of the world, such as BRICS, led by China, to occupy those roles that US, and the West in general, is probably leaving. In fact, despite the above-mentioned gaps, BRICS have fostered cooperation in some important areas that will give them a growing importance, if coordinated in a correct way (Downie and Williams, 2018):

*Stocktake of multilateral and bilateral meetings between the BRICS since 2015 suggest that there are areas that could be ripe for cooperation. Three areas are identified: energy efficiency, agriculture and development finance. Further, bilateral relationships between BRICS members, such as between China and India, could help to shape global climate governance agendas going forward and over time provide a basis for coordinated BRICS action.*

Thus, the surprising growth of the BRICS has allowed themselves to have a more authoritarian voice in the global scenario. Furthermore, their economic weight and the achievement of important development have strengthened their partnerships and claimed a more common line to undertake in cooperation, as often declared during the various annual BRICS summits that have taken place.

Among their cooperative purposes, the BRICS have repeatedly claimed to give a contribution to shaping GG (Xinhua, 2017). Over the years, their voice has been growing more, so much to encourage reactions from Western, which found themselves fragmented also because of the economic crisis that has struck them, and in which the growth of these countries has certainly had certain influence.

In this sense, the European Union, conceived as a civilian power and which represented a model to be imitated (Rifkin, 2004), in recent years has lost a great part of its charm (soft power) and highlighted some important failures such as the way in which to deal with issue like migrants, just to give an example. The same can be said, with due differences, about the US. In the last years some policies decisions, that have their emblematic representation in “America first” doctrine, have created even more accentuated issues.

In addition to the above-mentioned choices, US have taken initiatives that have undermined relations also in regard with their historical allies, the EU itself. It is, for example, the case of the position taken by the US towards the agreement of Vienna (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA ) of 2015 with Iran. This agreement, which had fostered a positive reaction and the Iranian adherence, was aimed at curbing the country's nuclear energy production that would have further destabilized Middle East area. The opening screams of victory for a reached consensus, however, were followed by the opposing decisions by President Trump, who eventually decided to leave the agreement, provoking again a diplomatic reaction and protest from the EU, concerned about the potential consequences that this decision may have in the area, as well about safeguarding its image and its global power, that has appeared weakened (Grunstein, 2018). Thus, it seems that not only within the EU and the US, there is a fragmentation, but it is also appearing between them (Carrel, Nienaber, 2018; Batabyal, 2018, Mansfield, 2018).

This situation, may encourage a greater realignment of BRICS countries that, by making pacts of greater closeness among them (Withnall, 2018), could organize a sort of “resistance” to the Western *modus operandi*, by creating “parallel institutions”, by representing the voice of the Global-South and/or the “rebel” world against the Western policies that have so far ruled, as in the case of Venezuela (Pons and Shepherd, 2018) or in Africa, and finally by trying to cope with global issues, especially climate change, that could further improve their soft power.



We wonder how effective their actions could be, and how much their action will shake GG. But before considering their effective impact on it, it is important to understand the limits of GG.

### Global Governance and Its Limits

The term “global governance” has become deeply used in political language in recent years. If, on the one hand, it is used as a means to describe a certain type of international order, on the other hand there are innumerable critics of the use of this concept: it does not clearly describes a specific framework, but it shows a deep lack, in terms of descriptions, of the international context. In fact, there are several definitions given, but actually almost all of them define a process, or a set of international processes, which do not have a precise order. Just to take some of the definitions, Lawrence Finkelstein highlighted, “Since the international system notoriously lacks hierarchy and government, the fuzzier word ‘governance’ is used instead” (Finkelstein, 1995). Of the term “governance” itself, Finkelstein highlights its lack of definition. He states that, “We say governance because we don’t really know what to call what is going on” (Finkelstein, 1995). Thomas Weiss outlines a clearer picture of the term. He states that the word “governance” is employed “to connote a complex set of structures and processes, both public and private” (Weiss, 2000).

Thus, in theory the word denotes an undefined set of processes that lead to decisions, taken by both public and private sectors, related to the international dimension. But it is not clear at all at which level and in which way these decisions are taken, also because within the global governance process are involved different centres of power, and not only one. In this sense, the identification of a clear process of decision-making is unclear. What is clear, is that GG tries to cover decisions that affect the world as a whole, and deals with those “problems without passport” described by Kofi Annan (Annan, 2009). In the global context, these decisions ranging from terrorism to diseases, from climate change to the participation of civil society, from the decisions that affect trade treaties to the initiatives taken during economic crisis. In every area thus far mentioned, and others, the decision-making processes have been carried out with the aim of fostering a more global dimension and involving multiple actors (stakeholders).

Although GG involve, at least in its theoretical path, a form of enlarged participation, there have been several critics that have outlined a number of ambiguities in the decision-making processes. Starting from the whole definition of the term itself and continuing through the institutions and stakeholders involved, they have often tended to consider this set of structures and processes as a different way, from the Western countries, to impose worldwide decisions.

The term “governance” itself, for example, has gained critics related to its English origin (i.e. with a deep English-US influence). In fact, some scholars have outlined how its use, coming from an English vocabulary, leads to more undefined understanding of the term itself. Just as an example, we can mention Jörg Friedrichs (2005):

*It is hard to translate “governance” into languages other than English, where the Oxford English Dictionary traces the term back by the well into the 14th century. Thus, the French “gouvernance” is easily discernible as a loan translation. Whereas “governança” and “governança” have conquered a firm place in the Portuguese vocabulary, “gobernanza” still sounds odd to Spanish ears. The Italians have simply assimilated the English term into their domestic vocabularies, and the same is true for the Germanic and probably for the Slavic languages. Given its difficult translatability into languages other than English, it is reasonable to assume that the term “global governance” is culturally not neutral.*

The author thus conclude: “it is relatively clear that the conceptual diffusion of global governance into other language areas would be unthinkable if America was not the centre”.

At the same time, other critics of the GG process come from the current functioning of international system, and the related attempt to “give an order to the disorder” in international decision making process. However, despite this good purpose, GG has often been criticized as a means to legitimate Western liberal predominance on the rest of the world (Friedrichs, 2009, Hermet, 2008). Critical scholars state that world order emerged from Bretton Woods, with the created institutions -World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank (WB), and International Monetary Fund (IMF)- is shaped with the final purpose of applying “Western policies” to global problems. For example, the way globalization has been managed, in the words of Joseph Stiglitz (2002), was determined by the interests of Western powers. Specifically, Stiglitz analyses the failure of the IMF policies where an unfair voting system favouring Western powers, as well as the austerity policies that have created more economic debt in the poorest countries in the world, have developed an imbalanced globalization with “winners and losers” (Baumann, 1998) that undermine the credibility of the current GG.

In short, the overall architecture of GG in recent decades has seen Western powers as the main protagonists, which, using international institutions, have dictated the timing and agenda setting of global development (Weisbrot, 2018).

## **BRICS Answer to Global Governance Limits**

### ***A “Counter Institutionalization”?***

Things being like this, some (non-Western) countries have reacted by trying to cope with this situation. One of the consequence in a system shaped mainly by the West, has been the so-called “counter institutionalization” (Zürn, 2018). Given the intolerance regarding the operation of the traditional Bretton Woods institutions, this term precisely describes the reaction to an unbalanced, and western-centric, functioning of institutions such as the IMF and the WB. These institutions for decades have done “good and bad” on the international framework. Over the course of time they have put into practice mechanisms that have ended up attracting the dislike of many part of developing countries, such as the BRICS that are one of the most emblematic examples of this “counter institutionalization” process: the bloc has created some parallel institutions such as the New Development Bank (NDB), the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) and the above mentioned Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). These financial institutions and framework, are trying to act in a different way from the IMF and the WB, starting from a different (and equal) vote sharing in the case of NDB (Weisbrot and Johnston, 2009), and the way to access to loans and by developing parallel and alternative programs to Bretton Woods ones like the case of the AIIB and CRA (Parizek and Stephen, 2017).

It is clear that this situation is leading to a new paradigm, and in this sense, also the meaning of GG is changing. Now it will have to include a new path, where new emerging powers are playing a more decisive role. What these emerging powers are questioning, is the unfair system created so far, their right to participate to more inclusive decision-making processes, and “to advance the reform of the international financial institutions, so as to reflect changes in the global economy” (BRIC, 2009).

In any case, some questions arise. Are the BRICS willing to create a different financial system? Are they really threatening the current international (Bretton Woods) order?

On these points, there are some different views that basically argue that (1) the BRICS are trying to create a “parallel” or “alternative” system (Wildau, 2015) and/or that (2) the BRICS are trying to create new areas, within the current international liberal order, in which they can have greater decision-making skills, more possibility of effective and practical access to loans and funds available (Morse and Keohane, 2014), and also create new spaces where to develop a different path of economic cooperation from that developed by Western countries. These, in fact, in addition to promoting international institutions in which they practiced as rulers (Kaya, 2018; Weisbrot and Johnston, 2009 and 2016), were promoting a liberal model, under the lemma of “good governance” according to which loans were delivered to developing countries that followed the rules these institutions (i.e. its most influential representative members) decided (Hermet, 2008).

Thus, to give an answer about the real intention of this “counter institutionalization”, we have to point some key features about these institutions created by the BRICS.

Firstly, in the case of the Chinese AIIB, doors were opened up to other countries from the western world. In fact, some historical US allies became AIIB members, US not (Perlez, 2014).

Another point, these institutions are inspired by a principle that provides for non-interference: unlike the Bretton Woods institutions, which by means of their actions wanted to promote the above mentioned good governance, AIIB and NDB are not “interested” in the practice of what happens in each country, but only grants funds based on the validity of a project (Abdenur and Folly, 2015; Peng and Tok, 2016).

At the same time, BRICS have not given up Bretton Woods institutions, but it rather seems that their intent is to seek new ways of projecting their economic power without the limitations that those institutions have (Kaya, 2018).

Things being like this, BRICS financial institutions seems more to be an attempt to escape some form of the dominant ones, especially from a point of view of the restrictions and impediments that had towards them (Parizek and Stephen, 2017), more than a threat to the Western-centric financial governance.

Consequently, the birth of these institutions can not simply be described as a parallel order or opposed to the traditional one, but an attempt to find solutions to problems such as under representation, i.e. the unbalanced vote system (Weisbrot and Johnston, 2009, Kaya, 2018), slow bureaucracy (Parizek and Stephen, 2017), i.e. the slowness and the restrictions tied to Western moods in achieving lends in addition to the respect of parameters related to Western good governance (austerity, human rights protection and so on), etc. In practice, it seems that for the moment, the purpose of the BRICS is not to create international organizations acting as a vehicle for the diffusion of a new hegemonic order. They are opening up glimpses, in which pursue a more active role, within the already existing (liberal) order.

Rather than subverting the current institutional order, and then replacing it with new organizations, the BRICS are trying to model it on the basis of their growth power. As for GG, therefore, it seems that their goal with these institutions is more to create a governance that reflects a multilateralism in place, instead of creating a new one that replaces the “old” Western-led one.

### ***BRICS Presence in the Global South***

In recent years, the presence of BRICS countries in the rest of the world has growth exponentially. In this sense, BRICS countries have started to open up new ways to increase their influence, regarding the “Silk and Road initiative”, by improving cooperation among themselves, and above all inaugurating new policies in Africa, and also other areas, where the presence of BRICS countries such as China and India is obscuring the Western “domination” (Evans-Pritchard, 2018). In fact, countries like China have adopted a specific strategy promising also non-repayable loans (Shukla, 2018), and fostering its presence by building infrastructures and improving services. In addition, India and Brazil have increased their presence. Even Russia is projecting towards Africa (Klomegah, 2018; Ross, 2018) and has re-established a certain presence in the Middle East and offers itself as a probable partner for those countries affected by the influence of the Western countries and the US *in primis*, as happened in Venezuela, where also China has deep interests (Pons and Shepherd, 2018).

Thus, in recent years the presence of BRICS in the rest of the world has growth exponentially. This attitude, which certainly hides its personal benefits, however, traces a major change compared to the policies adopted until now. In fact, historically the presence of Western powers in “peripheral” areas like Africa has had the effect of domination and submission (Rodney, 1972), causing in many ways an economic and social backwardness which consequences are still under our eyes.

By establishing important partnerships in Global South, BRICS countries seem (apparently) interested in covering this gap, looking for compromises of growth with less conflicting relationships. By doing so, these emerging powers have potential to configuring themselves as the real voice of the Global South, also promoting South-South cooperation (Thakur, 2014). Their behaviour, together with historical and colonialist motives, could favour a greater rapprochement towards these countries, to the detriment not only of the West, but also of the world balance.

However, other criticisms could come out. For example, the way BRICS are operating their presence in the Global South. According to some scholars, BRICS must pay attention to the model they want to develop. In fact, although they want to represent an alternative to Western countries, and potentially propose themselves as spokesmen, they could actually fall into the trap of creating new forms of imperialism or “sub-imperialism” (Deepak, 2016) inaugurating a new dependency which would not change anything for the “periphery” that would pass from one colonist to another.

It is early to understand what will happen, but the risk is there. In any case, it will depend on how the BRICS will be able to play these cards. If the BRICS will adopt the right path, we wonder if it could actually overturn the centre-periphery dichotomy theorized by Wallerstein (1974), where the West has practically occupied the centre and “the Rest” the periphery: a credible position as a leaders for Global South, could counterbalance the hegemony had from the West so far?

Now, we still not have enough elements to judge what will happen in the near future. However, it is without doubt that BRICS presence (economic, political, in cooperation etc.) is becoming stronger. Depending on the way they will act to effectively shape different ties with the Global South, BRICS will forge the future of global framework. In this case, GG will be shaped too.

### ***BRICS and Soft Power: The “Opportunity” of Leading in Climate Change?***

In the last years, the BRICS have started a massive action, both particularly and together, to improve their image perception and strengthen their soft power (Chatin and Gallarotti, 2016; Stuenkel, 2016). This is an important aspect of their growing power, because they presumably feel they have a lack in their “charm power”. Soft power, in his theorist words, namely Joseph Nye (2004), can be explained as the ability to influence others to get the outcomes one wants without the use of coercion. In other words, soft power involves leading by example, without the recurs to economic constraints and/or use of army.

Currently, at an international level, Western countries still have leading positions in soft power, as they have the best education and research centres, cultural hegemony in key sectors as cinema, brands, etc. (Stuenkel, 20016). Although BRICS countries are trying to fill this gap, they “face their most serious shortcomings relative to the West when it comes to serving as role models” (Chatin and Gallarotti, 2016). Therefore, there is still a lot of way to do, in order to compete with the West.

However, it is our opinion that there is a particular field that could be a benchmark for BRICS countries, to improve their image thus giving a positive and accountable impulse to their soft power. This field is climate change.

Climate change is the most pressing problem facing humanity (Sengupta, 2018). Several summits have been hold to try to cope with it: Conferences Of the Parties (COPs) - especially COP 21 in 2015 in Paris - are organized every year by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); climate change issues have been included in the Sustainable Development Goals (UN Sustainable Development Goals, 2015); several formal and informal meetings try to pay a special attention to it.

Like other “problems without passports”, climate change seems to play a central role in BRICS policy choices, as they decided to strengthen their cooperation to cope with it (Aurobinda, 2015) and committing with Sustainable Development Goals (Kosolapova, 2017). These efforts seems to coincide with a parallel decline in credibility, especially regarding political choices, by Western countries. In fact, just to give some examples, the US have even abandoned the agreements taken in Paris, while other European countries, despite the proclamations regarding the urgency of taking action, have often an ambivalent attitude, such as the case of France, where the Minister of Ecological and Inclusive Transition resigned after accusing the system of following “policies that favour environmental disorder” (Le Figaro Journal, 2018). Emblematic is also the case of Italy, where a 2016 referendum on the abolition of drills has not reached the *quorum*, and the state instead of encouraging the population to vote, has encouraged voters not to take part in this referendum, thus voluntarily or involuntarily favouring the interests of large oil multinationals (Balmer, 2016). However, the examples could be more, ranging from the critics to EU and US funds to climate (Carrington, 2017; Appelt and Dejgaard, 2018; Meade, 2018) to the declining role that they are having in leading with climate issues (Bäckstrand and Elgström, 2013).

Thus if on the one hand Western countries seem they are moving away from that leading role that they should have covered in climate change, also because of their historical responsibility in this regard, on the other the BRICS claim their accountability in dealing with this issue, at least apparently. For example, they invested a huge amount of funds in renewable energy through the NDB, in 2016, in the form of loans: Brazil US\$ 300 million for wind and solar power; India US\$ 325 million dollars to increase renewable energy, China US\$ 81 million to produce solar panels; South Africa to build new power lines and for generating renewable energy; and Russia US\$ 100 million for construction of hydropower plants (Mattos and Rosa, 2016).

However, is this sufficient to state that BRICS are doing more in climate change? This aspect may hide a more far-reaching goal that of overcoming the (soft) power vacuum of the Western countries in this field. More than giving a real impetus in dealing with this issue, BRICS may claim for more engagement in climate change only in order to build a credible image of themselves. In fact, there are limits in their engagement on climate, and the way in which BRICS will deal with them, will determine their effective capability in gaining more accountability. So, are BRICS really interested in dealing with climate change, or they just want to “use” climate change to build a stronger soft power?

As Downie and Williams (2018) state:

*In China, India and South Africa coal is the largest source of energy demand. Indeed, in China and South Africa, coal represents around two thirds of total primary energy demand, and in India, coal represents just under half of total energy demand. However, in Russia and Brazil oil and gas far outweigh coal. For example, in Russia, oil and gas together represent 73 per cent of total primary energy demand, and in Brazil, oil and gas represent 62 per cent. As a result,*

*significant variations remain in the profile of fossil fuel demand among the BRICS, with coal a major source of demand in China, India and South Africa, compared to oil and gas in Russia and Brazil. Further, these differences are exacerbated by the fact that as large energy consumers, China and India in particular, have an interest in reducing their dependence on imported fossil fuels, whereas Russia and Brazil, as large producers of oil and gas, have a very different interest, namely in increasing exports and higher prices.*

If we take a look on Climate Action Tracker (2019) web page, we can see how low are results obtained by BRICS countries to reduce their emissions and have a decisive swift towards alternative energies in order to fill with COP21 purposes, with the extreme case of Russia that has not yet ratified the Paris Agreement, and its contribution to reduce emissions is considered “critically insufficient”.

This means that there is still a lot to do, to fulfil with COP21 commitment. However, there are significant signals that BRICS countries could have ways to get more cooperation among them and try to switch leadership in dealing with climate change governance. BRICS could strengthen cooperation in some areas related to climate change: energy efficiency, agriculture and development finance (Downie and Williams, 2018).

It is in this context that BRICS can increase their credibility. In fact, the BRICS in the field of renewable energy should try to play in unison to create a kind of credible partnership (Mahapatra, 2015). This partnership can really make a decisive contribution to GG and increase their soft power, but only if their commitment and their effective effort will be more concrete in the near future.

## Conclusions

The influence of the BRICS is therefore decisive in several areas ranging from the creation of new institutions to their intent to cover gaps in soft power and by inaugurating a more expansive policy through their presence in Global South. Coinciding with a parallel crisis in Western countries, this situation gives rise to some remarks.

First, what consequences will bring to GG? As we have seen, GG, with all its various nuances and criticisms (Lederer and Muller, 2005), seems more to be a guided and forged governor of Western countries, which so far could count with a clear supremacy over the rest of the world, than a real claim for more enlarged participation in global policy making. The emergence of the BRICS countries, however, is questioning this paradigm, and is transforming the meaning of governance itself, which will inevitably change. Their growing presence in Global South, the creation of parallel institutions and the claim for a more accountable soft power, with a particular focus on the developing of climate change policies, are key fields in which BRICS could play an important role.

However, in all this fields there are important limits. First of all, regarding their interest in being spokesman for Global South, their cooperation and development policies developed could fall in the mistake of creating a new form of imperialism or “sub-imperialism” (Deepak, 2016). Although that would not be the initial purpose, BRICS should pay attention on their future policies towards “peripheral” countries. Secondly, the creation of other financial institutions has actually the aim to create new paths within the international liberal order, and not to subvert it. In addition, in this case, the way in which they will direct future loans, will have significant repercussion on GG. Finally, their willingness to achieve a more accountable soft power. Despite they have still lot of way to do to cover their gap, they could probably reach an important result by really involving in global issues such as climate change, beyond their rhetoric discourses. In climate change policies, they should really be accountable leaders to try to cope with this deal. In any case, there are several commonalities that could push on this sense (Downie and Williams, 2018), but it will depend on BRICS strength to effectively achieve their goal and acting in unison.

However, there are also other important limits to their compactness, such as the continues struggles and rivalry between India and China (Basile and Cecchi, 2018), their divergence in interests (Lo, 2016), and some populist drifts that could create fragmentation among the BRICS themselves, like the election of Bolsonaro in Brazil. Regarding this point, we want to outline how Bolsonaro declarations to give up Paris agreements (Agencia Brazil, 2018), avoid that China gains more power in Brazil economy management (Casarões, 2018), and move closer to the US (Spetalnick, 2018) seem far to be realistic. In fact, Bolsonaro has already begun to retract, after being elected, some of his previous statements (The BRICS post, 2018). Furthermore, Brazil is strongly dependent on the relationship with China since it is the country's first commercial partner (Casarões, 2018). Moreover the BRICS group is the only forum in which Brazil has two partners residing as permanent members in the UN, without counting the privilege, from a point of view of voting system and

economic capacity, to be part of the NDB, where practically Brazil has more say than in Bretton Woods institutions.

As a result, despite the populist drift, and despite the potential and further fragmentation of the BRICS, there is sufficient reason to believe that Brazil's decision to move away from the BRICS may be counterproductive for Brazil itself. In any case, we reserve to await the developments and the next moves by the Brazilian government.

Therefore, in the light of these last considerations, we have to wonder which effective influence will the BRICS have in GG. Despite their limits, their manifested intention is to give a shape to GG, to reflect the current world (BRIC, 2009). Now, although they have still gaps to cover, they are on their way to give a major influence on it.

Will Western countries agree to accept a multilateralism underway? There are countless voices that rise to warn against potential wars (not just commercial ones) that could take place. However, we hope that the answers are of a different kind, tending to recognize the decisive weight that the BRICS are having at a global level, looking for diplomatic, rational solutions, and aimed at reaching a global human governance (Falk, 1995). Otherwise, the world will start a phase of a new bipolarity, which will reach potential risks. On the one hand the Western countries, stubborn to a type of policy that is proving increasingly inadequate, on the other the BRICS that can exploit this situation to fill this role of leadership, trying to reverse, or at least change, that center-periphery paradigm, described by Wallerstein (Wallerstein, 1974), and to occupy those central positions in the world, building a new global architecture, modelling GG in a different way, and leading to consequences that give space to multiple interpretations, but that without no doubt could trace an unstable future.

Even if is not (still) a real and concrete treat, the specter of BRICS is haunting the West.

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