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# Elements of a democratically-based anti-authoritarian Foreign Policy

Lars Brozus

The year 2015 is being marked by serious international turbulence. War and instability abound, including – but not limited to – events in the Ukraine, Yemen and the expansion of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. These are but a few of the more recent additions to a long list of still bubbling crises. As a result, conflicts which were at the centre of international politics for decades – such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, the wars and instabilities in Afghanistan and the turbulence in various regions of Sub-Saharan Africa – have somewhat receded into the background, at least until they flare-up again. To this rather bleak scenario must, in turn, be added: the uncertainty regarding the Iranian and North-Korean nuclear programmes; the as-of-yet unclear – but in all likelihood overwhelmingly negative – consequences of climate change; the serious risks to global political and economic stability ensuing from the continued debt crises and growing inequality; as well as the destabilising effects of epidemics, such as Ebola.

The sheer number of wars, crises and conflicts that need to be addressed threaten to overwhelm long-standing institutions, such as the UN (United Nations). This presents so-called governance clubs with the opportunity to acquire and/or improve their international political profile. Dissatisfaction with the universalistic organisations that were established after World War II (i.e. the UN, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) has led to a diversification of particularistic institutions.

## The weakness of the UN is the strength of the Governance-Clubs

The UN remains entrusted with the objective of upholding peace and security at the international level. Nevertheless, the UN's capacity is, to a large extent, dependent on the political will and capabilities of its member states. It is only when these provide adequate resources and sufficient political support that the organisation is able carry out its tasks in an effective manner. Yet, the UN, which in the current year of 2015 shall celebrate its 70th anniversary, is often prevented from properly regulating international affairs. This difficulty was made clearly evident during the recent disagreements within the organisation's Security Council regarding a potential intervention in Syria. As a result of this deadlock, the G7 – as well as the G20 – have become alternatives, including in the defence and security realm. Heads of state and government have come to appreciate these clubs, given that – as compared to the UN – they function in a far more informal and flexible manner.

Since 2008, the G20 has grown significantly in importance as the prime venue for combatting the various global financial and economic crises. Its meetings have acquired the status of summits between heads of state and government, giving rise to an increased level of both expectations and fears regarding what may result from this club of key global players.[1] Meanwhile, the G20 has come to consider itself as a critically important player within the context of global governance i.e. the production and management of global public goods.

For institutionalised forms of multilateralism, such as the UN, the G20 represents a major political challenge. Both organisations promise an effective response to global problems within the framework of global governance. Because they are similarly engaged in the production and management of global public goods, they run the risk of competing with each other. The UN relies on its legitimacy as the "umbrella institution" of the international community to decide on how to confront global challenges in a formalised manner. The G20, on the other hand, relies on informal understandings between member country heads of state and government.

Intrinsically, the G20 has no decision-making power. However, it sets forth positions, which are subsequently formalised by the relevant international institutions. In this manner, at the G20 summit in Seoul, in 2010, the member nations' heads of state and government reached an agreement on the amendment to voting rights within international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), thereby fulfilling a long-standing demand of emerging economic powers, such as China, India and Brazil. However, with the apparent waning of the major global financial and economic crisis, the conflicts between the critics of the old multilateral order that benefited the major powers of 1945 resurfaced. Given that these fundamental contradictions cannot be harmonised within a collective

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[1]  The G20 include Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the UK, the USA, as well as the EU.

institution, such as the G20, the group lost a certain degree of coherence. This in turn opens up room for manoeuvre that can be utilised by other governance clubs, such as the G7 and the BRICS.

## The case for closer cooperation beyond the G7

The G7 was established in 1975 in order, primarily, to coordinate the financial and economic policies of the world's seven most industrialised countries.[2] Initially, other issues, such as defence and security were not focussed upon. The BRICS comprise Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.[3] However, the political, economic and socio-cultural discrepancies between the member states are particularly striking. Considering the political dimension, whereas China and Russia are authoritarian regimes, Brazil, India and South Africa are proudly democratic. Regarding the economic angle, meanwhile, the significant gap between China's high economic performance and that of the other members of the club is likely to continue increasing as opposed to decreasing. Finally, from a socio-cultural point of view, whereas the democratic members of the bloc pride themselves on being free societies with a tradition of open political criticism, China and Russia's societies are surveillance-controlled.[4] Therefore, it must be pointed out that the BRICS are not a very coherent ensemble. It remains to be seen whether any meaningful cooperation beyond simple converging interests will be possible. In other words, given their significant differences, it seems more likely that the BRICS shall only be successful in specific cooperation initiatives that satisfy the interests of all parties, as opposed to the developing and sustaining of wide-ranging policies (Stuenkel 2015-b).

Europe and North America are steadily losing relative importance in the globalised, networked and interdependent world of today. The Ukraine crisis highlighted this fact: except for the more or less directly affected western countries this conflict has, to a large extent, virtually been ignored. Apart from the G7 and the EU, only a handful of countries have imposed sanctions on Russia (the most important exceptions are Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland). Even close allies, such as Israel, South Korea and Turkey are holding back. Apparently, the majority of the G20 member states do not share the west's concerns about Russian policy. It is thus unsurprising that Russia should feel correspondingly low pressure, and little fear of international isolation, which might lead it to change its political direction.

The perception of "being the only ones who care about the rules" (to paraphrase the unforgettable Walter Sobchak in "The Big Lebowski") provides a strong incentive

[2]  Member-states are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the US. The EU is represented within all meetings.

[3]  In addition, India, Brazil and South Africa comprise the IBSA-Club (Stuenkel 2015-a). They see themselves as the representatives of their respective regions: Brazil for Latin America, India for Southeast Asia, and South Africa for Sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, regarded jointly, they deem themselves as representatives of emerging countries in relation to industrialised countries, particularly the G7. Both components – the regional leadership claim, with simultaneous representation of emerging markets – are also important reasons why Russia and particularly China have established the club of the BRICS with these partners. The self-perception of the IBSA-States is, of course, contested by competitive neighbours or regional rivals (Mexico and Argentina in the case of Brazil, Pakistan in the case of India, and Nigeria and Ethiopia in the case of South Africa).

[4]  "Reporters without Borders" Press Freedom Index 2015 ranks the BRICS accordingly (180 countries): Brazil 31.93 (Rank 99), Russia 44.97 (Rank 152), India 40.49 (Rank 136), China 73.55 (Rank 176), South Africa 22.06 (Rank 39), access. https://index.rsf.org/#!/index-details.

for the G7 member states to coordinate their politics even more closely. However, to achieve closer cooperation, the differences between the G7 members need to be smoothed out. Such differences include, amongst others, concerns regarding the TTIP negotiations (The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), or policies regarding cyber issues and data security. In view of the asymmetries of power within the G7, the most likely outcome of such divergences is that the US, as the strongest member, shall assert itself upon the others. Therefore, it lies in the interest of the minor G7 members to intensify their relationships with emerging democracies of the Global South, such as Brazil, India and South Africa.

A balanced network of democracies might become a significant global driving force for sustainable peace, development and security. This is all the more important given that the level of disagreement between democracies and authoritarian regimes, regarding the general configuration of international politics, is becoming increasingly apparent.

## Democratically legitimised governance on the defensive

From a universalistic point of view, democracy has become the globally recognised standard of governance. Practically all global and regional organisations – from the UN to the African Union (AU) to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) – promote democratic structures and processes for the organisation of state and society.

Democracy is considered to be a superior form of governance, in both normative and functional terms, since it meets and caters to the expectations and needs of its citizens. This is based on a simple mechanism: within a democracy, the head of state and/or government benefits from governing in accordance with the interests of the population. And, given that the latter has the power to decide on the former's re-election, policies must primarily further the common public good rather than private interests. Authoritarian rulers, on the other hand, are less dependent on public approval and, therefore, find themselves in a better position to pursue individual advantage.[5]

However, this democratic mechanism can only function properly when several prerequisites are met. Most important are competitive (i.e. free, fair and regularly-held) elections, capable of mobilising citizens politically. The existence of clear political alternatives coupled with a high voter turnout is, therefore, a sign of a stable democratic rule. Responsiveness to public interest and the constant pursuit of the common good are factors that help make democracy a form of government that stands out for its problem-solving capacities and level of social inclusion. Together with the empirically supported claim that democracies do not wage war against one another, this provides a strong argument for disseminating this form of government on a global scale, given that those promoting democracy are not only concerned with high quality – but also with peaceful – governance.

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[5] At the same time, authoritarian regimes are in a position to compensate, at least in part, for their lack of public approval through the use of repression, see Collier 2009.

Both factors, domestic good governance and international peaceful governance, form the basis for the acceptance of democracy as the global standard for governance.[6] That democracy is worthy of recognition as the standard of good governance, however, is not accompanied by a corresponding de-facto recognition throughout the world. Quite to the contrary, the attractiveness of democratically legitimised governance seems to be on a downwards trend, given that as of the mid-2000s the global spread of democracy has stagnated. Various relevant indices have noted this fact, such as, for instance, the Polity IV-Dataset, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), and the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI). Freedom House refers to a "freedom recession" (Puddington 2010), whilst, already in 2008, the Economist's Intelligence Unit stated: "The spread of democracy has come to a halt" (Economist Intelligence Unit 2008). Renowned experts on democratisation, such as Larry Diamond and Peter Burnell, also made this point, noting the existence of a "democratic rollback" or "pushback" (Diamond 2008; Burnell 2010).

The reasons for this are manifold. They encompass disappointment regarding the course of democratisation processes in many countries around the world, the erosion of trust in democratic institutions, and the increasingly successful competition of authoritarian regimes.

Firstly, regarding difficulties in the democratisation process: In the 1990s, numerous democratisation processes took place in countries with authoritarian regimes. These processes were undertaken, namely, in the former spheres of influence of the Soviet Union, in both Europe and Asia. These processes of governance transformation related not only to the political, but also to the social and economic spheres. Not all of these transformation processes were successful. Central and Eastern European countries, such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, succeeded as regards their institutional conversion, proof of which was their entry, as of the 2000s, into the EU, a genuinely democratic club. Nevertheless it remains unclear to what extent this institutional conversion really functions, considering the emergence of new authoritarian trends, for instance, in Hungary and elsewhere. Furthermore, many of the ex-Soviet Union countries display, at best, a superficial level of democratisation. Although regular elections take place they cannot be deemed fair and free. The quasi "office-rotation" that took place between the Russian President and Prime Minister in 2012 is a good example of this. In such cases, there is a conceptual notion of a "managed" or "sovereign" democracy (Brozus/Schröder 2011). Rhetorically, democracy might still be subscribed to as the standard of good governance, but there is no corresponding democratic practice.

Secondly, as regards the erosion of trust in democratic governance: Within more or less all consolidated democracies – such as the US, the UK and France – there are increasing doubts with respect to the actual ability of democratic systems and governments

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[6]   This assumption explains why prosperous democracies, such as the US and the EU, annually invest several billion euros towards the dissemination of this form of governance.

to respond to public desires, pursue the common good and solve problems.[7] The concentration of political, economic and media influence decreases the dependency of the ruling elites from the general population, and declining voter turnouts reduce the risk of being penalised for a selective interpretation of the common good. This can be the result of deliberately employing a political strategy of "asymmetric demobilisation". The aim of this strategy is to conduct the least controversial electoral campaign as possible, in order not to mobilise the supporters of one's political opponents to actually vote.[8] Moreover, after the global financial and economic crises, confidence in the superiority of democracies' problem-solving capabilities has suffered a severe setback. Many citizens feel that democracy's inherent promise of social inclusion has been broken. Within practically all consolidated democracies, populist propaganda, based on exclusion and segregation, is gaining ground.

Finally, with regard to successful governance by authoritarian regimes: The healthy economic performance seen in certain authoritarian regimes has cast doubt on the previous perception of a strong correlation if not causation between economic development and democratisation. China particularly, but also a number of other Asian countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam reap – quite regardless of their authoritarian governance systems – significant economic benefits from the globalisation process. In view of this, some apparently tried and tested assumptions about democratic and development policy have been questioned. Reasonably secure property rights, educational development, urbanisation and the rise of a prosperous middle class no longer seem to be sufficient factors for the shift towards democratically legitimised governance (Kurlantzick 2013).

Apparently, authoritarian governance is becoming a competitive option as regards the dimension of political order (Willke 2014). How can democracies deal with this challenge from a foreign policy standpoint? During the Ukraine crisis, the leading western democracies already addressed it by suspending Russia from the G8. This consistent, but at the same time somewhat helpless return to the old format of the G7 should be accompanied by:
› The reorientation of democratisation promotion
› The expansion of relationships with democratically-structured powers,
› The modernisation of the United Nations.

## Reorientation of democracy promotion

That authoritarian regimes have benefitted so much from the political push for economic globalisation in the 1980s is one of the biggest ironies of the 20th century. Originally designed and implemented by the conservative governments of Thatcher in the UK and Reagan in the US, the liberalisation and deregulation of economic activities turned out to be a form of sorcerer's apprentice. Instead of triggering political liberalisation, in some

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[7]   The phenomenon is being discussed under the catchword "Post-democracy", see Crouch 2004.

[8]   This strategy has been pursued quite successfully by the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) in Germany under Chancellor Merkel, see Schmidt 2014.

cases globalisation processes even strengthened authoritarian regimes by allowing for improved economic growth. The tragedy of globalisation, therefore, can be described as a factual contradiction to the promotion of democracy (Rodrik 2011). As a result of this unexpected development, non-democratic justifications for political order gain importance at the international level. These are based primarily on economic performance; in a secondary manner, they rely on traditional communal structures often characterised by the assumption of consensus and on the existence of only very weak identity structures beyond that of the family and peer groups.

It is more than unlikely that in order to take account of these unforeseen consequences there will be an attempt to cut back on globalisation processes. Another hypothetical option to solve the apparent contradiction between globalisation and the promotion of democracy might be to consider reducing the funds made available for the latter. This is, however, equally unlikely, notably since democratisation is a market of its own, closely tied to the industry of development (Carothers 2010).

Instead, it might be worth considering a reorientation of democracy-promotion, particularly in view of non-European experiences (Piccone/Alinikoff 2012). The aim would be to make the transition to a model of political competition – decided through competitive elections – socio-politically tolerable. So far, democracy-promotion has relied almost only on instruments such as the establishment of political parties, the holding of elections and the drafting of a constitution. Political negotiation-processes, such as round-tables and other collaborative consultation and participation models, used for instance during the transformation of Central and Eastern European as well as South American countries, have been neglected. This situation is unsatisfactory, because if the chances for successful democratic transformations are ultimately limited under conditions of expanding globalisation, the likelihood of conflicts between authoritarian regimes and democracies will inevitably rise.

## A network of democratic powers

Sharing a system of governance does not automatically imply a commonality of interests regarding international affairs. Despite being united via cooperation structures such as the "GIBSA-Quadrilogue", which encompasses IBSA countries (India, Brazil and South Africa) along with Germany, it was only the latter that chose to take a proactive position regarding the Ukraine Crisis; the IBSA countries chose, instead, to remain neutral (Hett/Wien 2015). However, this contradictory behaviour should not be overestimated. It should, rather, function as an incentive to sound out where intersections of interests and preferences lie given common ideas and assumptions about the structuring and re-structuring of international order. This should not implicitly mean that relationships between countries with differing governance systems ought to be automatically downscaled. Indeed, countries under authoritarian regimes remain important partners for the political effectiveness of many aspects of global governance (e.g. Energy, Climate). The cooperation with the IBSA countries should, however, be intensified as should relations with other emerging G20 democracies, such as Argentina, Indonesia, Mexico and South Korea.

The Brazilian initiative "Responsibility while Protecting" (RwP) could be a starting point (Kenkel 2015). It propagates the further development of the international norm "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P). R2P strengthens the commitment of all nations to protect their population against mass atrocity crimes. In the event that a country does not comply with this commitment, the international community has the authority to intervene. In Libya, in 2011, former dictator Gaddafi threatened to massacre his political opponents. As a result, the UN Security Council agreed to an international intervention which included the use of military force. As a result the population under threat was duly protected, but the intervention also contributed to the downfall of Gaddafi. This gave rise to heated controversies in the UN regarding whether or not Gaddafi's removal had represented an over-stretching of the organisation's original mandate. In response to this debate, Brazil proposed to clearly identify the rules of intervention wherein the issue is to avert the most serious human rights violations.

One need not agree with the analysis and conclusions of this initiative – as well as with other interventions by democracy-promoting powers. However, what such initiatives do indeed illustrate is the willingness of emerging democracies to co-structure the international order. This could lead to a network of democratic powers (under the acronym "G-Dem", in a similar manner to the G7/8 or G20 governance clubs). The goal of such a network would be to draw up the elements of an attractive model for spreading democratic governance. All G20 democracies might be considered as members of such a group. Certainly, there is significant distrust amongst some of them, in part even open rivalry. Germany's comparatively good international reputation could be useful to downscale these reservations (Kappel/Reisen 2015).

The modernisation of the UN could be another area of cooperation between democratic powers with a view to strengthening global governance and the production of global public goods.

## The modernisation of the United Nations

Arguments against the informal club-governance practiced by the G-Formats, such as the G20, are understandably raised by countries not represented therein. Any antiauthoritarian international strategy led by club-governance risks, therefore, meeting with resistance, or – at the very least – with only limited cooperation on the part of those countries not represented. This could be prevented if the democracy-promoting powers would, collectively, call for the modernisation of the UN. This would imply, e.g., the reform, and restructuring of working methods of both the Security Council and General Assembly. Of course it would also imply ensuring improved funding for the organisation. The UN is – regardless of all the well-known pathologies and dysfunctionalities inherent to international organisations – the only universal framework which allows all countries to take part in global governance. Adopting a truly democratic, participative style of governance could be a form of displaying the organisation's strengths. Thus, modernising the UN could become a project for democracy-promoting powers.

Due to the growth in relevance of informal methods for multilateral cooperation, such as the G20, viewpoints on institutionalised multilateralism have undergone changes. Countries which perceive themselves as rising powers press for the reform of traditional multilateral institutions in order to make them reflect the new global balance of power. This is illustrated, for instance, by the repeated claims on the part of Brazil, India and South Africa that the composition of the UN Security Council (UNSC) no longer corresponds to the political reality of the 21$^{st}$ century. Therefore, the UNSC should be expanded and reorganised to include new global players (Stuenkel 2015a).

On the other side of things are the states which tend to consider themselves as the losers of globalisation. They are highly interested in maintaining their institutionalised standing set forth in the UN charter, so as to remain able to exert influence on the future shape of global politics. These countries realise, however, that the growing relevance of informal institutions such as the G20, is putting pressure on the UN to adapt. Yet even those countries which fear status relegation within the UN context are much less capable of exerting influence within informal institutions – far less so than they would be within a reformed UN. It is therefore in their interest to upgrade the organisation to an entity more capable of action and suffering less risk of deadlock. A reformed UN – in which current global powers would need to share their influence – would still be a better forum for them to continue shaping the politics of global governance than the systems available today.

Therefore, even countries such as France are keen to shift the pressure from the calls of non-G20 members for increased accountability and representativeness to the context of a UN reform. Rendering the UN more representative would, inevitably, lead to a relative loss in power for countries that were globally relevant in the post-World War II world. Nevertheless, even they would benefit from a more effective UN-system. As a result, this could give rise to a broad coalition of countries, which for very different reasons, is keenly interested in strengthening the UN.

It might also be worthwhile taking another look at the G4-Initiative of 2005. On that occasion the G4 countries (Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan) submitted a wide-ranging UN reform proposal. It ended up coming to nothing, for three main reasons:

1. Fierce opposition from regional rivals, such as Mexico, Colombia, Italy, Pakistan and South Korea, all of which joined forces in the so called "Uniting for Consensus" group.

2. Insufficient engagement of the US, which only wanted Japan in the UNSC.

3. Lack of unity within the African Union (AU), which failed to agree upon two candidates for the Security Council, and insisted on full veto rights.

However, things have somewhat changed by now. Therefore, a new reform initiative might have some chances for success. Three driving forces are decisive for this shift:

1. Since 2005, global challenges have clearly become increasingly daunting. Globally interconnected risks, such as climate-change, poverty-centred population-growth and the financial and economic crises call, more than ever, for collective responses on the part of the international community. Given that the UN is currently not providing such collective responses, governance clubs, such as the G20, are seeking to fill regulatory and implementation gaps. This has given rise to an "informalisation of multilateralism", given that these governance clubs are less institutionalised than the UN system and not interested in universal participation.

2. The "Uniting for Consensus" group has lost its coherence. Some of its members, such as Mexico, Italy and South Korea, are also members of the G20. They use that platform to both voice and legitimise their global political claims. Accordingly, they might no longer be fundamentally opposed to a reform of the UN, which is deemed less important. Other members, such as Colombia and Pakistan, have not been granted admittance to exclusive governance clubs, such as the G20. This could lead to a renewed desire for a substantial UN reform in the hope of increasing their own relative power by turning that organisation into a weightier global actor. After all, these countries could still exert more influence on international policy through the UN than via the informal club governance format, to which they are not granted admittance.

3. The US has become friendlier to the UN. This is due to two structural factors: On the one hand, the overburdening of Washington as a "global problem solver" has become increasingly clear. Several wars (e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq) and an insufficiently regulated financial sector have triggered serious economic, financial and debt crises – to such an extent that Washington has had to rely on international burden-sharing. Furthermore, the US needs the support of like-minded partners in its management of global problems. Washington is therefore showing renewed interest in institutionalised forms of multilateralism. This is because the US's position of global predominance can be secured far better in the long term within the auspices of the UN than by relying on informal governance formats such as the G20, which swiftly reorganise themselves to reflect the ebbs and flows of global power (Thimm 2010).

   In order to ensure the success of a new initiative for UN reform, the AU's position must be cemented. In the event that a networked governance club of democracies were to be successful in achieving agreement on the support for an all-encompassing UN reform, such a project should be immediately submitted to the AU. Informally, preparation and talks could take place within the IBSA framework. The inclusion of wide-ranging access rights to the Security Council, a differentiated suspension of veto rights for new as well as old members (e.g. in the case of mass atrocity crimes, along the lines of a French proposal), as well as generous monetary transfers for the support and sustainable restructuring of African economies, could be components of an offer which would encourage the AU to settle upon two candidates, thus solving all three issues which led to the failure of the G4-Initiative of 2005, and thus paving the way for effective UN reform.

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