

## CYRIL RAMAPHOSA LED SOUTH AFRICA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH RUSSIA IN THE CONTEXT OF BRICS: A DIOPAN PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** Dubbed as the beginning of the “new dawn”, the year 2018 has served as a watershed moment in terms of South Africa’s domestic and international affairs. The basis for this narrative is the fact that in February 2018, Cyril Ramaphosa succeeded Jacob Zuma as the President of South Africa. Among others, this change of guard in South Africa’s presidency has ushered an emerging narrative about South Africa’s future engagement with Russia in the context of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) grouping. Unlike former President Zuma who was seemingly inclined towards the East, President Ramaphosa has been linked by observers to the West. It is on this basis that, this paper attempts to address the following central question: Does the Ramaphosa presidency represent a catalyst for change or continuity in terms of South Africa engagement with Russia in the context of BRICS? As a way of departing from the dominant tradition in International Relations of either locating studies of this nature within the realist or liberal perspective, the authors of this paper proposes a holistic approach which is based on the theory of Afrocentricity (also read as a Diopan perspective) and interdisciplinary critical discourse analysis in its broadest form. In this context, this paper establishes an argument that it is not “business as usual” insofar as South Africa’s present engagement with Russia is concerned.

**Keywords:** Afrocentricity; BRICS; Cyril Ramaphosa; Jacob Zuma; Russia; South Africa.

### INTRODUCTION

In the recent past, South Africa has become an active participant in global economic cooperation forums such as the World Economic Forum (WEF), Group of Twenty (G20) Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) and India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA). Pretoria (administrative capital of South Africa) has strategically positioned itself with emerging powers in opposition to the traditional big powers in the international political and economic system such as the United States of America (hereafter referred to as the US). As opined by Tella (2017), South Africa’s engagement in BRICS entails an opportunity for economic transformation retrenched in line with neoliberalism and the unilateral political gain as South Africa is the second largest economy in Africa after Nigeria. The foregoing observation is debatable because in certain circles the economy of South Africa is considered as the largest in Africa, especially in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Cornelissen et al. as cited by Baseda (2017:77) supports the above-mentioned assertion, “economic transformation after the global financial downturn indicate tectonic shifts away from the Group of Seven (G-7) countries and towards the BRICS and other countries of the global south.”

Regionally, South Africa is increasingly enforcing its hegemonic status in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. This situation is

largely influenced by the fact that South Africa is confronted with the challenge of influencing neighbouring countries as its hegemon status does not exist in a vacuum (Alden & Schoeman, 2013). South African development is inextricably located to the Southern African region and the continent at large. All the democratic presidents of South Africa (Nelson Mandela, 1994-1999; Thabo Mbeki, 1999-2008; Kgalema Motlanthe, 2008-2009; Jacob Zuma, 2009-2018; and Cyril Ramaphosa, 2018 to date) positioned their policies to address the marginalisation of the continent, through engagements with global role players in facilitating a just global order ([www.dirco.gov.za](http://www.dirco.gov.za)).

By jumping to the rationale of the research of this paper, the public resignation of President Zuma on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 2018, signalled the new dawn in South African politics and international relations. The latter should be understood within the context of the closer relations between domestic politics and foreign policy. His elected successor Ramaphosa occupied the hot seat faced with the daunting task of restoring transparency to the dysfunctional state-owned enterprises and growing the economy simultaneously addressing the trauma caused by the triple-headed monster (unemployment, income inequality, and poverty) and corruption. Another deterrent was President Ramaphosa had to rigorously explain the conditionality to both domestic and international investors on the motion to amend Section 25 of the Republic of South Africa's Constitution of (1997), which is geared to propel the expropriation of land without compensation.

As a statesman entrusted with the task of rebuilding the country's political and economic woes, his first stance as the head of state was (1) reshuffling his cabinet (2) the controversial signing of the South African Renewable Energy Independent Power Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) and (3) agreeing to partake to the African Union (AU) led African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTFA) agreement signed in Kigali (Rwanda) during March 2018. However, the president's utterances are reinforcing the neo-liberalism agenda in the country and Africa at large. It is emphasised because of the revived interest of Pretoria to further engage with the already liberalised markets across the continent, where trade and investment are prioritised, while social security, social development, and environmental issues are neglected.

The highlight of Ramaphosa's early days at *Mahlamba Ndlopfu* (the official residence of the President of South Africa) is the controversial announcement of the signing of REIPPPP by the newly appointed Minister of Energy Jeff Radebe, who is generally considered to be a close friend/ relative of the president. The REIPPPP announcement has somewhat shuttered the good bilateral engagements between Russia and South Africa. As reported by Naki (2018), "Jinping had asked to visit South Africa during the BRICS summit in July, which Ramaphosa accepted. The only problem was that Zuma, while he was still president, had reportedly already agreed to visit Putin at the same time". Ramaphosa chose to meet China's

President Xi Jinping by declining the Russian President's proposed visit. Instead, South Africa's Deputy President David Mabuza was chosen as a special envoy to go calm the tension in Krelim (the official residence of the President of the Russian Federation). His task was to congratulate Putin on his re-election as a head of state and notifying him about the termination of the nuclear energy deal (Haffajee, 2019).

The signing of the REIPPPP in political terms undermined the advanced Russia-South Africa nuclear energy deal proceedings. Some scientific studies (Nkadimeng, 2018) reflects that the nuclear deal would have costed an estimation of \$500 billion with a lifespan 50 years, whereas the REIPPPP will cost the South African government \$1 trillion with frequently renewing the technology. The nuclear deal versus renewable energy is an economic squabble of business elites that politicised by using the mainstream media, opposition parties such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) amongst others and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to peddle propaganda for the negative outcomes of nuclear energy.

Flowing from the above, it is worth noting that Putin later publicly denounced that Ramaphosa chose the Chinese President Xi Jinping over him (Ndaba, 2018). This paper interrogates South Africa's bilateral engagement with Russia since Ramaphosa assumed office, and provides argumentative analysis on how such relations impact the BRICS partnership. The authors employed Afrocentric theory to demonstrate how the South Africa engagement with Russia and BRICS is an economic cooperation forum that largely benefits Brazil China, India and Russia. This premised is largely driven by the unequal power relations between the BRIC countries and South Africa.

## **2. METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMING**

The data for this paper was acquired through broad review of relevant literature. The latter assumed a form of insightful news reports, academic articles and books, and journals in the field of Political Science and other cognate academic disciplines. The authors then synthesised and analysed the acquired data thematically. Theoretically, this paper was anchored by the Afrocentric theory (also read as Afrocentricity) as articulated by Asante (2003) and Diop (1954). While Asante has been instrumental in popularising the theory of Afrocentricity in the recent past, its idea is largely considered to have been fathered by Diop. It is for this reason that this paper seeks to paint a Diopan perspective of the subject of its research. This paper equally draws lessons from Mazama (2009) and like-minded Afrocentric scholars. In this study, Afrocentricity is understood as a theory and paradigm, as it captures the essence of reality from the view of Africans and other people whose fate is tied to the issues that affect the African continent. The authors have chosen Afrocentricity as an analytic lens for this paper because most studies of this nature are based on Westernised state-centric theories such as Marxism, Realism and International Political Economy (IPE) theory. The utility value of the aforementioned conventional theories in assisting to provide explanations to pertinent questions in International Politics

(IP) cannot be overstated. However, it should not be at expense of the theories, ideas, and concepts from the global South (including Africa), which have been marginalised for quite some time in the knowledge production industry (Shai, 2016).

One amongst the key components of Afrocentricity theory is the form of cultural criticism that is deployed by Afrocentric scholars. They carefully examine the epistemological analysis of a study and etymological uses of words by an author, to locate the author's cultural perspective (Asante, 2009). This allows Afrocentric researchers to intersect with ideas and actions of which the orientation of knowledge is based on during an investigation. In this paper, Afrocentricity is employed to capture the trajectory of Russia's engagement with South Africa within the context of BRICS partnership since Ramaphosa became president of South Africa. Moreover, to uncover the rhetoric largely covered and bypassed by Western conventional theories, when investigating Europeans engagement with African states.

Categorically Mazama, as cited by Pellerin (2012:150-151), conceptualised Afrocentric theory criteria as follows:

- Locate centrality of African people in all inquiries as historical subjects whether in religious, political or economic studies.
- The urgency of grounding an African project that entails the corrected history of African people across the world.
- Afrocentric methodologies must serve a social science inquiry for the African cultural phenomenon in practice and must be valid; reliable inquiry aimed at liberating African understanding of their continent and the world at large.

On a point of departure, according to Asante (1988:6), "Afrocentricity serves as the establishment of the subject place of Africans and the destruction of the compliance with the European ideas and concepts of Africans". Afrocentricity as a framework of this paper serves as a governing and empirical tool and guide the active agency of Africans. On studies of this nature, Afrocentricity is deployed as a theoretical guiding tool to dilute and distinguish between the mainstream International Relations theories on how they diverge or converge in analysing states behaviour.

### **3. RUSSIA IN AFRICA: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY CONSIDERATIONS**

Before eagerly discussing the historical ties between Russia and people of African ancestry, it is very important to note that Russia is amongst the few European states that never took part in the trans-Atlantic slave trade (1502-1863), and never established colonies in the African continent for that matter (Blackely, 2015). According to Matusevich (2007:13), "In the eyes of many black observers, Russia's absence from the histories of the slave trade and European conquest of Africa

contributed to its image as a relatively tolerant society, less affected by the curse of Europeans and North American racism.” First Imperial Russia’s connection with Africa is documented on the works of one of the most renowned poets in Russia, Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Pushkin was of African origin (Ethiopia), he was the maternal great-grandson of an Abyssinian’ Abram Hannibal. Hannibal was taken from Africa by the Great Tsar Peter. He grew under the care of the emperor and as a result, he became a key general in Russia’s army engineers. His grandson (Pushkin) acknowledged his African ancestry by providing an ‘Afrocentric’ inclined poetry that made him famous during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Pushkin was embraced by the public of Imperial Russia, and he was and still regarded as one of the country’s national cultural symbols. This gesture by the Imperial Russia regime underscored the racial intentions of other European states towards mynated (Black) people during the prevalent racism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Blackely, 2015).

As mentioned above, Imperial Russia’s historical connection with Africa during the 19<sup>th</sup> century is embodied in the genealogy of their national cultural symbol. Historians such as Blackely (2015) and Matusevich (2007) fondly believe the influence of Pushkin curtailed to their engagement with the Ethiopian Orthodox Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913). The historians report on both Ethiopia’s and Russia’s Orthodox Church similar embracement of church sacraments, their similar mythical form of God and related depiction of ancient biblical stories. Imperial Russia’s participation in the world trade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw them employ Africans as a freeman to help them further their national objectives internationally (Blackely, 2015; Matusevich, 2007). The bilateral relations between Imperial Russia and Ethiopia was witnessed during both the first (1895-1896) and second Italo-Ethiopian war (1935-1937) equally known as the Italo-Abyssinia war. Imperial Russia provided medical and military assistance to Ethiopian troops to outcast Italian troops. Ethiopia respectively became not only the first African state to defeat a Western force, but also the only African state to have defended its sovereignty against colonisers (Matusevich, 2007).

By shifting focus on Ethiopia-Russia engagements or vice versa, Imperial Russia’s presence in the Southern African region was their visible involvement in South Africa for their assistance to Afrikaners (Boers) troops against British forces during the Anglo-Boer wars or the South African war as termed by historians.\* The wars were fought between Great Britain and two Boers independent states of Transvaal and the Orange Free State (OFS). With the advancement of their military might, British troops won both the wars. However, the British colony realised they could not singlehandedly govern the region dominated by natives. As a viable alternative, they established the Union of South Africa in 1910 alongside Afrikaners. In this regard, indigenous people participation in decision making of the Union were submerged by segregationists policies through racial laws such as Native Land

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Act of 1913 and Group Areas Act of 1950 to name a few (Nkuna & Shai, 2016).

Russia-Africa relations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century were largely subjected to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), hosting most Blacks from African Diaspora and across the African continent. In the midst of the brutal conquest of European nations on mineral-rich African countries, the Bolshevik Revolution humbly offered asylum for people of African ancestry.\* The Revolution sufficiently established the USSR in the year 1917 under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin. Moving forward, Lenin offered an alternative to Western imperialism, with special emphasis on advancing theories that speak to dismantle the negative circumstances of racism and class (Arkangelskaya & Shubin, 2014). Mozov (2007) reasonably maintains that Africans engagement with the USSR was not based on their ideology rather a search for a tolerable life and education. As Africans were caught between a hard a place and a rock, they saw the Soviet policies as a refugee to the inhumane treatment in their countries of origin.

As part of the communism-capitalism battle between the US and the USSR, the competition made Russia to establish an 'alliance of convenience' with African states.\*\* Contextually, Russia's relationship with Africa was based on decolonising the continent's political, social and economic systems imbued by Western forces in return they embrace communism (Shubin, 2010). According to Mazov (2007:141), USSR underlying premise of their foreign policy was witnessed on their assistance for liberation in Southern African. They provided arms and financial aid, while the liberation movements themselves conduct the fight against Western imperialism in the region.

Borrowing works of Nolusthugu (2007) and Mazov (2010) to concur with the above-mentioned statement, the scholars maintain that Russia had no special Africa strategy. Rather, Moscow (the administrative capital of Russia) recognised the advanced nature of British imperial governments in Southern African region for instance. Therefore, political transformations in the region were left to the fate of global developments and local struggles rather through their intervention. In supporting this claim, Seroke (2018) reports that countries such as South Africa gained independence after the fall of the USSR/communism in the early 1990s. The ultimate global demise of communism was no longer a threat to Western investments in the country. USSR's Cold War intervention in Africa was largely driven by the ideology of anti-capitalism and non-racial society's stance.

In a way to support the scholar's abovementioned claims, the authors of this paper have opted to provide a glimpse of examples that emerged as themes during data saturation. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many African leaders embraced pro-socialist strategies as their development model after being granted self-governance from the colonial rule. An example is the pro-socialist philosophical thinking from the likes of Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1927) of Ghana and the notably Tanzania's Julius Nyerere's (1922-1999) African socialism. Nyerere remains the only African to

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have received both the Lenin Peace Prize (1985) and Gandhi Peace Prize (1995). His African socialism policies largely known as Ujamaa were introduced after Tanzania gained independence from the British rule in 1961. Ujamaa Created a one-party state system, which fostered a self-reliance economic growth model, by introducing free and compulsory education for citizens to name a few. The pro-socialist policies failed as the collapse of commodity prices and the war with the neighbouring country (Uganda) strained their monetary systems to support the commencement of Ujamaa. Furthermore, the lack of foreign direct investment and droughts on the onsets of agricultural production contributed to the collapse of Ujamaa (Yona, 2008; Cornelli, 2012).

Another example captured below is taken from responses of the informants of the research for this paper. The respondents gave an account of the alliance of the ANC, SACP, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) led government. They offered their personal experience to report on the alliance possible reasons not to endorse a pro-socialist government after the demise of the apartheid government:

The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) and some ANC cadres after the collapse of the USSR had the burning desire to drive socialist programs to reconstruct and redistribute the economic injustices of the past. However, their actions were clouded during the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) talks. Russia was no longer there to offer technical support for leaders thus the struggle was sold to the 'highest bidder'. The PAC boycotted the negotiations and the resulting elections as negotiating with the 'enemy' did not go hand in glove with their ideology as an organisation. You must remember that throughout the 1980s, the apartheid government received domestic and international pressure to dismantle the segregationist laws embedded in the country. The idea of surrendering power to African leaders who were inclined to Russia's ideology of communism posed a huge threat to their businesses. By choice, the Apartheid government delayed the process of dismantling apartheid laws during the 1980s. However, when the Berlin Wall fell (1989), which signaled the collapse of the USSR as a global power (the mother host of South African liberation movements leaders, members and activists), it steered in the processes of negotiating 'safe' transfer of power (Anonymous, 2018).

ANC leaders were caught in a cross-road, the alliance is home to conflicting ideologies, and this is where the 'broad church' name comes from. Conflict of interests amongst leaders constituted to an environment which was conducive for comrades to secretly suppress one another in a fight to be beneficiaries of the new rainbow nation government. Our leaders did not have a clear strategy on their mission to recover what was stolen by the terrorist regime (apartheid government) from our forefathers (Seroke, 2018).

The fall of the Berlin Wall signaled the demise of the USSR and the communist ideology as an economic system. In the year 1991 when the Federation of Russia

was established after the adamant economic crisis infused by Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of Perestroika and Glasnost.\* Russia was declared bankrupt by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB). As an alternative, the Bretton Woods institutions offered the Russian government under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) a loan of 22 billion US dollars to solve the Soviet debt (Holton, 2014). Equally important, the tragic fall of USSR heralded to end in the bipolar international system. The tragic collapse of the Soviets vainly offered a new international order as their disinterest in Africa ushered in the People's Republic of China to establish multilateral and bilateral engagements with African states. Beijing (the administrative capital of China) invested with Africa through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and BRICS.

Russia's assistance to African states/liberation movements during the Cold War comprised bartering of supplying arms, offering military equipment and providing low-interest long-term repayment loan agreements (Seroke, 2018). Therefore, the post-Cold War Russia-Africa relation is relatively subdued to use the USSR's historical ties to rekindle their relationship with African states. In the case of South Africa, after a rigorous examination by the researcher of the former liberation movement (ANC), it must be noted that the political organisation does not have a Soviet debt however still have good relations with Moscow (Rametsi, 2018). Offering an account on African state that has a Soviet debt, Katz (2007) study titled "*Russia and Algeria: Partners or Competitors*" maintains that the visit of Putin to Algeria in the year 2006 was for the settlement of USSR's debt, in return they provide them with their natural gas. According to Katz (2007), during the Cold War Moscow supplied Algeria with military equipment estimated at \$11 billion dollars. As both countries faced internal economic problems in the 1990s. Algerian government used their goods to pay off the debt and also joined the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue.

Scholars such as Mozov (2007), Linder (2008), and Holton (2014), argue that the post-Cold War Russia's global status was their disengagement from Africa in the early 1990s. Their internal political and economic predicaments culminated to the desire for rapprochement with the US-led a new international system commonly known as the New World Order. Russia closed nine (9) embassies in Africa during this period, they also terminated their trade mission with African states such as Algeria and Egypt.

#### **4. A POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF SOUTH AFRICA**

South Africa is one of the largest diamond, gold, coal and uranium producers in the world. Over the years, the country has enticed investors across the globe due to their mineral riches. The country remains a diversified nation also known as the 'Rainbow Nation' because of the unique nature of its citizens, which comprises of different races, religious beliefs and its unique approach on the promotion of gender equality. South Africa's unique social, political and economic structures and modern history have enticed the authors to interrogate how it managed to survive

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some of the thorny international political issues.

South Africa is one of the African states that were under a unique type of colonial rule during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The assertion is informed by drawing lessons from other of African states colonial backgrounds like in Zimbabwe, Ghana and Nigeria. In South Africa, non-white citizens fell prey to the terrorist (apartheid) regime. The erstwhile National Party (NP) led white minority rule had terrorised and harassed the majoritarian citizens of African origin and neighbouring countries to feed their economic interests due to the country's abundance in mineral wealth. Another unique phenomenon in South African politics is the manner in which the transition to democracy in the early 1990s was deliberated. Through the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) from 1991 to 1993, NP led government negotiated with key African stakeholders. The stakeholders consisted of liberation movements, unions and investors to name a few by safely negotiating strategies to demise segregation laws (Maharaj, 2008; Jolobe, 2014). In doing so, they prevented the traditional transfer of power conflicts trend amongst African states. This development usually manifested between the former oppressed and the oppressors or sometimes through conflicting ethnic groups. The Convention deliberated to a democratic and impartial election in April 1994 (Maharaj, 2018).

The demise of the apartheid regime (1994) was a beacon of hope for the previously disadvantaged citizens. The first democratically elected South African President Nelson Mandela's administration endorsed the distributive policy known as the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) to correct the economic divisions and other injustices of the past. Most importantly, his administration aligned the state ambitions in formulating a foreign policy to meet the global requirements (Youle, 2009). It is central to note that South Africa during the early 1990s was facing economic deficits due to the sanctions the apartheid government was subjected to. According to Bakari (2017), the African National Congress (ANC) led government attempted to establish an economic environment where all citizens should enjoy and share the riches of the country. The policies and laws that were adopted included; Affirmative Action, Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) Act of 2003 amended to Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE), Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) and RDP amongst others. The newly appointed democratic cabinet under Mandela accommodated all races, unlike other African states after acquiring independence from the colonisers who only catered for the previously disadvantaged citizens (Mojaelo, 2013).

By weighing the situation using an Afrocentric perspective, democratic South Africa is at the dinner table dined by superpowers such as the US, China, United Kingdom of Britain (UK) and progressively Arabs. The roller-coaster relationship between Russia and South Africa is due to the compelling influence of the West on political and economic matters of South African government. Therefore, Russia-South Africa relations would hardly materialise as Moscow remain a

historical enemy of the capitalist countries. The nuclear energy deal was a tender that could have substantially benefited the BRICS countries largely Russia and China. Ramaphosa liberal line of thinking was an influence to convince his cabinet and BRICS counterparts that the country cannot afford the nuclear energy deal. Ironically, South Africa can afford the European Union (EU) led renewable energy deal. The rationale behind this assertion is informed by the staggering gap between the haves and have nots. Former oppressors are largely administering the economic affairs of the state and the former oppressed frequently fall prey to government economic decisions that further monopolise the economic sector.

## **5. SOUTH AFRICA AS A GLOBAL ACTOR**

South Africa arguably holds an important position in the international political economy class. It is the most industrialised state in Africa (Boulle, 2015). Regionally, South Africa holds a huge political and economic influence in the SADC region. South Africa's GDP contributes around 85 percent of the gross national product (GNP) of the SADC countries (Mpungose, 2018). By assessing the difficult road South Africa has travelled throughout the years, it is fair to acknowledge and credit the democratic government for its excellent achievements throughout the years. Sparks (2003) maintains that Pretoria has endorsed a constitution that is progressively the best in the world. The doctrine of the separation of powers plays a pivotal role in the aforementioned claim. The Constitutional Court (Judiciary) critically checks the laws passed in parliament (Legislature) which ought to be executed by the cabinet (Executive) in their governance. Furthermore, the Chapter 9 institutions which guard democracy in the country, includes institutions such as the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the Public Protector, the Human Rights Commission and Commission for Gender Equality to name a few. Such institutions also works as a watchdogs to maintain transparency and accountability in the country (Mojapelo, 2013).

In the post-Cold War international landscape, South Africa entered the international community space with high expectations as she play an important role in African politics. Since the early 1990s, South Africa's foreign policy is still indoctrinated on human rights and democracy as Nelson Mandela (1994) rousingly stated, "human rights will be the light that guides foreign policy." Over the years, a tension which manifested over pragmatism and ethics are instilled at the core of the country's foreign policy (Sidiropoulos, 2007). However, Afrocentrists generally critique the promotion of human rights and democracy as the principal tool in advancing the interest of investors. The government often neglect the growing need to safeguard the wealth, history and cultural values of indigenous people.

During the Polokwane ANC National Conference (December 2007), the governing party stressed the need of a developmental state to advance the needs of all citizens. As the victorious presidential candidate from the ANC conference and the

newly appointed head of state in 2009, President Zuma constituted a special ministerial body of the National Planning Commission (NPC) to draft the national program aimed at alleviating poverty, income inequality and unemployment by 2030. The national policy was named the National Development Plan (NDP) endorsed in August 2012. A developmental state requires a government that can transform the livelihood and expectations of their populace. It is a dream that goes beyond on just to create wealth and jobs. However, it is mostly concerned about the creativity and urgency of the youth. To meet the developmental phase, a state must invest its economic growth on her youth's creativity (Bakari, 2017). As for South Africa, *the centre does not hold* as the state found itself at the receiving end on the Fourth Industrial Revolution era, the technology markets are largely dominated by the US and Asians.

A developmental state is politically driven, the lack of government funding to local business and rampant unemployment as a whole, breeds a society that lacks the enthusiasm to peddle economic needs of a state (Naido, 2008). As an unfortunate result, countries such as China (a success story of a developmental state) are given space to influence the economic prosperity of the country through BRICS and in Africa large. Of which they use this opportunity to further exploit the continent's minerals.

## 6. SOUTH AFRICA'S BRICS MEMBERSHIP IN PERSPECTIVE

BRICS alliance is an economic conglomeration of emerging markets from the Global South. It comprises of economic giants such as (1) China; the second largest market in the world after the US (2) Russia; a European orthodox superpower (3) Brazil; an economic giant of Latin America (4) India; an economic rival of China and Taiwan in Asia (5) South Africa; the most industrialised state and second-leading economy in the African continent. The demise of the USSR (in the year 1991) and the fall of the Berlin Wall (in the year 1989) signalled the end of the contestation between communism and capitalism. This contemporary international political climate introduced the new multipolar system (Tella, 2017). The system flagged increased political freedom and access for states to participate in international political and socio-economic dimensions by looking into their capabilities rather through economic ideologies. As a result, the fall of the Berlin Wall also ended the reliance on the US and USSR dictated worldviews (Baseda, 2013; Tella, 2017).

Developing markets in Africa, Asia and Latin America established development models to speed up the growth and development of their regions. This was done by forming economic blocs aimed at addressing their historical economic shortfalls. They engage through multilateral agreements, as the agreements are tools intended at combining ideas and resources to promote and develop the political and economic interest of member states. The behaviour of member states in a multilateral agreement usually establishes a memorandum of understanding to tackle a perceived common problem that affects all member states.

The formation of BRICS was a motivation by the Global South states advocating for their ideas, voices and capabilities to be offered opportunity and uniform space in the unjust global economic and financial dimensions. Member states of BRICS provide substantial integration, and they possess an extensive political and economic influence in their respective regions. Another critical factor that drove the formation of BRICS is the stronghold of the West in international financial institutions such as Bretton Woods: WB and IMF. According to Daniel (2014), BRICS member states combined only have 12 percent of voting rights in both the institutions, while EU member states and the US enjoy 88 percent of voting rights particularly on financial matters that affect the Global South states. By assessing the situation with Afrocentric lenses, the weight of the EU and the US on the Bretton Woods institutions breeds monopolies and illicit international trade, as many states must abide by the IMF led Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) provisions.

The first meeting of BRICS was a multilateral meeting of the foreign ministers of the four BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) in New York, September 2006. A plethora of meeting was held during that year, however, the first formal Summit of the BRIC group was held in Yekaterinburg (Russia) on June 16, 2009. The summit was attended by all head of states of the four BRIC countries. The following year (2010), former South African President Zuma was invited to an extraordinary meeting with the four BRIC heads of states. Resulting from the meeting, in the year 2011 South Africa was ushered in as a member of the group, renaming it to 'BRICS'; the 'S' representing South Africa's inclusion (Baseda, 2013). The joining of BRICS remains a cornerstone in Pretoria's global political ambitions. In the year 2013, Russian President Putin invited Zuma to attend the G20 Summit in Saint Petersburg, later that year South Africa officially joined the G20. In doing so, they became the only African state in the economic bloc dominated by industrialised states (Boulle, 2015).

South Africa is reasonably considered an equal partner in the BRICS group. It is worth emphasising that the country constitutes 1.2 million km<sup>2</sup> of land, and it is conveniently located on the Southern tip of the African continent where two major oceans (Atlantic and Indian) connect. This geographic status naturally makes South Africa a suitable location and attractive destination for international shipping and trade route of goods. In size, South Africa is larger than the highly industrialised European states of Belgium, France, Italy and Germany combined. Regionally, the national power producer Eskom typically generates 50 percent of the SADC region. The joining of BRICS gives all members a platform to establish a gateway to an inextricable trade with the SADC region and Africa at large (Mphahlo, 2013).

## **7. SOUTH AFRICA LEADERSHIP STAGES IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS MATTERS**

After 46 years of human abuse on Africans in South Africa by the Apartheid

government, the first democratic president of South Africa Mandela was concerned with national unity and restoration of the lost wealth, dignity and image of the state. Internationally, Mandela administration persistently advocated peace, human rights, democracy and unity into international politics. By drawing lessons from other African countries that were ruled by conflicts and wars, the administration was committed to developing a nation that equally accommodates all its citizens regardless of their race or creed. Mandela presidency did not have bilateral engagements with Russia, as then Russian President Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) terminated contact with Africa.

By looking into Mandela's successor Thabo Mbeki, scholars such as Habib (2009) argues that the foreign policy of South Africa after Mandela administration was personified in the character of Mbeki. During the Mbeki presidency (1999-2008), South African foreign policy was reflected on a mixture of principles and pragmatism. Mbeki embraced the ideology that South Africa's global ambitions must start in the region and the continent. South Africa's foreign policy under Mbeki was underpinned on the emancipation and up-liftment of the previously disadvantaged citizens. He carried the perception that Africans must acquire a common vision however be amplified on the development of Africans in a continent dominant by foreign practices. Therefore, the duty of Pretoria was to establish cohesion amongst the Global South states to have a say in global affairs. By attempting to democratise international institutional governance in the United Nations (UN), IMF, World Trade Organization (WTO) and the G20 (Johnson, 2009; Habib, 2009). It is critical to note that Zuma drove the country into significant multilateral agreements. However, the blueprint was set-up by Mbeki's presidency.

Mbeki's international order ambitions were regularly noted on his utterances and gestures towards his high abstraction of African Renaissance, the struggle on racism, AU and the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). His international achievement success story is the role played in transforming the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to AU in the year 2002. Moreover, his role in resolving the conflicts in Burundi, Ivory Coast and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) cannot be overlooked (Johnson, 2009). In terms of Russia-South Africa relations, during his administration, Russia under Putin was actively re-establishing relations with African countries that had Soviet debt (Egypt and Algeria). South Africa did not have direct engagement with Russia during Mbeki's administration.

Handover of the leadership torch in the Union Buildings from Mbeki to the 'laughing president' (Zuma) in 2009, was also a cornerstone in South Africa's international ambitions. This observation does not disregard Kgalema Motlanthe presidency, but considers its brief stint as that of only facilitating transition from Mbeki to Zuma. Meanwhile, Zuma's ascendance into presidency was a wave of shock for some and a wave of euphoria fuelled in by fellow politicians and voters

alike. Much of Zuma's cabinet focus was initiated towards organising a successful 2010 FIFA World Cup tournament in South Africa. The football tournament was hailed as a success as it provided a fertile ground for the upgrading of public transport, stadiums and created investor confidence to name a few. Under Zuma's tenure, the most notable achievements internationally were the joining of BRICS and G20, together with the strengthening of South Africa's relationship with China, Russia and India. The administration made continued efforts during Mbeki for the call for more representative United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and WTO. In what most politicians, journalists, and scholars alike fail to acknowledge Zuma pivotal achievement as a president is a role he played in tackling the widespread of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Domestically, Zuma's presidency contradicted South Africa foreign policy commitment to human rights and *Ubuntu* enshrined during Mandela's leadership. Events like the Marikana Massacre of 2012, where police officers gunned down protesting mineworkers in South Africa's platinum mining belt was a serious human rights violation. Another event is allowing the US-led African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) to dump US chickens in South Africa, which undermined the already established local poultry industries. The outbreaks of xenophobic attacks of 2008 and 2015 is another setback on South Africa's foreign policy core principles (Cilliers, 2017). Underneath is a response taken from a source who offers a brief summary of Zuma presidency achievements:

From a regional perspective, South Africa, with Zuma at the helm, evolved from being a strategic and intellectual founder of key influential institutions on the continent to a multilateral actor with a vested interest in aligning with emerging powers. Whereas the African agenda was a priority for Mbeki, Zuma tended to advance Africa's interests through multilateral platforms like the G20, BRICS and FOCAC (Mpungose, 2018:6).

By offering an Afrocentric account on Zuma's presidency in relation with Russia, he was generally attacked by the mainstream media for his alleged corruption and fraud charges. As a result, it damaged his image as president. Therefore, the investors could not invest with a president they could not trust. Zuma altered to look east for fiscal to drive government projects forward. He reinvented historical ties with comrade Putin, India's tycoons (Gupta family), the Chinese investors and Brazil for the HIV/AIDS alleviation program. It is important to note that South Africa had plans to build 9,600 GigaWatts (GW) worth of nuclear power stations in Koeberg, Kimberly. The process started during the second term of President Mbeki (2004-2007) when he placed power stations under tender with *Westinghouse* (US company) and *Areva* (a French company). When President Zuma took office, he placed those tenders on hold by entering into an agreement with Russia's *Rosatom* to construct the nuclear stations in Koeberg. The agreement was altogether scrapped by newly appointed South African President Ramaphosa in February 2018, who advocate for renewable energy to supply the country's demand for energy (Vegter,

2018). Below is a response taken from a former South African diplomat: “The French-led nuclear program could have colonised South Africa for 100 of years. The provisions on the payment of the tender were impossible to reach; they were overly focused on the country’s mineral resources” (Mabizela, 2018).

The multi-billion dollar tender reversal program frustrated the US and its allies. As a response, they formulated propaganda against the Zuma led cabinet on the dangers of entering nuclear energy with Russia. They used NGOs, lobby groups and opposition parties as a launching pad to collapse the relationship between Russia and South Africa. On a point departure, the authors argue that the nuclear energy deal under *Rosatomb* was a fair deal as it was going to be financed by the BRICS Development Bank. In contrast, the already drowning in debts taxpayers would finance the renewable energy deal.

Assuming the high probability that the Ramaphosa administration successfully further its foreign policy objective needs to incorporate changes in its approach. Ramaphosa’s presidency managed to join the AfCFTA agreement signed in Kigali during March 2018. The AU led AfCFTA strives to link up all 55 member states which combined constitute a population of over 1.2 billion people. The free trade agreement will generate an estimation of 24 trillion Rands, and it will eliminate trade tariffs barriers and grow African trade by 52 percent reducing import duties. The move is seen by Afrocentric thinkers such as Nkadimeng (2018), as the promotion of cheap labour that will banish local labour markets especially for countries with no labour standards. In terms of Russia-South Africa relations since Ramaphosa assumed into the presidency, the relations are sour due to the termination of the nuclear deal as noted earlier. Domestically, the premature termination of the nuclear energy deal and the separation of Eskom into three entities (generation, distribution and transmission), is described by the SACP as Ramaphosa’s sinister motive to privatise the troubled state-owned power utility to settle the R400 billion debt it has.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Based on the Afrocentric perspective, the document study of this paper has revealed that Ramaphosa led South Africa’s engagement with Russia can best be understood when located within the historical and continental context. Emerging from this, it would appear that the relations between the two countries are largely characterised by personalities of the incumbent Presidents than the domestic and international politics per se. It is on this basis that their relations can best be characterised by uncertainty and anxiety. Thus, South Africa has fundamental limitations in terms of defining its relations with Russia due to the unequal power relations between the two countries. Russia is one of the few global economic hegemon and South Africa is more in the transition zone between the developing and industrialised state. Russia’s identity and status after the breakdown of the USSR is battling intermediary with the new multipolar international system to rebuild its government

to become great power once more. Such a vision is partly shared by South Africa, which aspires to permanently represent Africa in the UNSC. During 1990s, Russia pulled back from Africa and looked for closer ties with the West with an end goal to properly focus on its domestic financial undertakings. However, Since Putin became Russian president in the year 2000. Moscow is re-establishing historical ties with African states such as South Africa. However, it must be noted that Russia does not have a direct foreign policy on South Africa rather their engagement is predominantly based on the BRICS partnership. While South Africa has a historical obligation to establish and maintain good relations with Russia, such seems to be threatened under Ramaphosa who is faced with domestic pressures to re-prioritise South Africa's national interests. Such a move often manifests in undoing the stability laid by his predecessors in terms of keeping closer relations with Russia. In the final analysis, it is concluded that if not properly addressed, the lack of the professionalization of foreign policy practice in South Africa is poised to enable Ramaphosa to refine South Africa's engagement with Russia in a manner which is injurious to the national goals of both countries.

#### *Note*

1. At the time of writing, Vongani M. Nkuna was a Masters candidate and Kgothatso B. Shai was an HOD and Associate Professor attached to the Department of Cultural & Political Studies at the University of Limpopo in South Africa. Emails: SKgothatso@yahoo.com; Kgothatso.Shai@ul.ac.za
2. Historians such as Van Der Waag (2000), Thompson (2000) and Pisani (1996) argue 'Anglo-Boer war' is not the valid term for the wars, their reasons are backed by providing conclusive evidence on the involvement of indigenous people (blacks) throughout the wars.
3. The Bolsheviks Revolution (which also read as the October Revolution) was the armed insurrection by workers and soldiers which dismantled the Tsarist autocratic regime and collapsed the Russian empire. They replaced the regime by a provincial government in February 1917, which subsequently gave all powers to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) who formed the USSR later that year.
4. Alliance of convenience denotes to the "initiation of security cooperation between ideological and geo-political adversaries in response to an overreaching third-party threat" (Resnick, 2011:4).
5. Perestroika (restructuring) referred to the democratic practices in Russia, which gave citizens a slight say in governmental matters. Perestroika called for free market business strategies and de-monopolising the economy, which largely opened Moscow's market to Western businesses. Glasnost (openness) referred to the names given to the social and political reforms



which bestowed more rights to ordinary citizens, such as criticism of government and the uplifting of media censorship to name a few.

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