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THE EMERGING POWER PARADIGM IN SOUTH AFRICA'S RELATIONS WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract

South Africa is one of the prominent countries of the African continent of 54 countries with its political and economic power. With the end of the apartheid regime, which was based on social segregation between 1948 and 1994, changes emerged both in domestic politics and foreign policy. The concrete indicator of this is the process of state-building with the new constitution. Peaceful, respectful of international law and human rights-based discourses resonated in the foreign policy of South Africa. In South Africa's relations with the countries of the continent, the concept of development is at the forefront, while emphasis is placed on the operation of solution mechanisms for the problems that the continent is likely to experience. In this regard, it is seen that the African Union (AU) has been restructured with the conditions of the period as it entered the 21st century. In this respect, it is clear that South Africa has adopted a mission for itself within the AU. In addition, South Africa's engagement with other organisations on a global level outside the continent is a result of its policy of being strong in international relations. Power categorisation in international relations can be evaluated within the framework of states' capacities and foreign policy relations. In particular, as a concrete example of the South-South dialogue, South Africa's rapprochement with Russia has important implications for the rising power paradigm, along with its relationship with China in line with BRICS. South Africa's neutral stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine has negatively affected its peaceful and normative stance. It is discussed in the article as an indicator of how idealism and pragmatism intersect in South African foreign policy. Foreign policy analysis is conducted through the use of qualitative research methods in this article. As a result, the rising power paradigm for South Africa has been tried to be understood in line with the foreign policy approaches of the Mandela, Mbeki, Zuma and Ramaphosa governments since 1994. It is critical for South Africa, whose status as a rising power is being questioned, to balance rather than bandwagoning the relations it has established.

Keywords

Emerging Power, South Africa, BRICS, Balance, Bandwagoning.

Resumo

A África do Sul é um dos países proeminentes do continente africano, composto por 54 países, devido ao seu poder político e económico. Com o fim do regime do apartheid, que se baseava na segregação social entre 1948 e 1994, surgiram mudanças tanto na política interna como na política externa. O indicador concreto disso é o processo de construção do Estado com a nova constituição. Discursos pacíficos, respeitadores do direito internacional e baseados nos

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direitos humanos ressoaram na política externa da África do Sul. Nas relações da África do Sul com os países do continente, o conceito de desenvolvimento está em primeiro plano, enquanto a ênfase é colocada no funcionamento de mecanismos de solução para os problemas que o continente provavelmente enfrentará. A este respeito, verifica-se que a União Africana (UA) foi reestruturada de acordo com as condições do período em que entrou no século XXI. A este respeito, é evidente que a África do Sul assumiu uma missão para si própria no seio da UA. Além disso, o envolvimento da África do Sul com outras organizações a nível global fora do continente é o resultado da sua política de ser forte nas relações internacionais. A categorização do poder nas relações internacionais pode ser avaliada no âmbito das capacidades dos Estados e das relações de política externa. Em particular, como exemplo concreto do diálogo Sul-Sul, a aproximação da África do Sul à Rússia tem implicações importantes para o paradigma do poder emergente, juntamente com a sua relação com a China, em linha com o BRICS. A postura neutra da África do Sul em relação à invasão da Ucrânia pela Rússia afetou negativamente a sua postura pacífica e normativa. Isso é discutido no artigo como um indicador de como o idealismo e o pragmatismo se cruzam na política externa sul-africana. A análise da política externa é realizada através do uso de métodos de pesquisa qualitativos neste artigo. Como resultado, tentou-se compreender o paradigma do poder emergente para a África do Sul em linha com as abordagens de política externa dos governos de Mandela, Mbeki, Zuma e Ramaphosa desde 1994. É fundamental para a África do Sul, cujo estatuto de potência emergente está a ser questionado, equilibrar as relações que estabeleceu, em vez de se aliar a elas.

Palavras-chave

Potência emergente, África do Sul, BRICS, Equilíbrio, Aliança.

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Introduction

The concept of power, which occupies a central position in international relations, has influenced the course of discussions within the discipline. Undoubtedly, the determinism of power in inter-state relations is essential in this regard. The ability of states with elements of power to shape international relations makes their actions in this direction a matter of debate. Power, which is reinforced by material and immaterial elements, is described with concepts such as superpower, global power, regional power, economic power, medium-sized power and rising power in line with the capacities of states. This discussion is important for understanding both the historical evolution and the dynamics of the international system. Debates surrounding the concept of rising powers are particularly prominent due to their connection with the emergence of new powers within the international system. Emerging power refers to a country that possesses certain tangible and intangible power elements and seeks to develop its sphere of influence in both near and far geographies.

South Africa is one of the continent's prominent countries due to its political, social, and economic significance. After the colonisation period, South Africa came to the forefront of the world agenda with the apartheid regime between 1948 and 1994. The apartheid regime was based on racial discrimination that led to the development of deep social problems. The end of the apartheid regime in 1994 marked the beginning of a new state-building process in both national and international political arenas. The foreign policy pursued after apartheid introduced a range of new policies and discourses. Domestic political changes in South Africa also have an impact on this issue. Especially, domestic economic problems are important variables for South Africa's international activity.

 This article discusses the characterisation of South Africa as an emerging power after 1994. In this respect, two aspects stand out in South Africa's engagement in regional and global processes. While South Africa's regional objective is to engage with processes related specifically to the African continent, it is also evident that the country cooperates with emerging powers such as Russia, China, and Brazil within a global framework. It is observed that international organisations are used to institutionalise the cooperation framework. The development of cooperation is based on the development of economic relations and the conduct of political relations based on norms. South Africa's rising power metaphor in foreign policy can be analysed in line with the discourses and actions of the Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa periods. The Mandela

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period represented a pivotal moment that enabled both the dismantling of the apartheid regime and the establishment of national conflict resolution mechanisms. Especially with the establishment of new relations with the United Nations (UN), foreign relations were established in a different way from the isolated apartheid regime. Mbeki, acting on the mission of African renaissance, pan-Africanism and Africa's influence on global platforms, has opened the rising power metaphor for South Africa to discussion. Although it may seem more passive compared to the Mbeki period, during the Zuma administration, South Africa actively pursued economic diplomacy and political cohesion through both intra- and extra-regional initiatives, culminating in its accession to BRIC. With the white paper declared in 2011, the foreign policy agenda of South Africa, which has a regional as well as a global mission, was laid out. In the post-2018 Ramaphosa period, it is seen that the southern dialogue continues, while relations with Russia and China are shaped by current developments. South Africa's neutrality in the war between Russia and Ukraine and its failure to condemn Russia's revisionist stance at the UN General Assembly expresses a pragmatist approach that is incompatible with the country's foreign policy, built on a historical framework.

This study will develop the analytical framework of the emerging power metaphor by exploring the variations in foreign policy strategies adopted by South African leaders and the relations of South Africa with international organisations. First of all, it is seen that social and economic problems may constitute an obstacle for South Africa to become an emerging power. The postapartheid transition to constitutional democracy and the development of a human rights-based approach symbolised an important transformation in the emerging power debate. It can be said that South Africa has been influenced by the countries it cooperates with around the concept of emerging power. At this point, South Africa needs to be able to practise balancing instead of bandwagoning. In addition, the processes aimed at developing South Africa's social and cultural relations around the emerging power discourse are also remarkable. When comparing the foreign policies of various leaders, it can be inferred that South Africa has moved away from its emerging power status. Ultimately, South Africa's emerging power status, which can be considered as a medium-sized power, will change in line with its continental activity and its relations with extra-regional countries.

An Overview of Society, Politics and Economy in South Africa

South Africa's role in Africa's colonial history is distinct from that of other countries on the continent. After 1948, the establishment of the apartheid regime based on racial discrimination by the whites who settled in South Africa before the 19th century has caused deep wounds in South Africa's history in many ways. The social segregation built by the apartheid regime with the laws was tried to be repaired with the collapse of the regime after 1994. Firstly, with the Population Registration Act, people in South Africa were registered as white, coloured and indigenous. The Group Areas Act led to the establishment of different living areas in the country, such as white, coloured and indigenous areas. The 1951 Bantu Authorities Act established independent areas for blacks to live in, while the 1953 Separate Amenities Act divided public spaces between whites and blacks. The 1960 Unlawful Organisations Act could declare parties to be unlawful in order to protect public safety and public order. This meant the restriction of

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blacks' activities in the field of politics. The apartheid regime was defended on religious grounds by the Dutch Reformed Church. It is seen that the interpretations of the Bible are distorted to legitimise the apartheid regime built on racial discrimination. Apartheid period Prime Minister D.F. Malan's African charter, in which he argued that the continent could only develop under the guidance of whites, illustrates the mental codes of the regime (Barber, 1973: 100-103).

Between 1948 and 1994, there were also protests against the policies of the apartheid regime. Firstly, apartheid was classified as a crime against humanity by the UN General Assembly (Guelke, 2005: 1). In 1959, after blacks organised a protest march to criticise congressional passage laws, the police used armed force, and many people lost their lives. After the massacre, the African National Congress (ANC) was banned, and the opponents of the regime started an armed struggle. The apartheid regime's politics through the National Party were one-sided and far from inclusive until 1994. A system in which only whites can vote and become parliamentarians has emerged, with the domination of the minority over the majority. With the establishment of the ANC, which defended the rights of black people, social struggle started in this field. The decline of the apartheid regime in 1994 ushered in a bottom-up nation-building process, marked by significant constitutional reforms.

As of 2024, South Africa has a population of over 60 million and a gross domestic product of approximately $400 billion. In 1994, South Africa's largest imports were from Germany and the United Kingdom, with the United States of America leading in exports. However, China is currently the leading destination for South Africa's exports (Vickers, 2012: 119-120). Apart from China, South Africa's trade with Russia, India and Brazil is also intensified. China, Russia, India and Brazil account for 17% of exports and 29% of imports. Moreover, South Africa's exports to its neighbours on the continent constitute an important part of its total exports. Since stability on the continent also has a meaning in terms of economic processes, South Africa's security concerns are shaped along this axis. In South Africa, economic problems such as inequality, poverty and unemployment come to the fore. In this respect, assessments based on the GINI coefficient of 0.67 indicate that income inequality is high in South Africa (Valodia, 2023). In this respect, the high unemployment rate, exceeding 30%, continues to exacerbate South Africa's economic challenges.

Since the end of the apartheid regime, the ANC has dominated South African politics. Over 30 years, national and international politics have been shaped by the governments of Mandela, Mbeki, Zuma and Ramaphosa. In the 2024 general elections, the ANC's decline in the vote and the fact that it had to form a coalition show the dissatisfaction with government policies at the grassroots level. The fact that 16 million out of 28 million voters cast their votes shows that the voter turnout in the elections was low, while the ANC's voting rates have declined significantly in the last two general elections.

Foreign Relations of South Africa

Foreign relations of South Africa, both regionally and globally, have diversified in accordance with the policies of postapartheid governments and their leaders. During the apartheid period between 1948 and 1994, foreign relations emerged under the influence

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of discriminatory practices on a community basis. Following the collapse of the apartheid regime, a new bureaucracy was established within the Department of Foreign Affairs, reflecting the shift in South Africa's domestic political landscape (Özkan, 2025: 113). The transformation of international systemic conditions after 1994 has also contributed to this situation. National interest is shaped by the leader's foreign policy vision, public expectations, and the structure of the international system. For South Africa, the foreign policy vision of the leaders and the structure of the international system have had a significant impact on the shaping of foreign policy. Foreign policy behaviour is formed by political, military, economic and cultural instruments in line with certain objectives. Moreover, the actions of regional middle powers are influenced primarily by internal political factors (Westhuizen, 1998: 435). In South Africa's case, its foreign policy remains largely shaped by ongoing domestic political and socioeconomic issues. Rising middle powers are typically distinguished by foreign policy orientations that are ideologically informed and closely aligned with the agendas of strong ruling parties at the domestic level. In the South African context, the ANC holds significant control over foreign policy, influencing it both in practical terms and through its ideological stance (Black and Hornsby, 2016: 157-158). Emerging middle powers are generally characterised by a dominant ruling party at the national level, with a foreign policy that reflects the party's ideological outlook on international affairs (Spies, 2010).

The United Nations Security Council resolution of 1950 recognised apartheid policies as a form of racial discrimination. The UN's attitude towards South Africa hardened after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. The UN called on states to impose an arms embargo on South Africa in 1963, and apartheid practices were recognised as crimes against humanity in 1973. South Africa's participation in the work of the UN General Assembly was suspended in 1974. The apartheid regime began to adopt an outward-looking approach (Goldenhuys, 1984). South Africa has endeavoured to build a network of economic and social relations on a southern regional basis (Davies and O'Meara, 1985: 184). In this period, South Africa prioritised relations with the Global South over broader continental engagement. South Africa's invasion of Namibia led to isolation and sanctions in the 1980s. In fact, the end of colonialism in Africa and the independence of the countries left the South African administration without support.

Especially during the apartheid period, the unfavourable course of relations at both regional and global levels emphasised actions aimed at repairing relations. In this respect, foreign policy is linked to domestic politics. Domestic political concerns limited foreign policy during apartheid. The primary goal of maintaining the apartheid regime, along with the failure to construct an inclusive national narrative, was a key factor in establishing a positive framework for foreign relations. When the new postapartheid administration was designing foreign policy, South Africa's future was linked to the African continent. In this direction, the international public opinion has also come to expect from South Africa. Post apartheid South Africa has moved away from an aggressive and confrontational foreign policy approach (Landsberg, 2009). After 1994, South Africa rejoined the UN and became a member of both the African Union and the Southern African Development Community. In line with its political and economic development objectives, South Africa has pursued an integration policy with international organisations. In this framework, she has been involved in the Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership and the Non-Aligned Movement initiatives. Since the end of apartheid, South

African foreign policy can be analysed in four different periods under the Mandela, Mbeki, Zuma and Ramaphosa governments.

Mandela Period (1994-1999)

In the post apartheid era during Mandela's leadership, South Africa transitioned from its long-standing status as a pariah state to being perceived as a key advocate and catalyst for the advancement of the African continent (Klingebiel, 2017). Therefore, the Mandela period was shaped around transformation and consolidation as it was postapartheid for South Africa. With the legal amendments, the state-building process was initiated through the operation of the conflict resolution mechanism in the social framework. In general, South Africa's foreign policy is founded on key principles such as the primacy of human rights in international relations, the promotion of democracy, adherence to international law, an Africa-focused perspective, and the advancement of regional economic development (Mandela, 1993). The first objective of the Mandela administration was to increase South Africa's engagement across the continent. In 1985, South Africa had 25 embassies across the continent, increasing to 43 in 1995. In Mandela's rhetoric, South Africa could not escape its African destiny, thereby forging a strong connection with the continent (Mandela, 1993: 89-90). The African agenda discourse, which emphasised that there can be no peace without development and no development without peace, was grounded in the Mandela government's goal of regional integration. During the Mandela period, South African foreign policy was overshadowed by his personality. The image of South Africa was equated with Mandela's image and profile.

Under Mandela, South Africa faced a challenging economic situation, with a compelling economic case for internal consolidation that had the capacity to affect its external relations. In this context, income inequality was severe, with the wealthy white minority favoured over the impoverished black majority, and unemployment remained persistently high (Alden and Pere, 2004: 287). Apart from the fact that economic reforms were based on this issue, it was emphasised that development could only be achieved through regional and international economic cooperation (Mandela, 1993: 86-87). There is no doubt that the primary objective of Mandela was to break the international isolation of South Africa. For this purpose, participation in international organisations was targeted. Additionally, South Africa's Africa-wide conflict resolution efforts have helped shape its foreign policy mission. Efforts to achieve a ceasefire between Congolese rebels were the result of a conflict resolution approach in 1997. South Africa's foreign policy during the Mandela period saw limited success in addressing the challenges related to Angola, Swaziland, and Nigeria (Özkan, 2025: 117). South Africa's regional policies during this period were based on preventive diplomacy, peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance (Westhuizen, 1998: 437). Furthermore, South Africa would recognise the People's Republic of China in 1996. Relations with Taiwan, which the apartheid regime had established, were severed in 1997. Human rights violations by the Chinese regime have adversely affected South Africa's international image (Wyk, 2012: 277). In April 2000, when Chinese President Jiang visited South Africa, relations were shaped on the basis of commercial interests. Apart from regional organisations, developing relations with other organisations at the global level is the result of the discourse of being strong.

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South African foreign policy was characterised by a comprehensive orientation and strategic purpose in the 1994-1999 period. In 1999, under Mbeki's administration, this situation became different (Özkan, 2025: 106).

Mbeki Period (1999-2008)

The Mbeki period in South African foreign policy is characterised by the institutionalisation of foreign policy processes and a strong commitment to multilateralism. Firstly, after Mbeki became President in 1999, South Africa's approach to foreign relations has been multilateralism. On the other hand, Mbeki's concept of African Renaissance expresses a vision of ideological, political and social transformation of Africa. Through this approach, Mbeki emphasised the need for Africans to liberate themselves from the legacy of colonialism, aligning with an anti-imperialist paradigm and advocating strongly for the continent's development. The African Renaissance has been shaped by the preservation of cultural traditions, democracy and human rights, and the advancement of international cooperation. The African renaissance offers a powerful vision for a just and equitable world order. The aim of the African renaissance is to revitalise African civilisation and overcome the negative effects of colonialism (Bongmba, 2004: 309). The discourse of African renaissance emphasises assuming responsibility for the transformation of the continent. This has established the economic and social development agenda for South Africa. South Africa's economically driven foreign policy is rooted in normative values and shaped by the narrative of the African Renaissance (Alden and Pere, 2004: 287). However, the idea of an African renaissance has not been internalised across Africa. In other words, the fact that the African renaissance remained at the rhetorical level posed a problem in the production of policies.

During Mbeki's period, with the discourse of 'African solutions to Africa's problems', the importance of the activities of the AU on the continent's problems was emphasised. Moreover, in the formation of the AU, Mbeki played a strategic role in securing the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Bischoff, 2003: 192). On the other hand, with the G20 membership, the goal of improving global cooperation has emerged. Between 1994 and 2008, South Africa can be considered as a pragmatic, reformist emerging medium-sized power. The Mbeki period can be seen as a process of building for the development of South Africa's empowerment. The Mbeki government has encouraged strategic partnerships with countries in the region. While the Mandela period focused primarily on peacemaking and negotiations, the Mbeki period emphasised the preservation of peace and aimed to expand South Africa's sphere of influence across the continent.

Zuma Period (2009-2018)

After Mbeki, the Zuma administration placed greater emphasis on economic relations in its foreign policy. For this reason, it can be argued that South Africa's foreign policy did not undergo a radical shift during the Zuma period, although its economic dimension became more pronounced. This has meant creating new avenues in foreign policy. South Africa recognises the interdependence of states and encourages cooperation rather than competition and cooperation rather than conflict in foreign policy (White Paper, 2011:

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10). Since 1994, South Africa's foreign policy has been guided by constitutional principles that prioritise the African continent and affirm a commitment to South-South cooperation, seek to consolidate relations with Northern countries, and aim to strengthen bilateral social, political, and economic ties (White Paper, 2011: 6). It is emphasised that Zuma's term was passive except for participation in BRIC (Cilliers, 2018). While Mbeki strategically sought multilateral engagement both internationally and at the African level, Zuma's influence was limited to South Africa's BRIC membership (Cilliers, 2018). This was considered an important achievement. South Africa's characteristic foreign policy of building bridges with developing and emerging countries, which developed under Mandela and Mbeki, has led to a deepening alliance with China and Russia under Zuma. South Africa's ability to balance its relations with China and Russia will also be linked to its rising power status. However, South Africa's tendency toward bandwagoning has undermined its credibility in the discourse surrounding emerging powers.

Ramaphosa Period (2018 onwards)

In the post-2018 Ramaphosa period, South Africa's foreign policy in the areas of economic development, African integration and expanding the framework of cooperation with international organisations has traces of the previous periods. Africa occupies a central position in South Africa's international cooperation policy. Especially, deeper integration increased trade across the continent (Cilliers, 2018). It is also argued that South Africa's declining multilateralism limits its ability to translate its power capacity into influence (Cilliers, 2018). South Africa's foreign policy has entered a period of pragmatism. In this context, more intensive relations were established with China and Russia. On 2 March 2022, South Africa abstained from the United Nations General Assembly vote condemning Russia, a fellow BRICS member, for its invasion of Ukraine. (Ishmael, 2023). South Africa's pro-Russian stance in the war between Russia and Ukraine has negatively affected its normative stance. This situation points to a conflict between national interests and normativism. South Africa's divergent policies when interests conflicted with ideals sparked controversy. However, South Africa's opposition to Israel's actions in Palestine, along with its filing of a genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, reflects its commitment to a human rights-based foreign policy. South Africa's political and trade relations with Western countries, particularly the United States, have declined, whereas its ties with China have strengthened in these domains. South Africa's partnership with China is based on South-South cooperation on the axis of similar interests and the AU's Agenda 2063. It is seen that the 2063 Africa agenda, which emerged as a strategic plan, has turned into an inclusive road map.

South Africa's Relations with International Organisations: General Framework

South Africa's relations with international organisations can be analysed within the context of debates on emerging powers. Undoubtedly, South Africa's foreign policy and its engagement with international organisations offer a foundation for assessing its status as an emerging power. In this respect, South Africa's relations at the regional and

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continental levels, as well as its engagement with global organisations, can be examined. Throughout its historical trajectory, South Africa's interaction with organisations such as the UN, AU, BRICS and G20 has taken diverse forms and reflected varying strategic priorities. South Africa's performance, initiatives, and influence within each organisation can be evaluated in a more systematic manner. However, this study will focus on an assessment based on the key points.

The concept of a middle power refers to a country whose leadership recognises that it cannot act effectively on its own, but believes it can have meaningful influence on the international system by working through global institutions (Keohane, 1969: 296). In this context, South African governments prefer to utilise multilateral forums and organisations rather than bilateral diplomacy (Schoeman, 2000: 50). Essentially, the aim of multilateral diplomacy is to reinforce a rules-based international system that reduces the chances of unilateral actions by major powers. South Africa's involvement with international organisations can be examined through the framework of four core strategies typically utilised by emerging middle powers: participating in policy-making within global governance institutions, seeking opportunities through bilateral relations and trade agreements, engaging in regional organising, and promoting regional mobilisation through economic integration (Yanacopulos, 2014: 206).

Particularly, the United Nations holds a prominent place in the foreign policy of South Africa. South Africa's relationship with the United Nations dates back to its role as a founding member in 1945. However, during the apartheid period, it was suspended and distanced from active participation in the organisation. The international response to the apartheid regime's acts of violence, which began with their condemnation in 1960, ultimately led to the suspension of South Africa's participation in the United Nations General Assembly in 1974. Following the collapse of the apartheid regime in 1994, South Africa began to participate actively in the United Nations. Furthermore, the key themes guiding South Africa's voting behaviour at the United Nations include the promotion of human rights and democracy, support for disarmament and non-proliferation, the advancement of African interests and the African Agenda, advocacy for United Nations reform, and the pursuit of fair and inclusive global governance (Graham, 2013). From 1994 to 2014, South Africa consistently supported thematic human rights resolutions at the United Nations, advocating for the protection of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, along with the promotion of democracy (Graham, 2016: 36). The emphasis on democracy, peace, prosperity, commitment to international law, and human rights during Nelson Mandela's presidency (1994-1999) laid the foundation for South Africa's relations with the United Nations. In addition, South Africa's accession to key UN conventions reflected the vision of a democratic nation actively engaging with the global community. Mbeki's period was characterised by a blend of idealism and a pursuit of a leadership role for South Africa on the international stage. The post-Mbeki period largely continued many of his policies, gradually shifting towards a discourse of national strategic interest. In contrast, the Zuma presidency adopted a more pragmatic approach to foreign policy (Yanacopulos, 2014: 210). During Jacob Zuma's presidency (2009-2018), South Africa pursued a vision of becoming a strong and prosperous nation by advocating for the United Nations as the most democratic body, promoting industrialisation, and investing in stronger infrastructure to drive sustainable economic growth.

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The relationship between South Africa and the African Union strengthened significantly after the end of apartheid, especially through South Africa's role in the restructuring of the African Union in 2001. Over the past 25 years, South Africa has actively participated in the implementation of various policies and initiatives of the African Union. South Africa's engagement with the African Union reflects its aspiration to assume a leadership and representative role on behalf of the African continent. During Thabo Mbeki's presidency, the idea of the African Renaissance significantly influenced and helped shape the agenda of the African Union through South Africa's leadership. The leadership periods of Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa reflect differing approaches and dynamics in the evolution of South Africa's relations with the African Union. During Zuma's presidency, South Africa adopted a political approach that prioritised domestic issues, resulting in a relatively passive stance in its foreign policy towards the African continent. However, under Cyril Ramaphosa, South Africa adopted a more active and engaged approach towards the African continent. During this period, South Africa's leading role in holding the AU Chairmanship, mediating peace processes, and advancing initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement are key indicators of its renewed engagement and leadership within the African Union.

South Africa's engagement with BRICS plays a crucial role in debates on emerging powers and the shifting dynamics of global governance. South Africa's accession to BRICS in 2010, alongside Brazil, Russia, India, and China, has provided the country with a strategic platform to diversify its global engagements and strengthen its position within the emerging multipolar world order. As of 2024, the inclusion of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates has expanded BRICS into a ten-member structure, reflecting its growing geopolitical significance. Being a member of BRICS has enhanced South Africa's position and influence as a key emerging economy. The country views its membership as strategically important, particularly in addressing domestic economic challenges. BRICS serves as a potential source of foreign direct investment (FDI), offers access to diversified markets, and provides a platform that South Africa can leverage to strengthen its role and partnerships within the African Union (DTIC, 2023). In line with its BRICS membership, South Africa's efforts to increase its influence in multilateral decision-making processes and to safeguard its long-term interests by promoting global order and cooperation through multilateral institutions lie at the heart of debates surrounding its status as an emerging power (Black and Hornsby, 2016: 152-153). Furthermore, South Africa remains the sole representative of the African continent within the G20, underscoring its strategic importance in global economic governance. South Africa's membership in the G20 serves as a mechanism for ensuring the representation of the African continent in global economic platforms, thereby assigning South Africa a broader continental responsibility and strategic mission. South Africa's engagement with the G20 is interpreted as a reflection of its aspiration for regional leadership and as a means of consolidating its status and influence as an emerging power within the global order.

South Africa's foreign policy is primarily shaped by the pursuit of regional common interests and collective benefits (Klingebiel, 2017). As noted by Schoeman, South Africa's role and status within the region, and more generally across the African continent, remain subjects of ambiguity and lack a unified perspective (Schoeman, 2000: 56). South Africa's relations with international organisations underscore its commitment to

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normative principles in global governance, while also revealing an underlying aspiration to enhance its international status and recognition.

South Africa: A Rising Power?

In general terms, the power capacity of a state consists of its economy, population, technology, military and international interactions. The concept of power can be differentiated in terms of the elements possessed. Hard power is built through military and economic capabilities; soft power capacity is built through culture, political values, education and social activities. While the possession of hard power elements is considered within the material framework, soft power is developed through intangible instruments of power, especially through influence and persuasion. Power categorisations in international relations are established on this axis. The dimensions of power can be classified as military, economic, cultural, diplomatic, geographical, demographic and natural resources. The power capacities of emerging powers in the international system and the way they influence relations are of great interest. Emerging power countries are expected to have most of these dimensions. In addition, the power indices developed in conjunction with these criteria make it possible to compare and rank states. Global power and soft power indices offer insights into the relative power positions of states (Dalio, 2024; Brand Finance, 2024).

As a result of changing international dynamics, emerging and medium-sized powers have gained influence after the Cold War. Emerging powers tend to be active in their geographical area; their behavioural pattern is more appeasing than reformist (Jordaan, 2003). Emerging powers aim for regional organisation through coalition building, development of bilateral relations and trade agreements (Hau et. al, 2012). The regional power discourse is also characterised by capacities, relationalities and approaches. While building capacity through both hard and soft power elements, a relational framework is created around economic, political and security issues. The approaches used in foreign policy shape this process. In line with the balancing, bandwagoning and coalition behaviours in foreign policy, if the emerging power engages in bandwagoning behaviour, it may negatively affect the process of increasing its power capacity.

Emerging and medium-sized powers have the function of influencing and directing other states on issues such as migration, environment, human rights and conflict resolution, which constitute the agenda of international relations. The powers are expected to be both willing and capable of assuming roles and responsibilities. Emerging powers must assess the evolving dynamics of global politics and leverage their comparative advantages to play a more influential role. The shift in the balance of power in the international system after the Cold War, along with the rapid narrowing of the capacity gap between developed countries and emerging powers, has created new opportunities for South Africa. According to Ray Dalio (2024: 100), South Africa ranks 23rd in the global power index. In this context, South Africa's main problems can be categorised under the headings of economy, education, innovation and technology, relative insignificance in global trade, corruption, lack of infrastructure, low investment, and a weak military. Particularly, economic dependence on foreign investments stands out in the case of South Africa. In this context, South Africa's relationship with China has also

manifested significantly in the commercial sphere. Additionally, political polarisation, corruption, and economic and social problems within the country increase the sovereignty risk. In the soft power index ranking conducted by Brand Finance (2024: 64-65), South Africa fell to 43rd place in 2024. A decline is also observed in the fields of education and science in this index.

South Africa's post-1994 efforts to assert itself as a regional power are closely linked to its broader state-building process. As an emerging power with a visionary new foreign policy and geopolitical discourse, South Africa has aimed to increase its influence both regionally and across the continent. South Africa has taken a leading role in implementing conflict resolution mechanisms at the continental level. In 1998, the government approved the white paper on South Africa's participation in international peace missions. In this context, South Africa has participated in peacekeeping operations and has become a regional actor in this regard (Muller, 1999). However, after that, the argument also surfaced that South Africa could be a good candidate for peacekeeping but lacked the administrative and practical capacity (Nhlapo, 1999: 118). Taking action on security issues also carries significance within the framework of aligning with the behaviour patterns of a regional power and an emerging power.

As emphasised in the South African National Planning Commission's 2011 "National Development Plan: Vision 2030", increased economic development will also strengthen Africa's influence in global processes. For this reason, it can be said that economic objectives have gained prominence in South Africa's foreign policy. South Africa's Vision 2025 outlines key objectives such as reducing unemployment, inequality, and poverty; promoting sustainable economic development; contributing to Africa's advancement; and enhancing its role as a successful and influential member of the international community (White Paper, 2011). Alongside its focus on development, South Africa aims to be effective in resolving conflicts on the continent. Moreover, the initiation of the G20 Africa Partnership led by South Africa is an important step. South Africa also assumed the G20 presidency in 2024.

Due to the nature of the power they possess, states have varying levels of influence on the global system (Keohane, 1969: 296). Great powers hold economic and political dominance over other countries. Middle-sized or emerging powers may not exert systemic influence on their own, but they can do so through international organisations (Keohane, 1969: 296). South Africa's status as an emerging power is inherently paradoxical. South Africa is the economic giant of the African continent, yet it remains a relatively minor player in the global economy (Kornegay, 2012: 203). It is inevitable that domestic economic problems in South Africa will affect its status as an emerging power. Although South Africa is considered a middle power, a significant portion of its population continues to live below the poverty line (Yanacopulos, 2014). When South Africa's status as an emerging power is questioned, there is a pressing need to strengthen inter-societal relations. At this point, public diplomacy practices can be utilised. Public diplomacy is essential for South Africa to effectively project its image, values, and culture at both domestic and international levels (White Paper, 2011: 36). South Africa's public diplomacy should be understood as the deliberate projection of its image, values, and culture both domestically and internationally. One of the challenges South Africa faces in becoming a soft power can be said to be xenophobia (Ogunnubi and Amao, 2016: 309).

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Becoming an emerging power requires developing actions at both the regional and global levels. In doing so, efforts often focus on areas such as mediation and peacekeeping, while aiming to establish partnerships within a global framework. In the Russia-Ukraine war, South Africa did not condemn Russia's revisionist stance at the UN, whereas other emerging powers such as Brazil, Nigeria, and Indonesia did. South African President Ramaphosa stated that they would not adopt a hostile stance toward Russia. Viewed from this perspective, the trajectory of South Africa's foreign policy reflects a greater reliance on pragmatism and realpolitik than on normative values. It is evident that South Africa's foreign policy has diverged from the normative framework established in the postapartheid era and now embodies a more pragmatic and integrative orientation. The influence capacity of an emerging power can be measured by its ability to achieve outcomes in line with its political objectives. South Africa's position in this regard is subject to debate. In this context, South Africa's inability to ensure the effective functioning of the AU can be considered an indicator. The fundamental distinction between a middle power and an emerging power lies in the state's capacity to exert regional influence. Within this framework, it is essential for South Africa to closely monitor and actively engage with plans and programs aimed at strengthening its capacity for regional influence. Although South Africa stands out economically at the regional and continental levels in Africa, its global influence remains limited. South Africa's ability to maintain balanced bilateral relations, along with its engagement in international organisations, is a significant factor in assessing its status as an emerging power.

Conclusion

This article examines South Africa's foreign policy from a historical perspective through comparative analysis and evaluates its status as an emerging power. South Africa is one of the leading countries on the African continent. As one of the symbolic representations of Africa's colonial experience, South Africa occupies a central place in ongoing debates about the continent's postcolonial trajectory. The most fundamental debate in the discipline of international relations revolves around the concept of power. The way the concept of power gives meaning to states' positions in the international system shapes the nature of these debates. An emerging power reflects a transition from one category of power to another, or a trajectory of increasing power. While the concept of an emerging power can explain a regional power's transition toward becoming a global power, it also becomes a subject of debate when a middle power evolves into a regional power. An emerging power holds political and economic dominance within its own region. It is quite clear that assessing states within a single category of power is a challenging task. In other words, attention should also be drawn to the presence of subjective interpretations regarding the criteria that indicate whether a state qualifies as an emerging power. While the primary interest in South Africa's foreign policy is achieving socioeconomic development, it also emphasises a peaceful approach toward the international system. At this point, South Africa can be assessed as a regional, continental leader and a middle power. South Africa's emphasis on participating in integration initiatives both within and beyond the continent, along with its relations with international organisations, reflects outcomes indicative of its emerging power status. South Africa has advantages as a regional power, but internal issues such as high

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unemployment and socio-political instability act as limiting factors. South Africa's foreign policy can be broadly divided into the pre-apartheid and postapartheid periods. In particular, the foreign policy choices of postapartheid governments have significantly shaped evaluations of South Africa as an emerging power. States that do not qualify as middle powers often lack the capacity to ensure their national security independently and therefore rely on alignment with other states or international organisations for support and protection. As an emerging power, South Africa demonstrates a defining characteristic of middle powers: an emphasis on multilateralism and cooperative engagement within international organisations. Emerging and middle powers prioritise balancing strategies while supporting international stability, aiming to preserve and enhance their global standing. These states place particular emphasis on the peaceful resolution of disputes and strict adherence to international law. South Africa's need for substantial capacity building as an emerging power, particularly by prioritising a balancing policy over alignment within its relations through BRICS, is a critical issue in debates surrounding emerging powers.

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