

## Rethinking “Alliances”: The Case of South Africa as a Rising Power

Christopher Williams & Mihaela Papa

To cite this article: Christopher Williams & Mihaela Papa (2021): Rethinking “Alliances”: The Case of South Africa as a Rising Power, African Security, DOI: [10.1080/19392206.2020.1871796](https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2020.1871796)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2020.1871796>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.



Published online: 11 Feb 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 82



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Rethinking “Alliances”: The Case of South Africa as a Rising Power

Christopher Williams<sup>a</sup> and Mihaela Papa<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Postdoctoral Research Fellow, International Relations Department, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa; <sup>b</sup>Co-Investigator, Rising Power Alliances Project and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Sustainable Development and Global Governance, The Fletcher School, Tufts University, USA

## ABSTRACT

How does South Africa view international alliances? International relations (IR) scholars have been debating the end of alliances and the relevance of the alliance paradigm itself. South Africa presents an excellent test case for advancing these debates for three reasons. First, it has been committed to nonalignment yet engages in close and complex inter-state collaborations. Second, debates about the alliance paradigm have largely taken place in, and focused on, the Global North. And third, there is a gap in South African scholarship on this subject. This article examines the South African understanding of alliances through a systematic study of its academic and policy landscape including an analysis of 285 articles from South Africa's five most highly ranked IR journals and key policy documents produced during the post-apartheid period. The article outlines how alliances are conceptualized and operationalized. It finds that the alliance concept in South Africa departs from the traditional understanding in the Global North: alliances are often driven by mutually shared political and developmental objectives rather than an external security threat. These objectives, combined with a perception of new economic opportunities, have led to an increase in the importance of South Africa's strategic partnerships with rising powers, and reinforced its multi-alignment diplomacy.

## Introduction

Before the African National Congress (ANC) took power in South Africa, it published a foreign policy document that averred, “A democratic South Africa will be non-aligned and will not affiliate to any international military blocs.”<sup>1</sup> This commitment was based on long-held ANC principles, and made possible by the geopolitics of southern Africa. Since South Africa was “not confronted by an immediate conventional military threat, and does not anticipate external military aggression in the short to medium term”<sup>2</sup> as the country's 1996 Defense White Paper stated, there was little need for military alliances.

**CONTACT** Christopher Williams  [Christopher.williams1@wits.ac.za](mailto:Christopher.williams1@wits.ac.za)  University of the Witwatersrand, 1 Jan Smuts Avenue, Braamfontein 2000, Johannesburg, South Africa

© 2021 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Despite the fact that post-apartheid South Africa has not been a party to any formal military alliances,<sup>3</sup> studying its international alignment behavior contributes to the scholarship on alliances in two important ways. First, much of the traditional alliance literature emanates from the Global North, and is informed by the views and experiences of North American and European states that have been prone to forming traditional military alliances.<sup>4</sup> Given South Africa's eschewal of military alliances, on the one hand, and its tradition of creating and participating in innovative international alignments and giving voice to the concerns of the Global South on the other, examining the case of South Africa's alliances is crucial for contributing to debates about the ongoing transformation of the alliance paradigm. Second, South Africa belongs to a group of states often labeled rising or emerging powers. States that "carry the potential to act as rule-makers and to set new norms and patterns of what is considered 'acceptable behaviour.'"<sup>5</sup> Examining South Africa's alignment behavior affords insight into how rising powers use alliances to advance their own interests, as well as create platforms for collective statecraft to change the system of global governance.

There is a rich body of literature on South Africa's relations with specific states, groups, or institutions, and growing scholarship on the country's important role as a rising power. However, existing studies do not explicitly address South Africa's conceptualization of alliances or provide broader and theoretically grounded accounts of South Africa's closest strategic relationships. To address this gap, this study asks: How does South Africa view alliances? And relatedly, what considerations have driven South Africa's alignment choices in the post-apartheid period?

This study systematically examines how alliances have been framed in South African academia and key policy sources (e.g., speeches and strategic documents) between 1994 and 2018. It begins with a discussion of innovations in the scholarship on alliance politics that seek to explain why states from the Global South form new types of alignments (section 1), the paper then examines South Africa's academic (section 2) and policy (section 3) landscapes to explore how alliances have been conceptualized. Next, we investigate the growing importance of South Africa's relationship with rising power groups, particularly IBSA and BRICS, from a security perspective to assess whether these groups have the potential to become traditional security alliances (section 4). We conclude by conceptualizing the contemporary alliance paradigm from the South African lens, and by suggesting new avenues to study the alignments formed by rising powers (section 5).

## **“Alliances” from traditional global North vs. global South perspectives: forms and drivers**

Much of the early scholarship on alliances was derived from and used to explain the behavior of developed states in the Global North. Glenn Snyder’s definition of alliances as “formal associations of states for the use (or nonuse) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership”<sup>6</sup> captures the traditional view of alliances. This understanding of alliances was prominent during the bloc-centered thinking of the Cold War and continued to characterize post-Cold War debates about the behavior of alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Some scholars have challenged this traditional notion of alliances, particularly over the last two decades. For example, Menon argues that formal US alliances do not adequately address contemporary security challenges, and instead advocates relying on coalitions whose membership depends on the issue at hand.<sup>7</sup> Wilkins finds the alliance paradigm too narrow and disconnected from diplomatic practice: he suggests supplanting it with a broader alignment paradigm that distinguishes among alliances, coalitions, security communities and strategic partnerships (SPs).<sup>8</sup> This is in part because, “the alliance paradigm (and the traditional alliance theories) have marginal utility or application for regions such as Africa and South America.”<sup>9</sup> Chidley reinforces this point, arguing that the traditional alliance concept does not reflect the way states from the Global South have “formed, maintained and dissolved” their most critical international relationships because they have a different worldview from that of the Global North.<sup>10</sup>

The Global South’s worldview has been informed by a very different history from that of the Global North. Many countries in the Global South that emerged from colonial domination (and often protracted struggles for liberation) have a strong commitment to strategic autonomy in their foreign affairs. The original vision of the Nonaligned Movement (NAM), as its name indicates, was based on expanding the nonaligned area of the world, keeping developed countries’ bloc behavior and military ambitions in check, and focusing on cooperation beyond the security issue-area.<sup>11</sup> While the East and West were locked in confrontation during the Cold War, research investigating the alignment patterns of states in the Global South found that leaders from this region often perceived the most pressing threats as emanating from within the state rather than beyond it. Hence objectives such as securing sufficient resources to pursue development priorities and preserving regime security significantly influenced alignment decisions.<sup>12</sup> There is also a growing recognition that the traditional alliance literature’s focus on military alliances can overlook alignment choices motivated by economic and diplomatic factors, which play important roles in allowing weaker states to position

themselves vis-à-vis a major power.<sup>13</sup> This literature calls into question the assumption that external security threats are always the primary drivers of alliance formation, and illustrates a range of alternative reasons why states create alliances.

“Rising powers” have emerged as a separate category in international relations (IR) literature: on the one hand, they constitute an important subset of states primarily from the global South, but on the other, they seek to join developed country clubs and create their own alignments that are separate from developing countries’ groupings.<sup>14</sup> Russia, though not from the Global South, is often categorized as a “rising power,” largely due to its key role in mobilizing the BRICS, which has become a successful rising power group.<sup>15</sup> The extent to which external threats drive the alliance behavior of rising powers is debated. China’s relationship with Russia is “alliance-like” and involves substantial security cooperation,<sup>16</sup> and India has pursued a wide engagement with world powers that reinforces its strategic autonomy and helps manage the threat from Pakistan and tensions with China.<sup>17</sup> However, rising powers are also at the forefront of constructing new modes of alignment that comprise “more nuanced, multidimensional and multifaceted partnership arrangements” in which security is not a primary motivator or central characteristic of an inter-state relationship.<sup>18</sup> These innovations are occurring as diplomatic practice itself undergoes important changes such as the growth of minilateral (e.g. clubs and groups) and plurilateral (bounded multilateral meetings within larger multilateral forums) formations.<sup>19</sup> Changes such as these reinforce the need for analyzing smaller inter-state arrangements.

Despite South Africa’s prominent position in the Global South and status as a rising power on the global stage, there is a lack of theoretically-informed research that offers general explanations for the strategic relationships South Africa has formed in the post-apartheid period. Much of the theorizing on South African security emphasizes the country’s efforts to engage as a regional power in conflict prevention and peacekeeping.<sup>20</sup> South African efforts to resolve conflicts in Africa have often been channeled through the African Union (AU), and in particular the African Peace and Security Architecture.<sup>21</sup> Given disagreement around whether the AU should be classified as an alliance (it describes itself as an “organization” or a “body” but never an alliance), and the extensive coverage of the AU’s peace and security efforts elsewhere, we do not focus on it in this paper.<sup>22</sup> Instead, we seek an understanding of South Africa’s *alliance policy*: the type of international relationships that have emerged after apartheid and the strategic considerations that generate them. The need for such research is well-established. While investigating South Africa’s relations with Russia, Geldenhuys notes the “modest” amount of research on “the theory and practice of strategic partnerships between countries” globally, and points out that this is “even truer of the study of SPs in South Africa’s foreign relations.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Kotsopoulos’ work on the types

of bilateral relations South Africa forms with other states, makes the point that South African scholarship typically focuses “on the dynamics of a specific strategic partnership . . . rather than any broader meaning of strategic partnership as a foreign policy tool.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Inductively exploring the alliance concept in South Africa**

To investigate how South Africa conceptualizes alliances we conduct an inductive inquiry using South African sources. This bottom-up approach draws on the country’s unique national history and identity to contribute to the scholarship on South African alignments and the study of alliance politics more broadly in three ways.<sup>25</sup> First, by drawing on South African sources this research informs and diversifies the primarily Northern-focused alliance debates. Second, in the absence of any official alliance policy, it uses extensive and systematic data gathering to examine the nature and the drivers of South Africa’s closest relations thereby contributing to South African IR debates. Finally, given South Africa’s specific position as a rising power and the entrepreneurship it exhibits in its alignment statecraft, understanding South Africa’s conceptualization of alliances informs the rapidly evolving scholarship on rising powers.

The inductive approach is designed to capture how alliances have been conceptualized both by South African academics and policy makers. Drawing on both these sources is valuable because the combination of findings provides a more comprehensive picture of South Africa’s alliances than either source would provide alone.<sup>26</sup> Ascertaining how South African scholars conceive of alliances is critical because through their scholarship, involvement with the media, and training of and advice to officials, they contribute to the public and policy discourses on the country’s alliances.<sup>27</sup> The view of policy makers, gleaned either through speeches or government documents, adds another dimension to the study by providing insight into the official policies that guide how South Africa interacts with other states. The way policy makers articulate South Africa’s approach to foreign engagements, and the actions they take is a window into the practice of forming and maintaining South Africa’s alliances. Each approach adds value in itself, but they are also interconnected. The academic analysis provides context for the ideas that animate the discourse about South Africa’s allied relationships, while the policy documents identify these ideas and their drivers.

### **Academic landscape analysis**

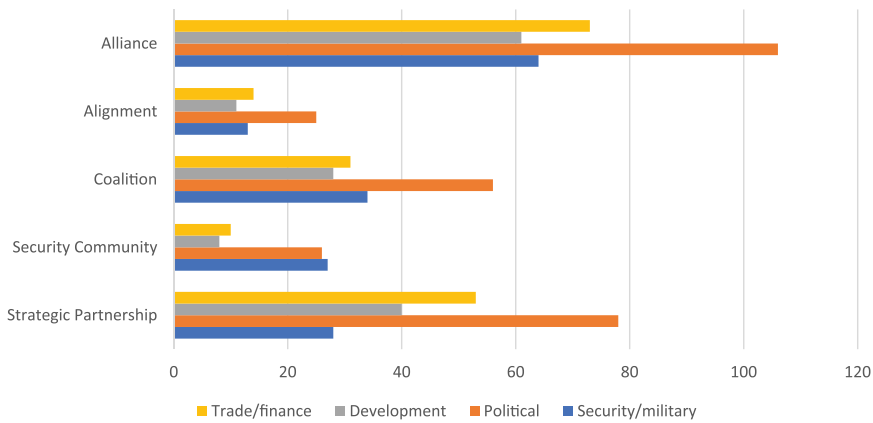
This section delineates the use of alliance and related concepts in South African academic literature to better understand and disaggregate South Africa’s view of alliances and identify key themes and trends. We assessed

articles published between 1994 (the beginning of democratic majority rule) and 2018 in the five most influential South African IR journals: *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, *South African Journal of International Affairs*, *Politikon*, *African Security Review*, and *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*.<sup>28</sup> Each journal was searched using five keywords related to the alliance concept: alliance, alignment, strategic partnership, security community and coalition.<sup>29</sup> To investigate South Africa's relationship with established versus rising powers, we also used additional search terms: South Africa + United States, + China, +Russia, + India, and + Brazil. We included only articles that dealt with: South African foreign policy; the foreign policies of the other BRIC countries; US foreign policy issues dealing with the BRICS, Africa or South Africa; and any international group or institution that any BRICS member is part of. The application of these decision rules resulted in a database of 285 articles. Articles were coded by issue-area (if they deal with security, politics, development, and trade or finance); by relationship studied; by article type (theoretical or empirical); and, whether they focused on rising powers. Eighty-two of the 285 articles (though they fit into one of the categories described above) only used an alliance term outside the context of inter-state relations or contained no alliance term. Such articles were filtered out when examining the relationship between issue-areas and alliance terms. The other computations draw on the pool of 285 articles.

### ***Conceptualization of alliances across issue-areas: understanding the security dimension***

This review of South African scholarship on alliances reveals that only 3% of the articles on this subject published in South Africa since 1994 were conceptual or theoretical studies.<sup>30</sup> Out of this 3%, the majority of studies deal with creating a security community in southern Africa or a network of these communities in Africa, and just over 1% of all articles surveyed theorizes alliances beyond the continent. Instead, most articles dealing with the country's strategic relationships focus on the details of South Africa's bilateral ties with significant states; its multilateral diplomacy at the United Nations; and, the specifics of its relationships with groups such as IBSA, BRICS and the G-20.<sup>31</sup>

Analyzed academic discourses do not clearly and consistently use a specific terminology to describe cooperative inter-state relations. Instead, our search terms: alliance, alignment, coalition, SP were used more or less synonymously and dealt with both security and non-security issues. [Figure 1](#)<sup>32</sup> displays how frequently each issue-area was discussed in articles that contain each of the alliance terms. Overall, political issues were discussed in 87% of articles surveyed, followed by trade/finance issues with 54%, security with 48% and development with 42%.



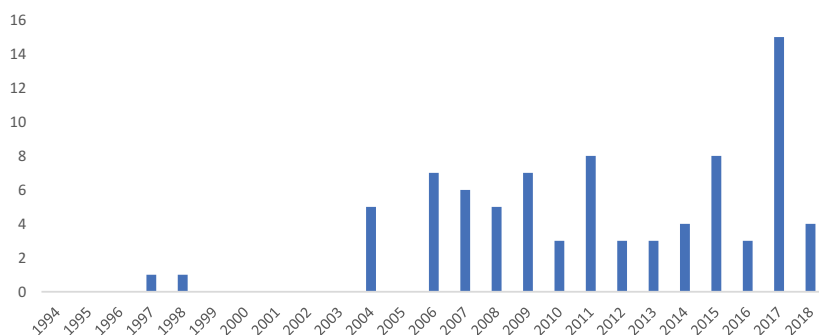
**Figure 1.** The use of alliance and alliance-related concepts by issue-area.

The term alliance is the most frequently used term, but out of the 120 articles that use the term, only 53% of them deal with security issues. This represents a departure from the traditional alliance concept which assumes some sort of security collaboration. That 61% of articles that mention alliances deal with economic issues stems at least in part from a colloquial use of terminology. However, it may also indicate that South African scholars see some economic relationships (even those that are not accompanied by security considerations) as vital to the well-being of their state and thus deserving of the alliance term.

Unlike other alliance concepts, the “security community” concept is more directly connected to security matters as security is embedded within it. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has long been conceptualized using this term, and 88% of articles on SADC dealt, at least in part, with security issues.<sup>33</sup> Globally however, security issues are not as dominant as economic or political factors in building relationships between South Africa and other states.

It is also notable that 64% of the articles using the SP concept address economic issues – a finding that is in line with the literature on this new form of association between states.<sup>34</sup> Our analysis demonstrates that the SP concept, as Figure 2 indicates,<sup>35</sup> entered the South African foreign policy lexicon in the mid-2000s (after a few incidental mentions in the 1990s). Since then, the SP concept has been widely used. The broader conceptualization of international relationships encapsulated by the multifaceted SP concept matches South African scholarship’s more holistic view of international relationships: 78% of the articles we surveyed dealt with more than one issue-area.





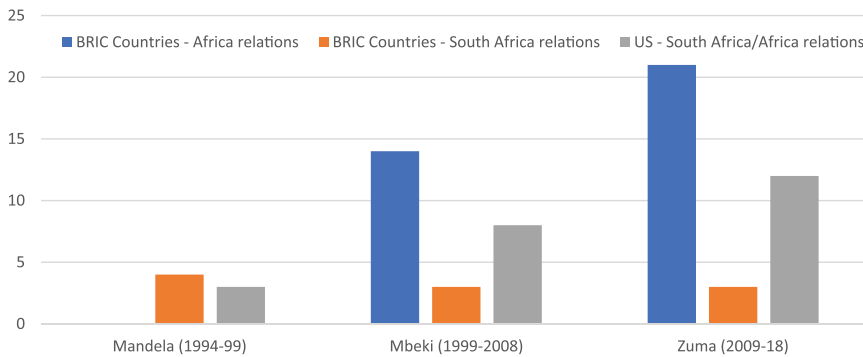
**Figure 2.** Number of articles using the “strategic partnership” concept by year.

### *Alliances from a rising power perspective*

Though theoretical work on alliances in South Africa is sparse, a significant body of South African scholarship has debated both the conceptual definition of a middle or rising power, and which category South Africa best fits into. The number of such studies increased from one in the Mandela period, to four in Mbeki’s time, and twenty-four in the Zuma period. These studies addressed South Africa’s self-conceptualization as a rising power, and raised questions about the possibility of a rising power alliance as well as the interaction between the global objectives of a rising power such as South Africa and its regional aims.<sup>36</sup>

Articles in a 2009 special issue of *Politikon*, “Africa’s Relations with Emerging Powers: Charting a New Direction in International Engagements,” refer to “South-South alliance building” and “the creation of new economic and political alliances which seek to provide greater representation to states of the South.”<sup>37</sup> Overall, the special issue concentrates on the shared political and development objectives of southern states, while offering only a limited discussion of security issues among these states. Economic rather than security considerations were also the focus of the 2015 special edition of the *South African Journal of International Affairs* entitled: “Alliances beyond BRICS: South Africa’s Role in Global Economic Governance” that examined South Africa’s relations with a range of middle powers.<sup>38</sup>

Another important trend, as [Figure 3](#) illustrates, is that there has been a growing concentration of literature examining how South Africa’s BRICS partners interact with South Africa and Africa more generally. That many of the articles produced during the Zuma era addressed BRICS-Africa interaction is not surprising since scholars and officials in South Africa argue that the country’s BRICS membership “serves as a gateway for BRIC countries to Africa.”<sup>39</sup> Among BRIC states, China is clearly the primary focus: of the 45 total articles dealing with the relationship between BRIC states and South



**Figure 3.** Articles on BRIC countries and US relations with Africa and South Africa by administration.

Africa or Africa, 76% focused on China. In contrast, research on relations between the United States and South Africa or Africa more broadly remains limited.

This analysis demonstrates that the framing of alliances in South Africa's expert discourses does not allow for a clear categorization of alliances as tools for security cooperation. The terminology used to describe cooperation among states is fluid, and only in the context of security communities is security a pronounced cooperation theme. A 2009 workshop at the Institute for Global Dialogue, one of South Africa's major think tanks, illustrates the fluidity of alliance terminology. Its report, "From BRIC to BRICS, South Africa's Emerging Power Alliances: IBSA, BRIC, BASIC," notes that "alliances" were used to describe these groups "in the loose sense of the term" since they are not formal alliance structures, but reflect "limited alignments of convergence in specific areas of global governance."<sup>40</sup> The report later describes South Africa's membership in groups like IBSA and (soon to be) BRIC as "*limited multi-lateral strategic partnerships* (emphasis in original)," but then comments that the term "coalitions" was "just as apt."<sup>41</sup> This conclusion mirrors the finding that SPs are increasingly a "go to" cooperation mechanism because these arrangements are flexible, and thus enable South Africa to develop a broad range of ties with other rising powers.

### Alliances in South Africa's policy landscape

To assess the perspective of South African policy makers we examine core government documents including strategic plans, annual reports, and policy papers from South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), in addition to speeches by senior officials, ANC

party documents, and the secondary literature on South African foreign policy.

Alliance terminology is rare in governmental documents. For example, South African alliances were only mentioned six times in DIRCO's annual reports between 2002 and 2018. These references used the term in a general sense to discuss issues such as collaborating with other states to reform UN peacekeeping and build commercial ties, rather than inter-state security cooperation.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, DIRCO's twelve Strategic Plans produced between 2003 and 2015, rarely mention alliances. When they do, alliances refer to states from the Global South coming together to pursue shared political and socio-economic objectives such as the call to use "existing negotiating groupings and alliances to pursue objectives of developing states."<sup>43</sup> The 2011 foreign policy White Paper, the clearest and fullest articulation of the Zuma Administration's foreign policy, mentions alliances only twice – once to discuss "like-minded alliances" formed by middle and regional powers, and in the second instance to comment on the "realignment of economic alliances."<sup>44</sup> The South African presidency's government review that has been produced every five years since 2004 includes only minimal mention of the country's alliance policy: in 2004, it states, "South Africa has used its position within sub-global 'blocs' and 'alliances' – such as the NAM and the Commonwealth – as a vehicle through which to push for the reform of bodies such as the UN, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and WTO."<sup>45</sup>

To probe deeper into the South African understanding of alliances, and assess what considerations have guided the country's alignment, the following sections investigate how the Mandela, Mbeki and Zuma administrations approached their country's international relationships.

### ***The Mandela administration (1994-1999): setting the basic conceptualization of alliances***

In the early 1990s the challenge for the incoming ANC government was to craft a foreign policy for the new South Africa in an uncertain post-Cold War global environment.<sup>46</sup> A focus on Africa, and in particular, engagement in regional and continental institutions, became a key pillar of the new South Africa's foreign policy. President Nelson Mandela's foreign minister, Alfred Nzo, believed South Africa could not exist as "an island of prosperity surrounded by a sea of poverty," and argued it had a direct interest in southern Africa becoming prosperous and peaceful.<sup>47</sup> While officials in the Mandela Administration were initially hesitant to exert influence in southern Africa because of the apartheid state's legacy of regional destabilization as well as their internal focus on reforming and restructuring South Africa's military,<sup>48</sup> in the later years of Mandela's presidency South Africa played an active role in African security, especially through SADC and the OAU.<sup>49</sup>

South Africa's view of alliances was shaped by a reconceptualization of the country's national identity after 1994. Apartheid-era officials considered South Africa a Western outpost on the tip of Africa. In contrast, ANC policy documents viewed South Africa as integrally connected to the African continent, and emphasized that "South Africa stands firmly as a country of the South" and was committed to "play[ing] an active and leading role in the development and strengthening of multilateral fora which empower the nations of the South."<sup>50</sup> The ANC's ambition was to form alliances to create a "just world order," and it was expected that alliances "will sometimes be based on economic or trade considerations and other times on political considerations."<sup>51</sup> Though the ANC is only one of several important actors that shape South African foreign policy decision-making, since it has been in power the ANC has significantly influenced the country's foreign policy "orientation."<sup>52</sup>

Economic considerations kept South Africa connected to the Global North, especially the US and the EU, as one of the Mandela Administration's primary goals was to rebuild South Africa's moribund economy.<sup>53</sup> Nzo noted:

Although we believe our future will be closely linked to the development of the South-South concept, there are certain realities that we dare not ignore. The United States of America and the other G7 countries constitute the undeniable economic power base of the world today. These countries are essential to the economic wellbeing of the developing world, including South and southern Africa.<sup>54</sup>

Based on its political affinity with the Global South, and the economic imperative of working closely with the Global North, the Mandela Administration charted a middle course. Nzo described how South Africa hoped to serve "as a bridge to bring the interests of the Industrialized World and the Non-Aligned World closer together ..."<sup>55</sup>

South Africa's membership in both the NAM and the Commonwealth illustrates the Mandela Administration's effort to play a bridging role between developed and developing states. South Africa's reintegration into the Commonwealth signaled the country's support for that organization's underlying norms, such as the importance of liberal democracy and market-based economies.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, the NAM, which South Africa chaired from 1998–2003, as well as the G-77, served as platforms for South Africa to address the concerns it shared with other developing countries. At the close of the 1998 NAM summit, Mandela highlighted two major concerns: "the construction of a just world economic order" for developing countries, and "the restructuring of the United Nations and the redirection of other multi-lateral organisations to ensure that they also address the aspirations of the peoples of the South."<sup>57</sup>

A major concern of ANC officials in the 1990s was that the end of the traditional Cold War alliance system constrained rather than strengthened the strategic options and development trajectory of South Africa and other states

from the Global South. A 1997 ANC foreign policy discussion document expressed disquiet with the collapse of the Soviet Union because “There is no longer a bloc of socialist countries which could, to some extent, serve as an alternative pole around which developing countries like ours could construct their trade, aid and strategic relations.”<sup>58</sup>

### ***The Mbeki administration (1999-2008): institutionalizing allied relationships and experimenting with partnerships***

The Administration of Mandela’s successor, Thabo Mbeki, focused on institutionalizing many of the relationships forged during the Mandela era both regionally and globally, and elevated the “partnership” concept in the lexicon of the South African government.<sup>59</sup> In Africa, Mbeki developed the idea of an African Renaissance. He encouraged South Africans to embrace their African identity, and worked to engender peace, prosperity and representative government across the continent.<sup>60</sup> To achieve the objectives of the African Renaissance, Mbeki sought to (re)build African multilateral institutions. He was a key player in reforming the OAU (reconstituted as the African Union in 2002) and developing the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism to make governments on the continent more efficient, transparent and accountable. Mbeki’s administration also took on increasing peacekeeping commitments in Africa and served as a mediator in a number of conflicts.

Mbeki was also heavily involved in strengthening South Africa’s relationships with the Global South and forging a more equitable relationship between the Global South and Global North. His administration played a “pivotal” role in the creation of the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP) that sought to “rekindle the ‘Bandung Spirit’ through enhancing the cooperation between the countries in Asia and Africa.”<sup>61</sup> During Mbeki’s tenure, South Africa was also closely involved with the G8-Africa Action Plan, the G8 Plus Outreach Five, and became a member of the G20 as cooperation with Northern multilateral groups was perceived as crucial for giving the South more say on global governance issues.<sup>62</sup> The Mbeki administration also negotiated important partnership agreements with the European Union, Brazil and China among others. In sum, Mbeki strongly advocated that Southern voices should be heard as part of a broader effort to make global decision-making more democratic and he endorsed reform of the Bretton Woods institutions to accommodate views from the developing world.<sup>63</sup>

Among the flurry of groups and partnerships South Africa became involved with during Mbeki’s tenure, the creation of IBSA (the India Brazil South Africa trilateral forum) in 2003 stands out as an attempt to both address South Africa’s dissatisfaction with developed countries’ unwillingness to integrate rising powers into global decision-making bodies, and its own drive to

experiment with new forms of South-South cooperation.<sup>64</sup> IBSA was a transregional association with the weight of important rising powers that could pursue their joint vision of global governance without the need to depend on G8 invitations or engage with the large and unwieldy memberships of the NAM or G-77 to act. Seeking to “advance human development by promoting potential synergies among the members,”<sup>65</sup> IBSA countries worked to develop inter-governmental cooperation and people-to-people initiatives, coordinate positions on trade, create a development fund, and, pursue reform of the UN Security Council while also deepening their own security cooperation. The voting records of the IBSA states at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) illustrate their alignment on many international issues. In 2008, five years after IBSA’s founding, the group voted in concert 77% of the time, five times more frequently than South Africa and the United States voted together.<sup>66</sup>

During the second half of Mbeki’s time in office a change, precipitated in part by the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, took place in South Africa’s strategy toward the Global North. South Africa became more “revisionist.” It took a firmer stance against established powers, and the anti-imperialist currents in South African foreign policy became more pronounced.<sup>67</sup> South Africa’s voting behavior at the United Nations Security Council in 2007–2008, especially its vote against condemning ethnic cleansing in Myanmar, is often cited as a prominent example of South Africa’s increasingly assertive revisionist posture.<sup>68</sup>

### ***The Zuma administration (2009-2018): reconceptualization of close relationships***

President Jacob Zuma deepened South Africa’s engagement with Africa and consolidated its relationships with other rising powers. DIRCO’s annual reports during the Zuma period indicate this strong Southern orientation. In the 2011–2012 annual report, the articulation of South-South diplomacy objectives takes three pages while the discussion of diplomatic goals to achieve with the North takes only a single page,<sup>69</sup> and, in 2017–2018 discussion of South-South diplomacy gets more than six times the space as relations with the North.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the key purpose of South Africa’s relations with the North is to leverage those relations to advance the national priorities and agendas of Africa and the Global South. The primary performance indicator DIRCO’s *2017/2018 Annual Report* uses to measure South Africa’s involvement in Global Governance issues, “Number of multilateral structures and processes engaged in to strengthen outcomes to meet the needs of South Africa, Africa and developing countries” speaks to this focus.<sup>71</sup>

The most emphatic demonstration of the Zuma administration’s focus on changing global governance was its active pursuit of membership in the BRIC

group, which was achieved in 2010.<sup>72</sup> Membership in BRICS positioned South Africa amongst other rising global powers, and bolstered Pretoria's ambition to be a leading state in Africa and a "gateway" to the continent. Foreign Minister Nkoana-Mashabane was explicit that the "rationale" for South Africa's request to join BRIC was based on "the role of emerging economies in advancing the restructuring of the global political, economic and financial architecture into one that is more equitable, balanced and rests on the important pillar of multilateralism." Furthermore, it was part of South Africa's "approach to intensifying . . . relations with emerging powers and other countries of the South" and thus complementary to its involvement with NAM, G77 and IBSA as well as the broader goal of "strengthening the muscle of the South in global affairs."<sup>73</sup>

The 2011 foreign policy White Paper also emphasizes the importance of restructuring the international system. It announced, "South Africa will actively participate in the BRICS, whose members are reshaping the global economic and political order."<sup>74</sup> The White Paper's analysis was that, "The shift in the balance of power in the international system combined with the rapidly closing capability gap between developed countries and emerging powers create opportunities for South Africa," and, that such a shift would allow rising powers like South Africa to play a "leading role both on specific issues and within their regions."<sup>75</sup> In 2015, an ANC policy document went so far as to describe the Chinese-led growth of rising economies as "A new dawn of hope for further possibilities of a new world order."<sup>76</sup>

A key factor pushing the Zuma Administration toward greater alignment with rising powers was the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent recession that started in and struck the Global North particularly hard. South Africa's 2012 National Development Plan (NDP), which serves as the government's overarching strategic blueprint, describes how the "economic and financial crisis in the United States and Europe and the increasing economic prominence of emerging market and developing countries has contributed significantly to the changing balance of world economic power."<sup>77</sup> The NDP makes clear that South Africa's increasing alignment with other rising powers was viewed as economically expedient as well as consistent with South Africa's enduring objective of reforming global governance. It stated:

In decades to come, as emerging economies increase their share of world trade and investment, the relative decline in the economic weight of the United States, Europe and Japan will have concomitant effects on their political and military influence. This could lead to a reorganisation of the international diplomatic and governance architecture, reflecting new centres of influence.<sup>78</sup>

This projection led the NDP to recommend that South Africa should "[r]e-orient trade to emerging markets."<sup>79</sup> The document also listed "Deepen[ing] integration with Brazil, Russia, India and China as part of the BRICS group,



while still promoting regional and global cooperation” as one of the four objectives that should guide South African foreign policy.<sup>80</sup> This is significant since BRICS is the only international group specifically mentioned in the list of foreign policy objectives articulated in the NDP.<sup>81</sup>

At the same time, the Zuma Administration focused on the BRICS as a group, it upgraded South Africa’s relations with individual BRIC members. Figure 4 illustrates the evolution of South Africa’s bilateral relationships with various key global actors. Joint Commissions, on the lower end of the spectrum of significance, are typically mid-level working relationships. Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships (CSP) indicate especially important relationships. South Africa has only six SPs or CSPs, four of which are with its BRICS partners.

Establishing partnerships with other BRIC states has significant implications. South Africa’s CSP with Russia specifies bi-annual meetings “for the purposes of promoting and guiding political and economic cooperation in order to enhance mutual understanding and support for each other on issues of mutual interest.” Moreover, the agreement with Russia has features of a non-aggression pact as it stipulates: “nonparticipation in any military-political or other alliances, associations or armed conflicts directed against the other Side, or in any treaties, agreements or understandings infringing upon the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity or national security interests of the other Side.”<sup>82</sup> While SPs or CSPs with other BRIC partners may not be formal alliances, their objective is to enhance policy coordination and create an international alignment. This alignment was tested when Moscow took the Crimea in 2014. During that episode, South Africa, together with India, Brazil and China, refrained from criticizing Russia.<sup>83</sup>

Relationship/ Partner	Joint Commission	Bi-National Commission	Partnership	Strategic Partnership	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
India	1995			1997 2006 (reaffirmed)	
China	1999	2000		2004	2010
Brazil	2000			2010	
Indonesia	2004			2008	
Russia			1999 2006 (reaffirmed)		2013
European Union	1999 (Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement)			2007	
United States		1995 2010 (Strategic Dialogue Agreement)			

**Figure 4.** The evolution of South Africa’s strategic partnerships. Data gathered from the Treaty Section of the Office of the Chief State Law Advisor at DIRCO. <http://www.dirco.gov.za/chiefstatelawadviser/treatysection.html>



The growing importance of China, the other state South Africa has signed a CSP with, is demonstrated by the burgeoning economic relationship between Beijing and Pretoria. In 2006, 6.3% of South Africa's total exports went to China, by 2016 that number had risen to 10%. The percentage of South Africa's imports that come from China has increased at an even more rapid rate – from 10% in 2006 to 18% in 2016. China is now South Africa's largest trading partner.<sup>84</sup>

South Africa's affiliations with Northern states have not led to the same harmonization of policies. The 2010 Strategic Dialogue Agreement between the United States and South Africa carries no provision for alignment of external policies.<sup>85</sup> The South Africa-European Union Strategic Partnership Joint Action Plan does discuss the common interests and values the EU and South Africa share as well as the need for "policy coordination."<sup>86</sup> Though economic intercourse between the two remains healthy, there have been difficulties arranging high-level meetings between senior EU and South African officials indicating "political tensions" between the two partners.<sup>87</sup> In addition, policy coordination has been impeded by "divergences" on a number of foreign policy issues such as ongoing instability in Zimbabwe.<sup>88</sup>

Unlike the Mandela and Mbeki administrations, which viewed states of the Global North as necessary partners in South Africa's efforts to engender economic growth at home and create a more equitable global order, the Zuma administration had a different approach. It focused more attention on rising powers such as the BRICS – states that were viewed as politically like-minded and economically vital.<sup>89</sup> To what extent this shift represents a tilt toward considering rising powers as defense partners is explored in the next section.

### **South Africa's shift toward rising powers and security collaboration**

Both academic and policy analyses suggest the increasing importance of South Africa's relationship with other rising powers, but are these relationships alliances? And, if they are not currently, do they have the potential to evolve into alliances? The traditional view of alliances requires orientation toward a shared external threat or providing some element of support or protection from a security threat. Yet South African defense documents do not frame alliances in a way that corresponds with this view – in fact, the key defense documents from the 1990s are completely devoid of any discussion of South Africa forming inter-state alliances.<sup>90</sup> The 2014 South African Defense Review does use the alliance term a dozen times when discussing general defense practices and procedures, but does not discuss South Africa's allies except for a mention of South Africa joining the BRICS "economic alliance."<sup>91</sup> This is not surprising given that post-apartheid South African defense documents identify the primary threats to the South African state as socio-economic.<sup>92</sup> The 2014 Review argues that "apart from . . . political or economic rivalry between states, any overt armed threat against South Africa is considered implausible," and

that “the principal sources of insecurity in South Africa and its region are underdevelopment, poverty, access to vital resources, the spread of diseases and environmental security, and the possible indirect effect of these on social, economic and political stability.”<sup>93</sup>

Defense documents are the most likely official publications to emphasize traditional security threats, yet these documents confirm the findings from previous sections of this paper: that the largest threats to South Africa are *not* traditional security threats, and that international relationships such as partnerships and alliances are conceived of in broader terms with socio-economic considerations at the center.

Since the primary threats South Africa confronts are socioeconomic, it makes sense that its alliance policy would be geared toward combating these socioeconomic threats. Rising power initiatives such as IBSA and BRICS, though not formed in response to a specific *security* threat, do deal directly with the socio-economic issues, and inequities in the current global order that South African officials view as core threats to their state. In this sense, BRICS and IBSA can be understood as alliances.

Is there a possibility that these new types of alliances, focused on economic and political issues could develop into more traditional security alliances? Korolev’s work on the stages of alliance institutionalization argues that an important indicator of security alliance formation is whether states conduct military exercises together. These exercises “achieve a certain degree of military force compatibility and interoperability, increase coordination, and . . . often send important signals, admonitions, or assurances to certain countries or groups of countries.”<sup>94</sup>

Since South African security concerns are focused on the African continent, many of the exercises the South African National Defense Force (SANDF) participates in are with other African states.<sup>95</sup> Outside of its African partners, however, the South African military’s training partnerships (Figure 5<sup>96</sup>) are relatively balanced between rising and established powers. This partly reflects the fact that established powers can help finance such training activities, but it also suggests that despite cooling political ties between South Africa and states

Year/ Partner	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
USA	X			X	X	X		X		X				X
Germany	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X			X		X
France	X	X	X		X			X		X		X		X
UK	X			X	X	X								
Brazil	X		X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	
India	X				X		X		X		X		X	
China													X	
Russia														

**Figure 5.** Training exercises between South Africa and (non-African) defense partners.

of the Global North, on an operational military level real cooperation still takes place. In the period from 2004–2017, South Africa participated in only one training exercise with China and none with Russia, a surprising finding since these are the two states South Africa has CSPs with.<sup>97</sup>

While IBSA has been somewhat “overshadowed” by BRICS, Figure 5 indicates that it remains an effective platform for South Africa’s security cooperation with India and Brazil.<sup>98</sup> IBSA’s biannual naval exercise called IBSAMAR is a case in point. IBSAMAR exercises are typically held in South Africa due to its position at the geographic center of the group, and involve “various navigation and seamanship evolutions, surface weapons firing, force protection exercises, antipiracy exercise, anti-air and anti-submarine exercise as well as flying operations.”<sup>99</sup> Over the past 12 years, IBSAMAR has expanded beyond cooperation amongst the IBSA countries’ navies, and now involves multiple sectors of these countries’ militaries carrying out a variety of missions such as counter-narcotics exercises and disaster management operations that require the deployment of medical and firefighting teams.<sup>100</sup> In addition to these exercises, the Indian, Brazilian and South African militaries have engaged in personnel exchanges, technical cooperation and joint research.<sup>101</sup> However, IBSA, lacks a key element of an alliance – a formal agreement stipulating if, when and how these states will come to the aid of each other. This “low level of institutionalization” limits IBSA’s ability to coordinate positions on, and play a prominent role in, international security affairs.<sup>102</sup> An analysis of India, Brazil and South Africa’s voting patterns at the UNGA found that the three states diverge most often on issues pertaining to international security.<sup>103</sup>

Though the BRICS has been the preferred forum through which South Africa engages with other rising powers on economic and political issues, the group has been slow to address security issues South Africa finds relevant.<sup>104</sup> Commitment to supporting South Africa’s UN Security Council membership at the BRICS level has lagged behind the support it has at the IBSA level.<sup>105</sup> When South Africa hosted the 2013 BRICS summit, it held an armaments exposition on the side-lines to facilitate defense industry cooperation and trade.<sup>106</sup> Five years later, at the 2018 BRICS summit, South Africa proposed the establishment of a permanent BRICS working group on peacekeeping.<sup>107</sup> Both these efforts were unsuccessful. Furthermore, BRICS voting record at the UNGA does not indicate that the group is engaging in increased security cooperation. Prior studies found that BRICS institutionalization did not lead to increased cooperation on hard security themes such as disarmament, the Middle East or colonialism. In fact,<sup>108</sup> as the BRICS became institutionalized and cooperated more in some areas, agreement on security matters decreased. Between 2006 and 2014, BRICS agreed far less in the Disarmament and International Security Committee than in other committees.<sup>109</sup> Aside from growing collaboration on counterterrorism, the BRICS countries have

engaged in only very limited cooperation on security matters via the BRICS platform. This reinforces the point that their key orientation is toward reforming global governance rather than creating a security alliance.

We cannot completely rule out the possibility that the BRICS or IBSA might transform from groups focused on political and economic issues into traditional security alliances. However, the limited institutionalization of security collaboration in IBSA, South Africa's unsuccessful efforts to promote even modest security cooperation in BRICS, and heightened tensions between China and India, suggest such a scenario is unlikely.

## Conclusion

This article contributes to the mostly Northern-focused debates on alliances by analyzing the South African view of alliances in academia and government, and the evolution of South Africa's alliance policy since 1994. It makes four main contributions:

First, on the *presence of alliances and security as their driver*, the article finds that South African academics and policy makers have used the alliance term to indicate close collaborative inter-state relations in their discourses, but this term does not consistently assume the security-centered meaning present in the Northern-dominated literature on alliances. Only when discussing security communities such as SADC does security stand out as a crucial area of cooperation. This confirms South Africa's focus on ensuring security in its own neighborhood as a regional power.<sup>110</sup>

In general, relationships South Africa has with other states that are referred to as "alliances," "coalitions," "alignments," and "strategic partnerships," serve as broad mechanisms for coordinating positions on global political issues or as agreements to foster economic or development cooperation. BRICS, the most prominent "alliance" South Africa has joined is instructive. BRICS is not motivated by a direct security threat from any state. Nor does membership necessarily facilitate security cooperation within the group or exclude cooperation with states outside it. Since South African leaders view widespread poverty and inequality within their country as a major threat, and the system of global governance that creates power imbalances as perpetuating these domestic problems, rising power alignments are often dubbed alliances, as they help positively contribute to South Africa's domestic development goals, while seeking global governance reform. Since they are predominantly mutual gains-oriented rather than driven by external threats like traditional alliances, these groups can be more accurately framed under the strategic partnership concept.

Second, *strategic partnerships are on the rise, highlighted by the shift toward rising powers*. Our analysis shows an increase in strategic partnerships in both policy and academic discourses, and as a preferred collaboration form in

practice since the Mbeki period. This trend coincides with South Africa's shift toward rising powers, which constitute the majority of South Africa's strategic partners. During the Zuma period, rising powers became increasingly attractive strategic partners because of their growing economic significance combined with the post-financial crisis economic malaise in the North. These economic shifts along with the ANC's strong Southern identity and ambitions of reforming the existing system of global governance explain why South Africa tilted increasingly toward rising powers and deprioritized maintaining its nonaligned posture. While most South African scholarship frames strategic partnerships as long-term bilateral relationships oriented toward joint cooperative ventures, this study shows that these dyadic connections can be enhanced in unison with efforts to strengthen minilateral strategic partnership such as BRICS.<sup>111</sup>

Third, *South Africa practices multi-alignment policies and seeks issue-based convergence*. It does not follow the traditional Northern-centered and security-focused view of alliances, as South African policy documents do not classify states as allies or enemies. South Africa actively engages powerful states from the Global North through its membership in groups like the G-20 and the Commonwealth. Yet, its Southern global governance reform-focused worldview is the foundation of its major alignment innovations such as IBSA and BRICS. Furthermore, South Africa enjoys active military cooperation with established powers even as it seeks to deepen security cooperation in IBSA and the BRICS. Thus, policy makers pursue multiple strategic alignments simultaneously, effectively negotiating South Africa's cooperation depending on issue-areas in which a shared interest exists.<sup>112</sup> The resulting strategic autonomy allowed policy innovators to shift South Africa politically and economically toward other rising powers during the Zuma period, while remaining balanced between established and rising powers in the security realm. South Africa's "multi-alignment" strategy of joining an array of established and new multilateral institutions, pursuing strategic partnerships across multiple issue areas, and promoting its own values while collaborating with ideologically different partners, strongly resembles India's multi-alignment approach.<sup>113</sup>

Fourth, this article opens up *new avenues for conceptualizing alliances and alliance policies* beyond South Africa. The South African experience informs thinking about alliance formation in states where traditional security threats are not prominent, and therefore not the primary driver of alliance formation. It demonstrates how developmental imperatives can play a key role in alliance decision-making in combination with an agenda of global governance revisionism.

To gain further insight into the formation and functioning of rising power alliances an important next step would be to conduct interviews with current and past policy makers. The case of South Africa makes clear

that rising powers view the purpose of alliances very differently than established ones. Interviews with officials from rising powers will shed light on a number of important issues including how this different conception affects how alliance choices are negotiated, and how intra-alliance tensions are managed.

## Notes

1. ANC, "Foreign Policy in a New Democratic South Africa: A Discussion Paper," (1993). [http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Govern\\_Political/ANC\\_Foreign.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Govern_Political/ANC_Foreign.html) (accessed June 12, 2019).
2. South Africa Department of Defense (DoD), "Defence in a Democracy: White Paper on National Defence for the Republic of South Africa," (1996). <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/155722/SouthAfrica1996.pdf> (accessed June 19, 2019).
3. The Correlates of War (COW) Alliance data set indicates that South Africa has not been party to any formal alliances since 1994. The Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) project, which uses a more expansive definition of alliance, indicates that South Africa is involved in two alliances – the African Union, which is coded as a non-aggression pact, and the SADC Organ on Politics Defense and Security, which is coded as a pact that entails non-aggression, consultation and defense.
4. Siphamandla Zondi, "Decolonising International Relations and Its Theory: A Critical Conceptual Meditation," *Politikon* 45, no. 1 (2018): 16-31.
5. Maxi Schoeman, "South Africa as an Emerging Power: From Label to 'Status Consistency'?" *South African Journal of International Affairs* 22, no. 4 (2015): 431.
6. Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 4.
7. Rajan Menon, *The End of Alliances* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
8. Thomas S. Wilkins, "'Alignment', Not 'Alliance' – the Shifting Paradigm of International Security Cooperation: Toward a Conceptual Taxonomy of Alignment," *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 1 (January 2012): 75.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Colleen Chidley, "Towards a Framework of Alignment in International Relations," *Politikon* 41, no. 1 (2014): 155.
11. For an overview of South Africa in the NAM see David Monyae, "South Africa And The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM): Confronting The New Global Challenges" (MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, November 1999).
12. Michael N. Barnett and Jack S. Levy, "Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: the Case of Egypt, 1962-73," *International Organization* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 369-95; Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (January 1991): 233-56.
13. Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN states' Alignment Behavior towards China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 100 (2016): 2.
14. Schoeman, "South Africa as an Emerging Power," 9; Deborah Welch Larson, "New Perspectives on Rising Powers and Global Governance: Status and Clubs," *International Studies Review*, 20, no. 2 (June 2018): 247-54.
15. Cynthia Roberts, "Russia's BRICs Diplomacy: Rising Outsider with Dreams of an Insider," *Polity* 42 (2010): 38 – 73.



16. Alexander Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," *Asian Security* 15, no. 3 (2019): 233-52.
17. C. Raja Mohan, "Today, India's Strategic Autonomy is about Coping with Beijing's Challenge to its Territorial Integrity, Sovereignty," *The Indian Express*, August 25, 2020. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/reinventing-india-strategic-autonomy-china-us-6568347/>.
18. Chidley, "Towards a Framework of Alignment in International Relations," 155.
19. Yolanda Kemp Spies, *Global South Perspectives on Diplomacy* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
20. See for example: Olumuyiwa Babatunde Amao, "The Foreign Policy and Intervention Behaviour of Nigeria and South Africa in Africa: A Structural Realist Analysis," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (2019): 93-112; Luis Leandro Schenoni, "Subsystemic Unipolarities? Power Distribution and State Behaviour in South America and Southern Africa," *Strategic Analysis* 4, no. 1 (2017): 74-86.
21. Anthoni van Nieuwkerk, "South Africa and the African Peace and Security Architecture," Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center (March 2014); J. Andrew Grant and Spencer Hamilton, "Norm Dynamics and International Organisations: South Africa in the African Union and International Criminal Court," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 54, no. 2 (2016): 161-85.
22. For the AU's description of itself see African Union, "AU in a Nutshell." <https://au.int/en/au-nutshell>. In addition, see note 3, which explains that some of the major alliance datasets consider the AU an alliance, while others do not.
23. Deon Geldenhuys, "The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between South Africa and Russia," *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 37, no. 2 (2015): 140.
24. John Kotsopoulos, "South Africa's Strategic Partnerships – between Pragmatism and Symbolism," in *South African Foreign Policy Review, Volume 3*, ed. Lesley Masters and Jo-Ansie van Wyk (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2019), 142. Both Kotsopoulos and Geldenhuys make this point about SPs in particular, but it holds in regards to the literature on South African bilateral and multilateral relationships in general.
25. Gi-Wook Shin, "National Identities, Historical Memories, and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia" in *Asia's Alliance Triangle*, ed. Gilbert Rozman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 189.
26. Charles Teddlie and Abbas Tashakkori, "Major Issues and Controversies in the Use of Mixed Methods in the Social and Behavioral Sciences," in *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research*, ed. Charles Teddlie and Abbas Tashakkori (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003): 3-50.
27. Maxi Schoeman, "South Africa: Between History and a Hard Place," in *International Relations Scholarship Around the World*, ed. Arlene B Tickner and Ole Wæver (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 58-9. For more on when and in which ways South African academics have affected policy making see Candice Moore, Twenty Years on, It's All Academic: Progressive South African Scholars and Moral Foreign Policy After Apartheid," *Politikon* 40, no. 3 (2013); and John Siko, *Inside South African Foreign Policy: Diplomacy in Africa from Smuts to Mbeki* (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2014), 243.
28. The journals were selected by their ranking in Google Scholar as well as Scopus when they were included on the latter index. 1994 is an appropriate starting point since it marks the advent of democracy and ANC rule in South Africa, and coincides with a critical juncture in global affairs following the end of the Cold War. While the end year (2018) is the same for all journals, the start year is 1994 for *Journal of Contemporary*

*African Studies*, *South African Journal of International Affairs*, *Politikon*; 1995 for *African Security Review*; and 1999 for *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* due to the lack of electronic records since 1994 for the latter two journals.

29. The choice of these keywords is based on Wilkins, "Alignment", Not "Alliance," article in which he provides a taxonomy of the alignment concept. If used in an inter-state context and a central focus of the article we also included derivatives of the term alliance such as "allies."
30. That there is limited theoretical work on alliances in South Africa is unsurprising, since, in general, IR scholarship in South Africa is atheoretical. On this point see: Karen Smith, "International Relations in South Africa: A case of 'Add Africa and Stir'?", *Politikon* 40, no. 3 (2013): 533-44; Ian Taylor, "Rethinking the Study of International Relations in South Africa," *Politikon* 27, no. 2 (2000): 207-20; Schoeman, "South Africa: Between History and a Hard Place."
31. John Kotsopoulos' effort to develop a conceptual understanding of South Africa's international relationships through the development of a rough typology of the enhanced bilateral relationships South Africa enjoys with other states is a promising exception to this largely descriptive body of scholarship. However, Kotsopoulos does not define the characteristics of the different types of these enhanced bilateral relationships, which limits the utility of his typology.
32. The sum of issue-area tallies in the graph add up to 777, rather than 203, the total number of articles containing alliance-related terms. This is for two reasons: (1) Many articles were coded as discussing more than one issue-area; (2) Many articles mentioned more than one alliance term. For example, an article that deals with political, economic and development issues and used the terms "Alliance" and "Coalition" would generate 6 total observations. This method is somewhat crude since it does not look at the precise context in which each term was used, which contributes to some "noise" in the data. The data is therefore directional rather than exact, but it does provide a picture of the relationship between alliance terms and issue-areas.
33. Our search did not capture every article on SADC because some articles on SADC do not include any of the search terms used. Our findings are indicative rather than comprehensive, but the correlation between security articles and a focus on SADC strongly suggests the importance of security in the region for South Africa.
34. Thomas S. Wilkins, "Russo-Chinese Strategic Partnership: A New Form of Security Cooperation?" *Contemporary Security Policy* 29, no. 2 (2008): 365-66; Geldenhuys, "The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between South Africa and Russia," 130.
35. This graph, like the last, draws on the pool of 203 articles that use alliance-related terms in the context of inter-state relations.
36. For examples of this work see: Chris Alden and Maxi Schoeman, "South Africa in the Company of Giants: The Search for Leadership in a Transforming Global Order," *International Affairs* 89, no. 1 (2013) 111-29; Eduard Jordaan, "The Concept of a Middle Power in International Relations: Distinguishing between Emerging and Traditional Middle Powers," *Politikon* 30, no. 1 (2003): 165-81; Janis van der Westhuizen, "South Africa's Emergence as a Middle Power," *Third World Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1998): 435-56. Alden and Schoeman (114-15) note "South Africa ... seems to be torn between aligning its positions with its BRICS allies and pursuing an African agenda."
37. Ian Taylor, "'The South Will Rise Again'? New Alliances and Global Governance: The India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum," *Politikon* 36, no. 1 (2009): 45-58; Scarlett Cornelissen, "Awkward Embraces: Emerging and Established Powers and the Shifting



- Fortunes of Africa's International Relations in the Twenty-First Century," *Politikon* 36, no.1 (2009): 9.
38. Maxi Schoeman, "Introduction to the Special Issue: Alliances beyond BRICS – South Africa's Role in Global Economic Governance," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 22, no. 2 (2015): 143-44.
  39. Oluwaseun Tella, "South Africa in BRICS: The Regional Power's Soft Power and Soft Balancing," *Politikon* 44, no. 3 (2017): 394; and Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, "South Africa and BRICS: An African Perspective," January 16, 2013. <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2013/brics0213.html> (accessed June 21, 2019).
  40. Francis Kornegay and Lesley Masters, eds., *From BRIC to BRICS: Report on the Proceedings of the International Workshop on South Africa's Emerging Power Alliances: IBSA, BRIC, Basic* (Pretoria: Institute for Global Dialogue, 2011), 23.
  41. *Ibid.*
  42. DIRCO annual reports before 2002 were not available from the DIRCO website and could not be found in the DIRCO library.
  43. DIRCO, *Strategic Plan: 2011-2014* (nd), 17.
  44. DIRCO, "Building a Better World: The Diplomacy of Ubuntu," White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy, May 13, 2011, 13-4.
  45. Policy Co-ordination and Advisory Services, the Presidency of South Africa, *Toward a Ten Year Review* (October 2003), 71. <https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/10year.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2019).
  46. Alfred Nzo, September 1995, quoted in DFA, "Foreign Policy for South Africa: Discussion Document," June 1, 1996. <https://www.gov.za/documents/foreign-policy-south-africa-discussion-document> (accessed 21 July 2019).
  47. Alfred Nzo, "Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the National Assembly," May 18, 1995, in *Mission Imperfect: Redirecting South Africa's Foreign Policy*, ed. Chris Landsberg, Garth Le Pere and Anthoni van Nieuwkerk (Johannesburg: The Center for Policy Studies and Foundation for Global Development, 1995), 116.
  48. Theo Neethling, "The Defence Force and Peacekeeping: Linking Policy and Capacity", in *South Africa's Policy 1994-2004: Apartheid Past, Renaissance Future*, ed. Elizabeth Sidiropoulos (Johannesburg: The South African Institute for International Affairs, 2004), 138-39.
  49. Aziz Pahad, "The Foreign Ministers Annual Address," Johannesburg, November 7, 1996 *South African Journal of International Affairs* 4, no. 2 (Winter 1997), 197.
  50. ANC, "Foreign Policy in a New Democratic South Africa."
  51. ANC, "Discussion Document: Developing a Strategic Perspective on South African Foreign Policy," July, 1, 1997.
  52. Essop Pahad, "Response," in *The Influence of the ANC on South Africa's Foreign Policy*, compiled by Fritz Nganje (Pretoria: Institute for Global Dialogue, November 2012), 11.
  53. Jack Spence, "The Debate over South Africa's Foreign Policy," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 4, no. 1 (1996), 122.
  54. Nzo, "Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the National Assembly," May 18, 1995.
  55. Alfred Nzo, "Statement to the Eleventh Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement," Cairo, May 31-June 3 1994, *South African Journal of International Affairs* 2, no.1 (1994), 136-39.
  56. Ian Taylor, *Stuck in Middle GEAR: South Africa's Post-Apartheid Foreign Relations* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2001), 10.
  57. Nelson Mandela, "Closing address by President Nelson Mandela at the 12th Summit Meeting of Heads of State and Government of the countries of the Non-Aligned

- Movement,” Durban, South Africa, September 3, 1998. [http://www.mandela.gov.za/mandela\\_speeches/1998/980903\\_nam.htm](http://www.mandela.gov.za/mandela_speeches/1998/980903_nam.htm) (accessed November 2, 2020).
58. ANC, “Discussion Document: Developing a Strategic Perspective ...” 7.
  59. The partnership concept was used during the Mandela era, but less frequently and usually in a vague manner. The ANC’s 1993 foreign policy discussion document used it only twice and the Party’s 1997 foreign policy discussion document only four times. The DFA’s Green Paper of 1996 used the partner concept 13 times, but often in a very general sense rather than in reference to a specific relationship. For example, it often referred to South Africa’s “African partners” when discussing any other African state. See ANC, “Foreign Policy in a New Democratic South Africa,” ANC, “Discussion Document: Developing a Strategic Perspective ...”; DFA, “Foreign Policy for South Africa.”
  60. Thabo Mbeki, “The African Renaissance Statement,” SABC, Gallagher Estate, Midrand, South Africa, August 13, 1998. <http://www.mbeki.org/2016/06/08/the-africanrenaissance-statement-sabc-gallagher-estate-19980813> (accessed June 12, 2019); Adekeye Adebajo, *Thabo Mbeki* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana, 2016).
  61. Chris Landsberg, “Continuity and Change in the Foreign Policies of the Mbeki and Zuma Governments,” *Africa Insight* 4, no. 1, March (2012): 2; DIRCO, “The First New Asian African Strategic Partnership (NAASP) Senior Officials Meeting (SOM), The First Step of the NAASP, August 17, 2006. <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2006/naasp0817.htm> (accessed June 13, 2019).
  62. Chris Landsberg, *The Diplomacy of Transformation* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 2010), 174-77.
  63. Thabo Mbeki, “Address of the President of South Africa at the G20 Finance Ministerial Conference,” Kleinmond, Western Cape, November 18, 2007. <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/speeches/2007/mbek1118.htm> (accessed July 20, 2019).
  64. Philip Nel, “Redistribution and Recognition: What Emerging Regional Powers Want,” *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 4 (October 2010): 9051-974; Chris Landsberg “IBSA’s Political Origins, Significance and Challenges,” *Policy Studies Bulletin of CPS* 8, no. 2 (2006): 4-7.
  65. IBSA Dialogue Forum, “Agenda for Cooperation and Plan of Action,” New Delhi, March 5, 2004, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/3168/IndiaBrazilSouth+Africa+IBSA+Dialogue+Forum+Trilateral+Commission+Meeting+New+Delhi+Agenda+for+Cooperation+and+Plan+of+Action> (accessed 13 November 2020).
  66. Suzanne Graham, “South Africa’s UN General Assembly Voting Record from 2003 to 2008: Comparing India, Brazil and South Africa,” *Politikon* 38, no. 3 (2011): 421-24; United States State Department, “Voting Practices in the United Nations 2003 – 2008” <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/io/rls/rpt/c25867.htm>.
  67. Rian Leith and Joellen Pretorius, “Eroding the Middle Ground,” *Politikon* 36, no. 3 (2009): 352-53.
  68. United Nations, “Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Myanmar, Owing to Negative Votes by China, Russian Federation,” press release, January 12, 2007. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2007/sc8939.doc.htm> (accessed July 39, 2019); Paul Henri-Bischoff, “Reform in Defence of Sovereignty: South Africa in the UN Security Council, 2007-2008,” *Africa Spectrum* 44, no. 2 (2009): 103.
  69. DIRCO, *2011/2012 Annual Report* (2012), 75-8.
  70. DIRCO, *2017/2018 Annual Report* (2018), 101-16.
  71. *Ibid.*, 84.

72. Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, "SA Full Membership of Brics," December 24, 2010. <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2010/brics1224.html> (accessed June 13, 2019).
73. *Ibid.*
74. DIRCO, "The Diplomacy of Ubuntu," 26.
75. *Ibid.*, 13 and 18.
76. ANC, "NGC 2015: Discussion Documents," 161-62.
77. South Africa, National Planning Commission (NPC), "National Development Plan 2030: Our Future – Make it Work," (2012), 238 and 256.
78. *Ibid.*, 31.
79. *Ibid.*, 113.
80. *Ibid.*, 253.
81. *Ibid.*, 243-46.
82. Joint Declaration on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Africa, March 26, 2013. <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/1428> (accessed July 29 2019).
83. Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, "South Africa's Response to the Ukrainian Crisis," Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center, Policy Brief, June 2014; Malte Brosig, *The Role of BRICS in Large-Scale Armed Conflict* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 147-48.
84. MIT Media Lab, The Observatory of Economic Complexity. <https://oec.world/en/> accessed 13 July 2019. (accessed September 3, 2019).
85. Memorandum of Understanding for the Establishment of a Bilateral Strategic Dialogue Between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the United States of America, April 10, 2010. <http://www.dirco.gov.za/chiefstatelawadviser/treatysection.html> (accessed August 1, 2019).
86. The South Africa-European Union Strategic Partnership Joint Action Plan, May 14, 2007. <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%209650%202007%20INIT> (accessed August 2, 2019).
87. Sven Grimm & Christine Hackenesch, "The EU–South Africa Strategic Partnership: Waning Affection, Persisting Economic Interests," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 24, no. 2 (2017): 161.
88. Philani Mthembu, "Situating the European Union within South Africa's Foreign Policy Calculus," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 24, no. 2 (2017): 250.
89. DIRCO, "Revised Strategic Plan: 2015-2020," 16. [http://www.dirco.gov.za/departments/strategic\\_plan/index.htm](http://www.dirco.gov.za/departments/strategic_plan/index.htm) (accessed 1 August 2019).
90. DoD, "Defence in a Democracy"; DoD, "South African Defence Review" (1998). <https://www.gov.za/documents/south-african-defense-review-1998> (accessed June 29, 2019).
91. DoD, "South African Defence Review," (2014), I-3, [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/dfencereview2014.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/dfencereview2014.pdf) (accessed June 29, 2019).
92. DoD, "Defence in a Democracy," chapter 2, paragraph 5; and DoD, "South African Defence Review" (1998), paragraph, 28.
93. DoD, South African Defense Review (2014), Annexure D-8, and 2 (O-3).
94. Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance," 236.
95. For a good example of the density of interactions between the SANDF and its continental counterparts see DoD, *Annual Report 2014/2015*, 138-142.
96. South African DoD Annual Reports, 2004-2017, <http://www.dod.mil.za/documents/documents.htm> (accessed June-July 2019).
97. In November 2019 China, Russia, and South Africa engaged in naval exercises, but this event did not occur under the BRICS umbrella. Peter Fabricius, "South Africa's military drills with Russia and China raise eyebrows," ISS Today, November 29, 2019. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/south-africas-military-drills-with-russia-and-china-raise->

- eyebrows#:~:text=This%20week's%20unprecedented%20joint%20trilateral,tanks%20back%20in%20their%20capitals (accessed December 12, 2019).
98. Sanjaya Baru, "The Bricks to Rebuild IBSA," *The Hindu*, April 28, 2015. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-bricks-to-rebuild-ibsa/article7147509.ece> (accessed October 24, 2020).
  99. "South Africa Hosts Sixth Edition of Three-nation IBSAMAR Drill," *Naval Today*, October 4, 2018, <https://navaltoday.com/2018/10/04/south-africa-hosts-sixth-edition-of-three-nation-ibsam-mar-drill/> (accessed December 20, 2019).
  100. Dean Wingrin, "Ibsamar Naval Exercise Ends on Dramatic Note," *DefenceWeb*, October 29, 2012, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/sea/sea-sea/ibsam-mar-naval-exercise-ends-on-dramatic-note/> (accessed December 12, 2019); Athina May, "Navies Train together to Reduce Potential Threats at Sea," *Daily News (IOL)*, October 3, 2018.
  101. Frank Charles van Rooyen, "The India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Collective and the Socio-Political Construction of Security" (PhD Dissertation, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 2017), 229.
  102. Daniel Flemes [e-mail interview], "Global Insider: IBSA Countries Take Tentative Steps Toward Defense Cooperation," *World Politics Review*, December 21, 2012, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/12567/global-insider-ibsa-countries-take-tentative-steps-toward-defense-cooperation> (accessed 11 November 2019).
  103. Graham, "South Africa's UN General Assembly Voting Record . . .," 422-23.
  104. South Africa's NDP describes BRICS as an "alliance" and labels it "an important development in the recent history of South Africa's international relations." NPC, "National Development Plan," 238.
  105. Peter Fabricius, "Call for reform of UN Security council falls short," *Daily Maverick*, June 5, 2018, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-06-05-call-for-reform-of-un-security-council-falls-short/>.
  106. Hopewell Radebe, "Defence Plans Show, Talks, at BRICS Summit," *Business Day*, March 4, 2013; "Industry News" *African Armed Forces*, March 1, 2013.
  107. *DefenceWeb*, "South Africa looking to involve BRICS more in peace support operations," August 6, 2018, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/south-africa-looking-to-involve-brics-more-in-peace-support-operations/> (accessed November 12, 2020).
  108. Frederieke Dijkhuizen & Michal Onderco, "Sponsorship Behaviour of the BRICS in the United Nations General Assembly" *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 11 (2019): 2046.
  109. Bas Hooijmaaijers and Stephan Keukeleire, "Voting Cohesion of the BRICS Countries in the UN General Assembly, 2006–2014: A BRICS Too Far?" *Global Governance* 22, no. 3 (2016): 398-401.
  110. Walter Lotze, Cedric de Coning, and Theo Neethling, "Peacekeeping Contributor Profile: South Africa," in *Providing for Peacekeeping*. <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/2014/04/03/contributor-profile-south-africa/> (accessed February 2, 2020).
  111. Geldenhuys, "The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between South Africa and Russia," 122.
  112. Adam Habib, "South Africa's Foreign Policy: Hegemonic Aspirations, Neoliberal Orientations and Global Transformation," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 16, no. 2 (2009): 155.
  113. Ian Hall, "Multialignment and Indian Foreign Policy under Narendra Modi," *Round Table* 103, no. 3 (2016): 272.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Kelly Sims Gallagher, Scott Hoag, John Zeleznak, Zhen Han, Frank O'Donnell, the editor, and two anonymous reviewers for valuable input and the grant agency for making this work possible.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work relates to the Office of the Secretary of Defense Minerva Initiative through the Department of Navy award [N000141812744] issued by the Office of Naval Research. The United States Government has a royalty-free license throughout the world in all copyrightable materials contained herein. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Office of Naval Research.