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The Challenge to the Liberal Order: Norms of the Global South

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Introduction

This is a time of rising interest in the Global South in Western academia, matching increased interest in policy circles. In support of this contention, Haug (2021, 1924) cites Elsevier’s Scopus database, where references to the “Global South” in titles, abstracts, and keywords in Anglophone publications have expanded from one registered publication mentioning the term in 1994, to thirty in 2005, and more than 1,600 in 2020. In policy circles, China, still considering itself a champion of the South (Char 2016), has gone from being considered

an emerging power with a very long way to go in the 1980s and 1990s to being an economic powerhouse with regional military ambitions and global reach.

Scholars and commentators have for some time now been remarking on and writing about the perceived threat of China’s rise (for example, Luttwak 2012; Layne 2018). Meanwhile, in U.S. policy circles, both former President Donald Trump and current President Joe Biden (using slightly differing strategies)¹ have prioritized China in their strategic planning, vowing to keep it from continuing, as they see it, to threaten *the liberal order*. In the Interim National Security Strategy

¹ In National Security documents, both presidents have adopted similar views: that China is a threat to U.S. values and interests and should be contained both by building up domestic capabilities as well as countering China’s initiatives globally, that the U.S. can engage with China on some global issues, and that close cooperation with allies is advisable. In practice, however, President Trump was less cooperative with allies (seeing them as functioning to magnify U.S. power [NSS 2017: 46]), whereas President Biden has been more willing to see them as global partners in initiatives to contain China as also on global issues in general. Biden has also articulated more clearly that indeed, there are issues on which cooperation with China is needed (case in point, his signature climate change focus).



document of March 2021, the Biden-led administration has clearly expressed this rising alarm:

*We must also contend with the reality that **the distribution of power across the world is changing, creating new threats** [emphasis per original]. China, in particular, has rapidly become more assertive. It is the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system. ... In many areas, China's leaders seek unfair advantages, behave aggressively and coercively, and undermine the rules and values at the heart of an open and stable international system. When the Chinese government's behavior directly threatens our interests and values, we will answer Beijing's challenge. (The White House 2021, 7–8, 20)*

While China is, for obvious reasons, the main focus of analysts, there has long been a concern in the West² about “third-world” (now Global South [GS]) countries’ potential challenges to the “open and stable international system.” Since the heyday of the 1970s, third-world countries have been vexing the West by articulating new norms, with the more radical of them having even sought alternatives to the Western-dominated international economic system. The question is: does the increasing visibility today of Global South countries — the so-called “rise of the rest” in the “post-American world” (Zakaria 2008) — really constitute a challenge to the existing world normative order? To assess this, most scholars and analysts have been concentrating on the wealthier countries constituted as the BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa) or, for our purposes, more accurately the IBSA since Russia is not a GS nation. The BRICS are seen by most as neither cohesive (Pant 2013; more recently Nuruzzaman 2020) nor revolutionary (Bond and Garcia 2015), and therefore their significance in this regard is considered to be overestimated. Indeed, one analysis, steeped in more scientific international relations theory than most, even uses Bayesian change-point modeling to assess the identity and behavior of the BRICS, concluding that they are less focused on revisionism than on assimilation (Thies and Nieman 2017).

However, few analysts focus on the GS as a whole, assuming rather that there is no identifiable and cohesive grouping that can collectively threaten global institutions or rules. Collective “troublemaking” in the form of radical third-world rhetoric is assumed to be a thing of the past. Still, the increasing influence of some developing nations is arguably tied to collective perceptions and norms, articulated in individual foreign policies as much as in international organizations and multilateral negotiations. This brief article suggests that GS states do still share certain principles and beliefs that will be elaborated here, that we should remember that those seeking more influence in international affairs are not just the BRICS, and that some change in the world structure as well as in attendant global norms can and should be anticipated. However, as other analysts already cited have concluded, I too maintain that based on the evidence elaborated briefly below, such changes are likely to be gradualist and negotiated over the long term.

First, what is the liberal order? The bones of this order were instituted post–World War II around one main idea: liberalism. In the political sphere, this meant that leading nations were committed to the principles of democracy and the rule of law; in the economic sphere, the commitment was to freedom of the market. This liberal order owes much to the United States, which emerged from World War II as the leader of the free world. In Neack’s words, “The liberal international order is the product of the United States acting as a hegemon, so it is correct to call it a **hegemonic order**” [emphasis per original] (Neack 2019, 150). This is also stressed in Robert Keohane’s (1984) concept of hegemonic stability — based on Charles Kindleberger’s work — which is integral to international relations’ neoliberal institutionalism approach. In this respect, then, the challenges to the liberal order that are cause for alarm refer to possible disruptions to the ideal of free polities and free economies, and a global order led by the United States and its allies, particularly now that there is no longer any Soviet competition. What follows is a brief discussion of the political, economic, and cultural norms promulgated by GS nations: norms that might be the cause of some concern.

² By “West,” I am referring to the historically dominant European and North American countries. I recognize that “West” and “non-West” are contested terms in the post–Cold War era, but a debate on this is not needed here.



Just to clarify our terms, note that reference was made above to both the third world and the Global South as if they were equivalent. It is true that there is some contention about the term “Global South,” primarily among academics (among other discussions, see Haug, Braveboy-Wagner, and Maihold 2021). It is not a lay term: average inhabitants of Africa, Asia, or Latin America are more likely to refer to “third-world” values than “Global South values,” usually while using the term “third world” in a pejorative fashion. This is unfortunate, given that “third world” originally simply referred to those countries that did not wish to be aligned with East or West.³ Unfortunately, over time, connotations of inferiority were read into the term by critics both in and outside the third world.

As I noted in 2009, “as far back as the 1970s, dissatisfaction had already surfaced over the stagnation and inequality that could be read into terms such as ‘third world’ and ‘less developed’” (the latter itself changed later to “developing”). “Thus the term ‘South’ began to appear more frequently in U.N. documentation by the 1970s” (Braveboy-Wagner 2009, 3). As illustrations of the growing acceptance of the designation “South,” one can point to the fact that in the 1970s, U.N. documentation routinely referred to the “North-South” division of the world (as opposed to the Cold War East-West divide), and “South-South cooperation” was adopted as a new focus. (We will return to this later.) “Global South” is a logical post-Cold War nod to globalization in that it has generated greater integration among countries as well as the “rise” of some developing countries, even while also not erasing the traditional inequalities between economic and political haves and have-nots in the international system. It is used primarily by governments and international organizations.

There is certainly some fuzziness in determining the membership of the group. For one, is China really “Global South”? This is not a new issue. In my own early book on the third world (1986), I questioned whether China was “third-world” based, among other things, on its already-rising economy and nuclear weapons advances. It is an even more complicated question today, though it suffices for our purposes



A climate activist demonstrates during a Global Climate Strike in Parliament Square, London on Sept. 24, 2021. The protest was organized to show the influence of the Global North through its colonialism, imperialism and other exploitation. (Getty Images)

here to use the common experiences and longstanding connections China has had with the South as a key to determining its GS identity. Or is Turkey a Global South country? Some include it on the basis of its hybridity and contentious place within Europe. I do not. Are former “third-world” countries that are accepted into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or the G20 to be deemed as having left the Global South? While there is no space here to debate these issues, for the purposes of this article the GS, the South, and the third world are all terms referring to the countries that were colonized or quasi-colonized by European powers in their contestation over centuries for territory overseas.

³ The origin of the term is usually dated to Alfred Sauvy’s coinage in 1952, but it may have originally been used to describe the third parties of France in the 1940s (Allen Merriam 1979).



Domination and attendant exploitation have left their legacy of material and cultural distortions, and have diminished their global influence. This has impacted their foreign policies even today. While the issue of “graduation” from the South designation is academically interesting, it is usually based on a wealth criteria that is not a necessary condition for belonging to the GS. The reader will also note that the GS, as used here, is territorially based. This is because foreign policy and diplomatic action are still centered on state actors, despite the rise in importance of nonstate actors. In sum, then, GS refers here to the states in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America and the Caribbean.⁴

How Do GS States Respond to Northern Demands for Democracy and Good Governance?

In the 1990s, political and economic liberalism spread worldwide, after the demise of the Soviet Union. But several decades later, the “charm” of democracy seems to have worn out in many parts of the South, with repression and civil violence occurring in some countries (for example, today’s Myanmar, Ethiopia, and Syria), dubious attempts to tweak constitutions to prolong stays in power (Côte d’Ivoire, Haiti, and Venezuela, for example), a return to authoritarianism or military rule (today’s Egypt, Tunisia, and Sudan, for example), and arguments and standoffs between governmental factions (Sri Lanka, Somalia, Ecuador, South Africa, and Samoa). Even in countries where democratic rule is on firmer ground, there have been hints of authoritarianism (India and Brazil, for example) and sometimes widespread politically oriented popular protests. In short, the path to democratization has proven to be fairly perilous.

In foreign affairs, however, GS states do not profess any aversion to democracy at all. Indeed, any search of U.N., Nonaligned Movement (NAM), or the documentation of the numerous regional organizations would turn up strong declarations by states in support of democracy. For example, one of the best

ways to assess GS norms is to refer to the NAM’s declarations since this is a grouping of all or almost all the GS states.⁵ Early in the 2000s, NAM states openly endorsed the “defence and consolidation of democracy, reaffirming that democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social, and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their life” (NAM 2009), and they continue to reiterate these principles today. There is no reason to believe, then, that nonaligned or GS states *oppose* democracy as a norm or indeed, oppose international action to curb instances of bad governance. The charters of most regional organizations contain a commitment to democracy and measures to oppose undemocratic governance. Even more agreement can be found with respect to “crimes against humanity.” African states and Caribbean states, in particular, were proactive in endorsing the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The problem, however, is that, given their historical experiences, GS states do also tend to still guard their sovereignty closely. Thus, *nonintervention* is a norm that is treated very seriously by states that have historically been ruled by foreigners and subjected to takeovers, blockades, and sanctions. In this sense, the defense of democracy runs up against the adherence to the norm of nonintervention and noninterference in others’ domestic affairs. It is interesting, for example, to read in the speeches of President Xi Jinping fairly constant references to the “Five Principles of Coexistence” (for example, Xi 2017) because these principles, the Panchsheel – respect for each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, noninterference in each other’s affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence – remain a fundamental part of the principles of the nonaligned. While it is certainly self-serving in many ways (and unacceptable) for GS states to cling to nonintervention in cases where accusations of human rights and other governance violations are pointed at them or their allies, it is also the case that

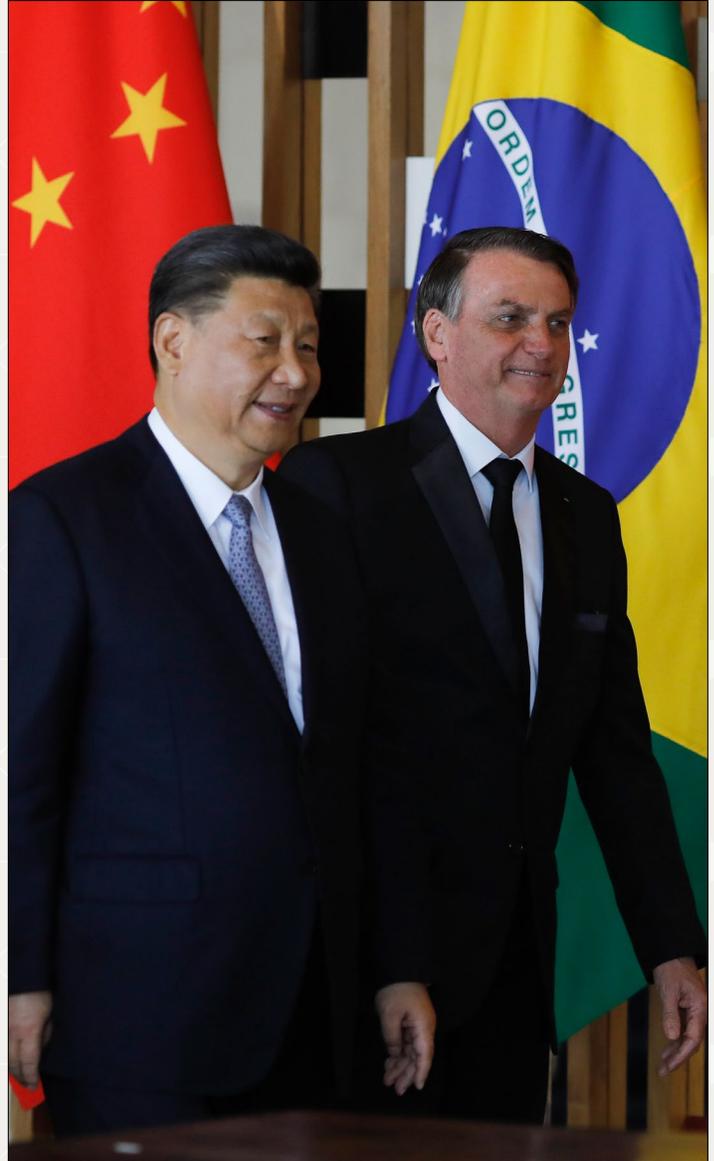
⁴ It should be noted that “Global South” is sometimes used as a reference to decoloniality, that is, to the movement to decolonize knowledge and critique colonial/Western superiority (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). In this sense, the South can refer to many marginalized groupings, racial, gender-based, class-based, etc. While this approach can lead to the identification of crucial issues, the focus here is on foreign policy in a traditional state-based sense.

⁵ Despite a certain loss of visibility, the NAM is still a crucial community for states of the Global South. One hundred twenty diverse countries from all three regions of the traditional South as well as the newer states of Central Asia Azerbaijan and Belarus, in addition to China and other observers, meet together every four years (and caucus at the United Nations in the interim). Note, however, that the grouping has always included European states. Yugoslavia, a founder, no longer exists, and Cyprus and Malta left to join the EU.



sometimes punitive coercive measures, imposed unilaterally or even multilaterally, *can* reflect the self-interest of those that do the pointing, in particular the leading powers. This explains, for example, why GS states are universally opposed to continuing U.S. sanctions against Cuba, and vote accordingly in the U.N. General Assembly each year. It also explains why the Association of Southeast Asian States' (ASEAN) approach to Myanmar over the years has generally been oriented toward constructive engagement (despite some intragroup contestation) rather than sanctions. Similarly, the small Caribbean countries comprising the Caribbean Community, always aware of the dangers of intervention because of their size, have preferred a noninterventionist, negotiated approach to the situation in Venezuela even as U.S., European, and even Latin American neighbors have imposed (to be sure, smart) sanctions against the government of Nicolas Maduro (CARICOM 2017).

A particular subset of this general GS skepticism about the use of punitive measures to bring undemocratic actors in line has been the GS approach to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm, adopted by the international community in the wake of the genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda. GS states initially were wary but approving, but concerns grew after the Western intervention in Libya in 2011. There is, however, no disagreement with the norm itself: as Brazilian scholar Oliver Stuenkel says of the BRICS: "The BRICS are in fundamental agreement about the principles that undergird R2P. Their support for R2P[] s pillars I and II is absolute, therefore sponsoring the idea that states have the primary responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, and that the international community must have a role in assisting States to do so. [But] ... the BRICS diverge from Western countries ... about when and how to apply the norm" (Steunkel 2016, 212, note 38). This is indeed the position of most GS states. It is not the principle of protection itself that is disputed, but rather the way it has been applied. What are the criteria for determining the need to intervene? What are the limits to be imposed? Who determines when to intervene? Certainly, the intervention in Libya seemed tainted by France's self-interest, and the application of force went beyond the original mandate of the U.N. to protect citizens.



Chinese President Xi Jinping (L) and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro meet on the eve of the BRICS Business Council in November 2019. Bolsaro has sought to boost ties with China. (Getty Images)

Of the BRICS, Brazil is probably the country that has most opposed the use of force in its foreign policy. Historically, it has tried to ease tensions with its neighbors by avowing its nonmilitary intentions. Notably, today it is credited with promoting the concept of "responsibility *while protecting*," which focuses primarily on securing the peace and human security needs of the affected populations (Kalil and Braveboy-Wagner 2016).



Similar hesitations by GS states have been observed with respect to the operations of the ICC. Most states readily signed on to the court and indeed were unhappy that the United States did not. But as time has gone on, concerns have grown about the way in which the court has exercised its role. In 2016, a number of African states threatened to withdraw because of the court's seeming preoccupation with cases in Africa (Kuwonu 2017). Although in the end this threat was not carried out, it did raise a reasonable doubt about the court's evenhandedness, despite the fact that African (and other GS) judges and prosecutors have actually played prominent roles on the ICC.

A more recent restatement of an old norm has been the affirmation by the leading GS nations of their commitment to anti-hegemony. This is new in the sense that whereas hegemonic concerns used to be directed at the West/North, the rise of countries such as China and India has generated some intra-South wariness about the intentions of their own; while GS countries may harbor hopes for favorable changes in the world structure, they are also aware that they may be equally exploited by their more influential counterparts. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the BRICS/IBSA states have gone to rather great lengths to assure other GS nations that they do not have hegemonic intentions. China is, of course, the main country whose intentions can be doubted, given its vast economic investments around the South. President Xi has stressed on a number of occasions that China is not to be feared:

China will never pursue development at the expense of others' interests, but nor will China ever give up its legitimate rights and interests. No one should expect us to swallow anything that undermines our interests. China pursues a national defense policy that is in nature defensive. China's development does not pose a threat to any other country. No matter what stage of development it reaches, China will never seek hegemony or engage in expansion. (Xi 2017)

As already noted, Brazil too, the largest country in South America, having borders with all countries but Ecuador and Chile, has long maintained that it is only interested in cordial relations with its neighbors. Other regional powers beyond the BRICS have asserted similar sentiments: Nigeria, for example, provides

security and economic assistance to its neighbors but prefers to be perceived as a "big brother," not the hegemon that its neighbors might be tempted to call it (Adogamhe 2016). Of course, academics recognize that hegemony may be benign (hegemonic stability theory has already been mentioned), but in the GS the term is uniformly seen as carrying negative connotations.

In the discussion of democracy so far, nothing has been said about the search for equality and justice at the global level, yet this is an important focus of the GS. There is a reason why GS states embrace multilateral institutions, and that is because they are able to have a wider voice and impact while participating in international forums than they would otherwise. This does not mean, however, that they are happy with the current global institutions. In particular, for some time now they have been seeking to democratize the biggest organization of all, the United Nations. The concern about the "democratic deficit" in the U.N. Security Council is well known, as is the longstanding debate on how to fix it. Space does not permit a long discussion of the various proposals that have been tabled across the years, but they include expansion of the council to include more African, Asian, and Latin American seats, without or without veto power, and also a seat for small states. No proposal, including also Western proposals to include Japan and Germany on the council, has yet been accepted, each of them being opposed by some proportion of member states. However, in the meantime, the U.N. General Assembly's regional groups have been enabling more diverse representation themselves: for example, in the 2020–21 term, the Latin American and Caribbean group voted in the smallest nation ever to hold an SC seat, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

In sum, there is certainly some contestation by the GS *in re* certain political norms. However, this contestation rests more on disagreements about *modalities* than about basic principles. Moreover, since the evidence is that GS states are inclined toward negotiation and dialogue, there is no reason to believe that they cannot achieve via negotiation reforms that would better their position and influence in international affairs.



Chinese Premier Li Keqiang (C) and the heads of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) meet at the Third “1+6” Roundtable in Beijing on Nov. 6, 2018. (Getty Images)

What are GS Norms in the Economic and Cultural Spheres?

Many define the GS, like the third world before it, as primarily referencing the countries at low levels of development. This is inaccurate inasmuch as there has always been great variety among the third world and now GS countries: indeed, for their policy purposes, international institutions use measures indicating high, medium, and low levels of development to classify countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Still, it is important to remember that third-world unity was from early on crafted around development issues (at least, once the decolonization period was underway), and that there are shared norms and goals that continue to be articulated today, as the search for sustainable development and the reduction of the gap between developed and developing nations continues. Even as globalization has deepened linkages, in fact, because of it, GS nations have articulated concerns that reflect their preoccupation with *inequality*. In trade, that has meant seeking fairness along with free trade; in investment, that means seeking partnership agreements that bring more economic and social benefits to the host countries; and in aid, that means seeking assistance that is properly targeted to

economic, social, and environmental purposes and not unduly burdened by conditionalities. As the world has become increasingly more globalized, it has also become even clearer that a healthy world economy depends on all states progressing and working together. Indeed, the shutdowns and obstacles to global trade experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–22 have proven this point while also emphasizing global structural inequalities in the production and distribution of vaccines.

Given their histories, many GS countries have viewed developed-country assistance as compensation of sorts for past exploitation, and indeed, former colonial powers have usually responded by instituting preferential arrangements and relationships. In this liberal era, the language has turned to partnerships rather than preferences but a patron-client tone still remains in the governance and environmental conditionalities required in exchange for aid. There is also a very visible push by many countries today to openly phrase the search for compensation in the language of *reparations* for colonialism, slavery, and the abuses of indigenous peoples that occurred under and after European occupation.

As they have with the U.N., GS countries have over the years sought reform of the Bretton Woods institutions. This led across time to the opening of many new windows by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the noteworthy introduction of a facility for debt-ridden and poor countries by the IMF and World Bank, the creation of funds for climate change and food security, and other reforms. GS states have long also sought more voice in the decision-making process of these institutions, where voting power coalesces around the wealthy industrialized nations. First China and Saudi Arabia, and later India rose to the top 10 in donors (and therefore voting power). But in the 1990s and 2000s, fatigue with the international financial institutions’ structural adjustment (neoliberal) policies set in and many countries moved away from IMF borrowing in particular. Interestingly, Latin American countries went further: facilitated by the election of left-wing regimes in Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, and other countries, Latin America established institutions that were touted as alternatives to the World Bank and IMF. These included the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America and the Union of South American



Nations, which generated a Bank of the South to lend money on soft terms for programs primarily for social development (Gardini 2015). These alternative institutions were intended to showcase the norm of *South-South cooperation (SSC)*, which has seen encouraging growth since the first major conference on technical cooperation among developing countries in 1979. This South-South cooperation (SSC) is supposed to be based on the following norms:

SSC ... is supposed to be undertaken in the spirit of mutual benefit, respect for sovereignty and non-conditionality. The lack of political and policy interference in the affairs of the recipient – referred to as the partner to emphasize horizontality in SSC – is seen as differentiating SSC from traditional assistance. SSC assistance is also intended to be more directly focused on sustainable, equitable development. Economic and technical assistance are targeted to specific areas identified by the recipients, which should help countries deal with specific human security as well as economic deficiencies. (UNOSSC 2019, 78)⁶

SSC norms are intended to be guidelines not only for intra-South assistance but also for triangular cooperation with developed countries. Certainly there is a trend by many of the latter – the EU countries in particular – to give more agency to host countries in the identification and implementation of projects for development assistance. Nevertheless, as I noted elsewhere, it would be hard for donors to conform absolutely to SSC norms, given that the ability to establish and monitor not just financial conditions but also governance, democracy, and environmentalism are now a fundamental part of the existing aid architecture. Ethical concerns have also been raised about nonconditional aid, and some civil society actors in the South are also concerned that nonconditionality may lead to missed opportunities to reinforce important commitments to human rights, anti-corruption, and environmental sustainability (UNOSSC 2019).

To sum up, GS countries are focused on *equality and fairness* in their approaches to foreign economic policy. SSC norms address this as well as directly

address their concerns about interference and agency in decision making. While Latin Americans have sought to create more social-leaning institutions, this has not been the case with institutions such as the BRICS New Development Bank or the Chinese Asian Investment Bank. In economics as in politics, then, it can be said that the general GS approach has been not to completely change the international structure, but rather to reform it.

A Brief Word on Culture

It is not just in the political and economic spheres that GS countries have adopted or tried to adopt new paths. Cultural values (broadly speaking) have also impacted their image of themselves and the world and what foreign policies they have put in place. A few such impacts can be mentioned here: for one, given the preoccupation of the West with democracy, it should be noted that for the GS' highly multicultural states, democracy has also meant accommodating religious, racial, and cultural differences. Nonaligned statements speak of the “recognition of the equality of all races, religions, cultures and all nations, both big and small” and the “promotion of a dialogue among peoples, civilizations, cultures and religions based on the respect of religions, their symbols and values, the promotion and the consolidation of tolerance and freedom of belief” (NAM 2009). This idea of the dialogue of civilizations is directly counterposed to any idea about an inevitable clash of civilizations, especially between Islam and the West (per Huntington 1998). GS declarations also stress the right not only to civil freedoms, but also to development and human security (including the right to food, for example). This is balanced against the equality of rights of states, which also means the right to determine whatever economic and political system they see fit. Of course, any realistic portrayal of the actual adherence to rights by GS states must recognize the variety of practices among these countries. Some (English-speaking Caribbean states, for example) are notably proud of their longstanding tradition of respect for political and civil rights; others (such as Singapore or Middle Eastern states) have their own views of societal order and legal punishments sometimes decried by the

⁶ The author wrote chapter 4 of this report, from which the following quotation, as well as the assessment following it, are taken.



West; yet others (for example Cuba) emphasize social rights even at the expense of the political. The extent to which some systems are unacceptably repressive can and has spurred significant debate. The balance between culture and the rule of law (as put forward in the West) remains unresolved, but cultural relativism cannot completely be ignored.

In Sum

The theme of this exercise has been to identify certain common principles and values held by Global South states that are likely to be reflected in their foreign policies. It should, of course, be clear that this is a highly differentiated group of countries, held together mainly by their past experiences of global

subordination. The norms they have developed have come to some degree from their precolonial histories in some cases, but more so their experience with colonialism. They coalesce around an aversion to interventions and hegemony, a constant search for global social justice and equality, and a strong desire for equal voice and respect. Does the West need to worry about GS challenges to the liberal order? Although China is the focus of this “threat,” it is also a state that is benefiting from the current economic order, as are also its counterparts in the BRICS. Indeed, there are so few “resistant” or revisionist states (Iran, North Korea, less so Cuba and Venezuela) that they are hardly representative of the overall GS. For GS states, then, reform and persistence in negotiation seem to be the “name of the [long] game.” □



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representative of the International Studies Association (www.isanet.org). She has served on the Governing Council, the Executive Committee, the Committee on Ethics and Responsibilities, and other committees of ISA. In 2011, she was awarded the Ladd Hollist award for significant service to the association at the

annual ISA convention. She founded the Global South Caucus of the ISA (GSCIS) in 2012 and served as its chair until 2015 and cochair through 2016. Professor Braveboy-Wagner has been a Fellow at and assistant to the director of training of the U.N. Institute for Training and Research. In April 2011, she was honored as one of fifty “distinguished alumni” chosen for their outstanding accomplishments and community service by the University of the West Indies Alumni Association at their inaugural Hall of Fame award ceremony, held to mark the fiftieth anniversary of UWI, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago. She was honored with a special panel on her scholarship at the ISA Annual Convention in Toronto in 2019, and then received the GSCIS Distinguished Scholar Award for 2020.

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