

Sri Lanka in changing the world order: together with BRICS

KPPU Jayawardena

Department of International Relations, University of Colombo

jayawardenapavithra1@gmail.com

Abstract— *The existing world order does not demonstrate the true features of either a unipolar system in which a sole super power controls everything by itself or a multipolar system in which several states have equal power to maintain the world arena. Though the current world order is not very much clear, it has the common argument of not reflecting geo-political realities and being highly centred towards the developed western powers. Against this unbalance, the developing force has raised their considerable voice, by demanding a more democratic change in the world order.*

In this context, as giant emerging economies and regional leaders Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa together as BRICS have now gained the spotlight in the world arena. This is not only due to the economic and trade aspects of this group, but also due to their political and other security means in changing the world order. BRICS is recognized by the world today as a strong group optimistically strong enough to make a considerable pressure in the world politics.

On the other hand, Sri Lanka as a pioneer state that defeated terrorism and is located in a strategic position in the Indian Ocean, she always demands that the current international institutions should adopt a more democratic approach. Therefore, it is clear that both BRICS and Sri Lanka hold similar objectives regarding certain matters. In fact Sri Lanka keeps strong bilateral relations with all the BRICS states. This study examines whether Sri Lanka is able to make a noticeable impact in changing the world order together with BRICS. Furthermore, this study will discuss how Sri Lanka should keep multilateral relations with BRICS and how she can go forward as the hub of Asia together with BRICS in changing the existing world order into a more democratic multipolar world.

This research was mainly an archival based one. Both primary and secondary data were gathered. Primary data were collected through declarations, joint statements and recorded speeches while secondary data were through online journal articles, reviews, printed books and reports.

Keywords— **World Order, BRICS, Democratic Approach**

I. UNDERSTANDING THE EXISTING WORLD ORDER

“World Order” as a key concept in International Relations discipline, generally gives the meaning of the existing nature of the political, economic or social situation in the world in a particular time and how does it effect on the relationships between countries. Looking at the present world order, we can clearly see, that the United States of America is more powerful in terms of political, economic, military and technological aspects and also keeps a high profile in the international politics comparing to the other major and minor powers. But does it mean the existing world order is unipolar?

A unipolar system consists of only one super power, alone with many minor powers. In a pure unipolar system, there are no several significant major powers who can affect the super power. That means, the super power can resolve important international issues alone, without an assistance of any other state or a group of states. Further, any other state or a combination of states has no capacity or intention of preventing it from doing so. (Huntington, 1999) The time when the classic world under Rome can be argued as a unipolar order, because there was no one who could challenge the power of Rome. Also, there were times which some states of East Asia had to be under China and it is also similar to a unipolar order.

Bipolar order has two main super powers as we experienced in the cold war era. Those two super powers either keep conflicting relations or cooperative at times, and the relations among them are central to the international relations. Each super power tends to dominate a coalition of several allied states and generally competes with adverse super power. At the same time, either super powers tend to influence the nonaligned countries to get them as much as possible for their own coalition. The cold war era among the United States of America (USA) and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) which lied for nearly four decades up to 1990, is the only global experience of a bipolar world order.

Relatively we, the people of the world have experienced multipolar system than any of unipolar or bipolar. Multipolar system contains several major powers with comparable strength that cooperate and compete with each other, in shifting patterns. When in a need of resolving a particular

international issue, a coalition of major states does it, either by cooperating or by competing. The period before the cold war starts generally can be named as a multipolar system. Because clearly, there were lot of European powers such as Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece and also non-European powers such as Japan, China who were with comparable strengths.

Now, what is the contemporary world order? In fact, it does not fit to any of the above well-defined three models of unipolar, bipolar or multipolar.

1990 marked the end of the cold war with the collapse of the USSR and obviously USA became the sole super power creating a new world order. Since then, up to date, USA is acting the main role in the world politics, world economy and especially in military aspect. USA is in top as the world's largest economy since 1900. The US economy has been at least twice as big as any other country in the world for the last 100 years. The United States repeatedly translated that economic weight into decisive military and political power. (Huisken, 2006)

There is no doubt regarding the economic, political and military power which USA spread around the world through hard and soft power but not in smart power. But is USA the super power who leads alone the current world order?

Though USA became the only super power after 1990 creating a unipolar order for a certain period of time, USA was unable to drag its super power status up to date. Therefore USA could not maintain the above stated qualities of a unipolar system continuously. That means, if this is a pure unipolar system, there should not be several other significant powers who can make critical effects to USA. In examining the current system, number of other majors powers either alone or as coalitions make both cooperative and competitive effects to USA. Countries such as China, Russia, India, Germany, Britain, France and as coalitions, European Union(EU), United Nations (UN), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) are making such comparable relations with the USA in the present context. Therefore, USA today is not in a position to resolve international issues alone as it needs to do. Such characteristics remark that the current world order is not unipolar.

Samuel P. Huntington in his "The Lonely Superpower" suggests that the current situation can be named as a "unimultipolar system", a system with one super power and several major powers.

The settlement of key international issues requires action by the single super power but always with some combination of other major states; the single super power can, however, veto action on key issues by combinations of other states. The United States, of course, is the sole state with pre-eminence in every domain of power – economic,

military, diplomatic, ideological, technological, and cultural – with the reach and capabilities to promote its interests in virtually every part of the world. (Huntington, 1999)

There are in fact, several other major powers, who are either not willing to be global leader or does not have the capabilities to do so. Those major powers consist the German-French condominium in Europe, Russia in Eurasia, China and potentially Japan in East Asia, India in South Asia, Iran in Southwest Asia, Brazil in Latin America and South Africa and Nigeria in Africa. According to Samuel P. Huntington, those countries are in the second level, after the US, and they do influence US in various economic, political, social and even military ways. According to Huntington, the third level consist the secondary regional powers. These include Britain in relation to the German-French combination, Ukraine in relation to Russia, Japan in relation to China, South Korea in relation to Japan, Pakistan in relation to India, Saudi Arabia in relation to Iran, and Argentina in relation to Brazil.

In any system, whether it is unipolar, bipolar or multipolar, most powerful actors try to grab the domination, while others try to prevent it from happening. The same situation has occurred in the current world order. On one hand, United States prefers a unipolar system in order to keep its sole domination under its hegemony. On the other hand the above stated other powers either alone or as coalitions try to prevent from occurring a unipolar, and try to create a multipolar system, because they feel they are threatened when the United States handles international issues alone. (Huntington, 1999)

BRICS is a coalition as such. If we categorize BRICS states - Brazil, Russia, India, China, south Africa are concerned as major powers of the second level. They are regional powers, who try to make impacts on United States by not allowing United States to get its own decisions regarding global economic, political and in other fields. As clarified above, those five major powers have got together as a coalition, a club, a group instead of standing individually. Basically because they think collectively they are more powerful in than being alone. Together BRICS demands for several institutional changes in the existing system. Particularly BRICS demands of a multi polar system for the future.

II. BRICS IN THE WORLD

BRICS was formed as a group of emerging economies such as Brazil, Russia, India and China. The presidents or Prime ministers of each country officially met for the first time in Yekaterinburg, Russia in June 2009. Then they met Brasilia, Brazil in April 2010 making their second summit. Their third meeting was in Sanya, China in 2011. In that summit, BRIC turned into BRICS with the South Africa. Then onwards, all the five countries of BRICS met in New Delhi, India in March 2012 and in Durban, South Africa in 2013. (Fifth BRICS Summit, 2012)

Though the first BRIC meeting happened only in 2009, the concept of the emergence of this vastly developed four countries Brazil, Russia, India and China is a concept of Jim O'Neill. He predicted these economies collectively, would make a considerable contribution to the world. Hence, he suggested to the world to look at these countries in a different way that the world already do. He said, these BRIC countries should not get a lower glance anymore, since they are rapidly growing economies. Furthermore, he showed the possibilities and the economic, investment opportunities in these countries. He came up with the potentials and capacities of these four countries in 2001. (O'Neill, 2011)

Why BRICS is so important to the world at the moment? It is because by 2011, BRICS countries accounted for about 25 per cent of global GDP, 30 per cent of global land area and 45 per cent of the world population. Not only that it is important in terms of innovations, investment opportunities, resources, labour force, market demand and other domestic importance. (BRICS Countries, 2011)

By today, China is concerned as the manufacturing factory of the world. India is the global IT related services centre. Brazil owns agricultural products and minerals. Russia is the biggest oil and natural gas producer. South Africa also, has a rich deposit of various minerals. Thus, BRICS can enjoy the privileges by sharing their potentials among themselves. (Ray, 2012)

Most of the scholars show the possibility of BRICS, to make a severe impact on the world order. Special economic potentials of BRICS would be helpful to it, to grab the world's attention to them. Now, with the financial crisis, BRICS is in a point where they can easily turn their economic power in to political power.

In each summit, BRICS has presented declarations, including their objectives and demands which they hope to fulfill, together as a collective forum. When we examine those four declarations carefully, all those objectives and demands they have presented can be categorized mainly into three sections.

1. Development objectives and demands of BRICS
2. Economic objectives and demands of BRICS
3. Political objectives and demands of BRICS

BRICS carries a lot of faith on development matters as a common interest. Since it is a collection of newly emerging economies, and since all those nations are mainly regional powers in their respective regions, BRICS talks not only on intra-BRICS development but also a common development to their regions and to the world. BRICS believes being economically stronger would lead them to achieve their other political objectives easily. In other words, BRICS is trying to use its economic strength as a soft power to gain more political powers in the international arena. At the same time, as nations who are not only standing for

individual needs, but also representing their respective regions, BRICS presents very broad scaled economic expectations and objectives.

In all declarations, BRICS has presented similar objectives in different ways. Commonly, BRICS presents their objectives such as a multi polar world order, more connected and fair trade relations, economic assistance to developing countries in all their declarations. But in each declaration, above three sections have gained different levels of attention.

BRICS is highly interested of a multi polar world system. As a collective force, BRICS is willing to gain more power in the world political arena. Their voting pattern in international institutions such as in United Nations (UN) and G20, shows how much they are interested in gaining multipolarity. They by themselves suggest to get them more in the decision making process by justifying their right as emerging nations and regional leaders in their respective regions, that they are potential enough to represent their regions in world politics. BRICS is said to be a more economic and trade relations based forum, but most of their demands and objectives of economic and development are also shaped on the basis of multilateral approach, and that says how important the political agenda behind the BRICS acronym.

III. SRI LANKAN RELATIONS WITH BRICS

A. Sri Lanka – Brazil

The Sri Lankan Government has had diplomatic relations with Brazil from 1960s. Later the official diplomatic contacts with Brazil were maintained by the Brazilian office in India. Since the relationship between two nations continued warm, both countries decided to open their offices in each respective countries. Sri Lanka opened its new office in Brazil in December, 2007 while Brazil opened its office in Sri Lanka in January, 2008.

In his official visit to Sri Lanka in March 2011, Antonio Patriota, the Minister of External Relations of Brazil expressed hope that Sri Lanka's new found peace and political stability would quickly translate into beneficial gains for the country and its people. He also agreed to identify priority areas that would benefit from enhanced cooperation between the two countries. Also, Brazil promised to explore avenues such as infrastructure development, agriculture and engineering projects that could lead to human resources partnerships and exchanges with Sri Lanka.

B. Sri Lanka – Russia

Diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Sri Lanka were established on February 19, 1957. But the history of Russian – Sri Lankan relations have started much earlier. Russian Consulate was established in Galle in 1891.¹The solid base for the mutual business interests

¹ <http://www.srilankaembassy.org/en/relationship/>

was laid down in the 1960s and 1970s of 20th century by the package of bilateral agreements basically on trade, economy, science, technology and culture.

Simultaneously Moscow and Colombo reached the agreement on opening of air and sea travel routes and on training of national Lankan specialists in the USSR. In those years the Soviet Union assisted Sri Lanka in constructing of the metallurgical plant in Oruwella, the tyre-producing enterprise in Kelaniya, milling and house constructing plants. Since mid 70s Soviet experts began drilling for crude oil in the island. At the same time large shipments of refined oil and oil products were delivered to Sri Lanka. During the years of our bilateral relations thousands of Lankan students have graduated from universities of the Soviet Union and then Russia in medicine, engineering, education, etc. Bilateral relations were strengthened in through agreements which were signed on Economic & Technical Cooperation, Housing Constructions, Goods Exchange, Air Services, Education and various other fields. (Embassy of Sri Lanka in Russia, 2013)

C. Sri Lanka – India

Sri Lanka has a more than 2,500 years old relationship which have built upon a legacy of intellectual, cultural, religious and linguistic intercourse with its closest neighbour, India. The relationship has been marked by close contacts at the highest political level, growing trade and investment, cooperation in the fields of development, education, culture and defence, as well as a broad understanding on major issues of international interest.

Sri Lanka is one of the major recipients of development credit given by the Government of India. Under a line of credit of \$167.4 million, the tsunami-damaged Colombo-Matara rail link has been repaired and upgraded. It was handed over during the visit of the Parliamentary delegation in April 2012.² In the post war development era, the Government of India put in place a robust programme of assistance to help the IDPs return to normal life as quickly as possible as also consistently advocated the need for them to be resettled to their original habitations as early as possible.

India and Sri Lanka enjoy a robust trade and investment relationship, with bilateral trade growing rapidly in the last decade and a number of leading Indian private sector companies investing in Sri Lanka and establishing a presence in this country. Sri Lanka is India's largest trade partner in South Asia. India in turn is Sri Lanka's largest trade partner globally. Trade between the two countries grew particularly rapidly after the entry into force of the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement in March 2000.

Cultural cooperation is another very important aspect of the bilateral relationship and the Cultural Cooperation

Agreement signed by the Government of India and the Government of Sri Lanka on 29 November, 1977 at New Delhi forms the basis on which the periodic Cultural Exchange Programmes between the two countries are signed and implemented. (High Commission of India in Sri Lanka, 2013)

D. Sri Lanka – China

Sri Lanka and China have had historical links that can be traced back several centuries. The Rubber-Rice Pact (1952) was a major achievement of starting close, cordial and durable relations in the post-independence era. China provided steadfast support to Sri Lanka in the fight against terrorism. The generous support provided, in financing development following the end of the conflict, particularly the unprecedented infrastructure development program has always being appreciated by Sri Lanka. China has provided unhesitating support at times when other friends of Sri Lanka have shown reluctance. Very importantly China's support to Sri Lanka has been firmly based on the principle of non-interference in internal affairs.

Even during President Mahinda Rajapaksa's most recent state visit to China from 27th to 30th May, 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to elevate Sri Lanka and China relations to a "strategic cooperation partnership". During the warm and friendly discussion between the two leaders, President Rajapaksa reiterated Sri Lanka's support for the One-China Policy and President Xi Jinping stated that China was strongly opposed to foreign countries interfering in Sri Lanka's internal affairs. Also during the discussion both leaders endorsed the early establishment of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two countries to further enhance mutually beneficial trade. (Asian Tribune, 2013)

E. Sri Lanka – South Africa

Sri Lanka has a long historical relationship with Africa beginning with the arrival of Arab traders in the early 11th century. Sri Lanka established diplomatic relations with the newly formed post Apartheid Government of South Africa on 12th September 1994, following the end of Apartheid and the election of Nelson Mandela as the President of the Republic of South Africa.³

There were number of bilateral visits to each other's country since the establishment of diplomatic relations. Coming from the South, both Sri Lanka and South Africa which are members of the United Nations, NAM, Commonwealth and IOR-ARC, have common positions on most of the international issues such as human rights, eradication of poverty, UN reforms, ramification of globalization on trade or international terrorism. The two countries in December 2003 established a Sri Lanka South Africa Partnership Forum, with a view to advancing and strengthening the close cooperation in political, trade, economic, cultural, scientific and technological fields. Of the more recent interactions between Sri Lanka and South

² http://www.hccolombo.org/index.php?option=com_pages&id=24

³ <http://www.srilanka.co.za/SL-SA-relations.htm>

Africa, the bilateral meeting between President Mahinda Rajapaksa and President Thabo Mbeki in Cuba in September 2006 on the sidelines of the Non-Aligned Summit. (High Commission of Sri Lanka in South Africa, 2013)

IV. CONCLUSION

BRICS as a collective force is willing to gain more power in the world political arena and demand a multipolar system which creates a democratic approach to nations to get engaged in the international decision making process. As regional leaders they raise voice representing their respective regions. Most of BRICS's objectives and demands despite under economic, development or political sections, are created and sharpened on the basis of multilateral approach.

Sri Lanka, despite being a developing and a small country, always contributed to the same demand. President Mahinda Rajapaksa stated this demand in his policy manifesto, Mahinda Chinthanaya in 2005.

"It is my belief that the United Nations Organization and International Financial Institutions should be more democratic in their approach. We will actively intervene in this regard." (Mahinda Chinthanaya, 2005)

Also, delivering his speech at the Sixty-First Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 2006, President stated the Security Council has to be strengthened, as it does not reflect current geo-political realities. Also he reminded the need of a more democratic decision making process for the Security Council because it is essential that the Security Council should reflect the current geo-political realities in Asia, Africa and Latin America. (Rajapaksa, 2006)

Both Sri Lanka and BRICS has this very similarity of promoting a multilateral world order, where all the states can contribute to the global decision making process in an equal manner.

Regardless the size of the strength, economy, military power, populations of states, all should promote and demand a more democratic approach if they truly need a transition from the existing uni-multipolarity into a pure multi polar world order. BRICS has risen its voice as a strong group especially on behalf of the developing countries, who are individually not powerful to stand up in the international arena. Therefore, these regional powers should be strengthened by their respective regional members. As an Asian island in a strategic location, Sri Lanka already has already tightened special bilateral relations with Asia regional giants such as India and China. Not only that, Sri Lanka has warm and cordial relations with other BRICS nations as well. Sri Lankan strong partnership with BRICS

countries would positively contribute in changing the world order in to a multipolar system.

REFERENCES

- "BRICS Countries" (2012). *Global Sherpa*, <http://www.globalsherpa.org/bric-countries-brics> [Accessed December 28, 2012]
- "BRICS: The New World Powers" (2011). *Globalization 101*, SUNY LEVIN Institute, <http://www.globalization101.org/brics-the-new-world-powers-3/> [Accessed November 27, 2011]
- Embassy of Sri Lanka in Russia (2013). <<http://www.srilankaembassy.org/en/relationship/>[Accessed July 27, 2013]
- "Fourth BRICS summit: New Delhi" (2012). *BRICS India*, <http://www.bricsindia.in/> [Accessed December 27, 2012]
- High Commission of Sri Lanka in India (2013). http://www.hcicolombo.org/index.php?option=com_pages&id=24 [Accessed July 28, 2013]
- High Commission of Sri Lanka in South Africa (2013). <http://www.srilanka.co.za/SL-SA-relations.htm> [Accessed August 2, 2013]
- His Excellency President Mahinda Rajapaksa (2013). http://www.president.gov.lk/speech_latest.php [Accessed July 24, 2013]
- Huisken Ron (2006). "history as Policy", *The Strategic and Defense Studies Center*, http://epress.anu.edu.au/sdsc/hap/mobile_devices/ar01.html [Accessed November 09, 2012]
- Huntington Samuel P (1999). "The Lonely Superpower", Council on Foreign Relations, <http://users.dickinson.edu/~mitchelk/huntington.pdf> . [Accessed November 05, 2012]
- O'Neill Jim (2011). "BRICs' rapid growth tips the global balance", *The Telegraph*, November 20, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financialcrisis/8902824/Jim-ONeill-BRICs-rapid-growth-tips-the-global-balance.html>[Accessed December 26, 2012]
- Ray Alok (2012). "Putting BRICS together", *DECCAN HERALD*, <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/251493/putting-brics-together.html> [Accessed December 01, 2012]

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR



Author, Ms KPPU Jayawardena is an assistant lecturer at the Department of International Relations, University of Colombo. She has completed her Bachelor's Degree (special) in International Relations. Her research interests include regional integration and foreign policy.