

**BABEȘ BOLYAI UNIVERSITY**  
**FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY**  
**Doctoral School of International Relations and Security Studies**

**PH.D. THESIS**  
**SUMMARY**

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**Cluj-Napoca**

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*The role of emerging powers in the international political  
order*

*Case Study: BRICS (2001-2021)*

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**KEY WORDS:** world order, emerging power, BRICS, power balance, complex interdependence

## SUMMARY

The XXI century started with an unequal distribution of the power resources. With 5% of the world population, The United States were responsible for a quarter of the world GDP, almost half of the military *expenses* of global defense and possessing the most extensive cultural and educational resources of software power. At the beginning of the century there was no other power that could equal that of the US<sup>1</sup>. But, toward the end of the century, a group of states stand up in the economical landscape and the international relations due to their potential to generate economical growth and surpass economically the developed countries in G7. The group of the biggest emerging powers was called BRICS by Jim O’Neill, analyst of the American Bank of Investments, Goldman Sachs. O’Neill chose the biggest world emerging economies starting from two criteria necessary to ensure the economical growth: demography and productivity. Beginning with 2011, BRICs becomes BRICS, following the inclusion of the South Africa in the group of the biggest emerging powers in the world. The five countries represent 42% of the world’s population, 23% of the total GDP, 30% of the territory and 18% of the world’s commerce<sup>2</sup>.

The vast majority of specialists in International Relations admit that the international systems face nowadays a series of challenges and the emerging powers represent one of the main themes in these debates. Because in the first decade of the XXI century the four countries have exceeded the expectations, getting growth rates higher than those predicted by Goldman Sachs, BRICS became the center of the debates and controversies concerning the challenge represented by the emerging countries for the developed states and the American hegemony.

The actual world order was historically and culturally influenced by the Western states and especially by the USA, considered responsible for the norms, values, rules and practices in the international relations. Is the concern shown by the Western countries regarding the intentions and the way in which the emerging powers use their growing power natural, keeping in mind the historical lessons that show us that the emerging powers can have a dramatic impact or even violent in the existing order? The International Relations Schools are

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph, Nye, *The Future of Power*, New York, Public Affairs, 2011, p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> „What is BRICS”, <http://brics2019.itamaraty.gov.br/en/about-brics/what-is-brics>, accesat în data de: 12.02.2020.

focused on hypotheses and theories that concern the way in which more recent powers try to assimilate the emerging powers into the actual order and the way in which the emerging powers search to benefit from this challenge and the order change. Thus, the literature in the field of The International relations or that of the International political economy focus on the debate concerning the contributions, the challenges and the instability brought by the emerging powers (especially China) in the existing actual order, leaded by America<sup>3</sup>.

### **Objectives, hypotheses, research questions**

The emerging powers distinguished themselves first due to the high economic growth rates, reaching higher and higher positions in the world economical chart. The BRICS countries managed to overcome the 2008 crisis better than the majority of the developed states and managed to have a role in the making of the agenda for the economical revival. Since then the states that are members started to express their dissatisfactions regarding the way in which their power is reflected in the international political system, asking for a political recognition equal to their economic power. The international order leaded by the USA and the occidental states will have to integrate in one way or other these powers. Starting from these ideas, the general objective of these PhD thesis is to analyze the role that the emerging powers have in the international political order now and in the future.

The specific objectives were the following

1. The analysis of the history, the economical and political context in which BRICS has been developing
2. The analysis of the summits and annual declarations of BRICS up to the present
3. The analysis of the balance of actual powers in the international system and the impact that the emerging states BRICS have on these ones
4. The analysis of the interdependent relations between BRICS and the developed powers from the international system and of the role that BRICS have in the international cooperation

To accomplish these objectives this thesis starts from the hypothesis that the BRICS countries have noticed a better position in the distribution of the global richness, which they intend to transform into political power. Through this research I

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<sup>3</sup> Li, Xing, „The International political economy of the BRICS in a changing world order: attitudes and actualities”, in Xing, Li (ed.)*The International Political Economy of the BRICS*, London, Routhledge, 2019, pp. 1-17.

will analyze the way in which the BRICS countries have succeeded to use up to the present the economical growth in order to gain recognition in the sphere of international politics and their potential to follow this objective in the future too.

The secondary hypotheses are linked to the way in which the BRICS states search now and, in the future, to fulfill all these objectives. According the realistic theory, the BRICS states will search the maximization of power and security, wanting to balance the powers and this process will not be a peaceful one. According to the liberal view, the BRICS states will search to obtain political recognition in a peaceful way, due to the interdependent connections with the other states from the international system and through cooperation within the main international regimes.

In this thesis I want to answer the following main questions.

1. To what an extent the economical growth of the BRICS states is and will be reflected in the international political order?
2. How could possibly the BRICS states be adjusted to the international system?

### **Methodology and research strategy**

In order to test the theories, researchers use two strategies: experimentation and observation. The exact sciences use experiments, but in the field of international relations the researchers mostly appeal to the observation either of a large number of cases or a smaller number of cases, in the form of case studies. To a large extent, my research uses the observation of a small number of countries analysed in a case study. The studies about the emerging powers didn't limit to the BRICS countries because there are several other powers considered as emerging such as Next 11, MINT, MIST. In this paper I chose to refer to BRICS not only because it is the most known of these groups but also because it is the biggest and most important group of emerging powers.

Due to the multidisciplinary character of this work, I used quantitative and qualitative research methods. For the economical analysis of the emerging powers, I used quantitative data, the main macroeconomical indicators having numeric values. Even though it starts from hypotheses concerning the economy of emerging powers, the work treats mostly aspects concerning the political power, being integrated in the political sciences rather than in the economical ones. It is for this reason that the research will mostly use qualitative research

methods. These methods are based commonly on an inductive reasoning, making theoretical hypotheses based on empirical observations.

The main data collection technique of this work consists of document analysis. The primary sources used throughout this work are: the official Declarations issued by the BRICS leaders after the annual summits, the economical reports made by Goldman Sachs American Investment Bank, the data basis and some reports of the World Bank, World Population Review top. The secondary sources used in this work were: books and specialized articles of different researchers in the IR field and EPI, articles that appeared in the international press, but also press communicates of the press releases in the countries in question. We also observed the sites of the national governments and of different international organizations (ONU, OECD, IMF, OMC).

In the economical analysis of the BRICS states I used the main values of macroeconomic factors: the GDP and average annual raise, using the data basis of the World Bank. With the help of these data I have described the level of economic development of the BRICS states, the periods of expansion and regression and the most important the stage of economy at this moment. Also, the economical reports from Goldman Sachs regarding BRICS and the economical growth prognosis were an important source. The reports and presentations of *Doing Business* by the World Bank allowed us to detail the challenges that the states face from an economical point of view and the reforms that they have to make in order to generate economical growth in the future too. Still in this analysis I have made some observations concerning the way in which the coronavirus pandemics affected the economy of these states.

In the second part of the case study I applied the general theoretic framework (realism/liberalism) to the particular case of the emerging powers BRICS. Eric Leonard stated that the aim of the theory surpasses the description and the explanation of what happens in the world because a complete and practical theory has also the quality of predicting behaviours and future events<sup>4</sup>. Starting from this supposition, I tried to figure out some ideas about the way in which the BRICS states will adjust to the future international order, taking into account the specific ideas of the two theories and their evolution in the form of neorealism and neoliberalism. In the first time, I analysed the role of BRICS in the international political order starting from the hypothese of the realistic theory according to which the BRICS states

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<sup>4</sup> Eric, K., Leonard, „Introduction: Helping you understand the world”, in Eric, K., Leonard, *Building your IR Theory Toolbox: An introduction to understanding World Politics*, New York, London, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018, pp. 1-9.

will search to maximize their power and security and balance the powers and this process won't be a peaceful one. For this, I analysed the position that the BRICS countries have in the international system (super powers, big powers or medium ones.) and the impact of their development on the actual and future balance of powers.

Next I have approached the subject from the point of view of the liberalism. Due to the complex interdependencies between states, BRICS will search to gain political recognition in a peaceful way, through cooperation within the main international regimes. To realize these steps, we used a series of documents, most of them being secondary sources, such as books written by IR authors, articles of scientific journals, international mass media articles of well renowned publications such as *The Economist* but also primary sources such as press declarations and interviews.

### **Chapter 1. The role of the emerging powers BRICS in the actual world order**

Chapter 1 of this work represents the analysis of the specialized literature. It is the actual stage of the research regarding the emerging powers in the field of International Relations and International political economy. The chapter starts with the presentation of the main problems and debates concerning the growing role of the emerging powers in the international order. In the same chapter I presented the main research questions and the hypotheses from which this research started. I made some statements regarding the contributions that this thesis brings to the specialized literature.

The opinions regarding the role of the emerging powers in the international political order differ. Most of the times, the economical growth of the five emerging powers was seen as a threat to the order in the international system, being mostly analysed in comparison to the developed countries. If in the first part of the century the debate focused on the economical competition, starting with the BRICS summits, the attention moved to the international politics. During the annual meetings, the member states expressed their disareement concerning their role in within the main international institutions and in the making of the main politics, asking for a recognition equal to their economical growing power. A large series of works approach this subject from the point of view of the realistic theory, more precisely, through the eyes of the power balance, currently considered unipolar in transition to bopolarity/multipolarity. On the other hand, there are the liberals who think that BRICS is not such a big power so as to counterbalance the hegemonic force and their growth represents the

resilience of the actual system facing the adjustment of new states that manage to recover economically.

A special attention in the specialized literature is given to the relation between China and USA and especially the competition between the two. In the field of international relations, the most debates concern the hegemony of the USA and its future in the context of the relentless growing economical power of China.

## **Chapter 2 Theoretical analysis of the emerging powers BRICS in the world order**

The second chapter represents the theoretical framework of this thesis and starts with the definition of two important concepts I have worked with during my research, namely: global order and emerging power. I continued with the presentation of the theoretical debates about emerging powers within global order. I considered that, in order to analyze the role of BRICS states in the world order in the most complete and objective manner possible, the most representative theories are realism and liberalism.

The chapter begins with a short presentation of the history of these theories and depicts the way in which they have developed until the present. I considered that it was important to present the different view streams within the two theories for a better understanding of the emerging powers phenomenon.

There is not a universal definition of global order. Most often, it is defined either as the set of accepted rules by which the limits of allowable actions are traced, or as the description of the balance of power in the international system, which prevents one unit to subdue the others.

Besides descriptive definitions, there is a series of normative definitions that describe the way global order should look like; most often, authors consider that it should be more representative, taking also into account smaller states and their interests.

Regarding emerging power, besides the multiple definitions, there is also a series of terms that have been used when talking about these states: emerging markets, emerging economies, medium size powers, rising powers etc. In this work, we have used the term emerging power, described as a country which has noticed an improvement of its position within the distribution of global economy, which it is going to convert into political power.

## **Chapter 3. BRICS (2001-2021) – A Case Study**

I could not conduct a complex and objective analysis concerning the role of emerging powers within the present international order without describing the history of the group, the context in which it appeared and the important events, that had an impact on the international system, from the invention of the BRICs acronym, until the BRICS group of the year 2021. All this is comprised in the third chapter of this work.

Since 2009, leaders of the largest emerging powers have been meeting in yearly summits and, in this chapter, I have analyzed their respective declarations. Members take turns in leading the summits and holding the presidency of the group for a period of one year. At the moment, various events and meetings are taking place, in different areas, in which BRICS states have decided to extend their cooperation.

The degree of cooperation among BRICS states is an essential factor in helping us form an idea regarding the direction of the group in the coming period, but also regarding the role that BRICS could have within the international system.

Together, BRICS states represent 42% of world population and 23% of global GDP and, although China varies a lot in terms of power in comparison with the other states, it has already been proved during the 2008 crisis that, acting collectively, BRICS countries have more chances of reaching their objectives.

In this chapter, I have also considered it important to analyze the economic development of the five countries, the problems they face and the solutions that ensure their future economic growth.

#### **Chapter 4. BRICS within the International Political Order: Conflict or Cooperation?**

The last chapter represents the essence of this work, using the theoretical framework described in chapter 2 and the specific data about BRICS in chapter 3 to validate or invalidate the hypotheses this research approach started with.

Starting from concepts related to the realist theory, I have analyzed the current power/threats balance and the way in which BRICS states can influence it in the future, taking into account the differences in views amongst defensive and offensive realists.

Since China is considered the only BRICS state with the potential to become a superpower and to challenge the status that the US has within the present structure of the international system, I have carried out an analysis of the relationship between the two powers

and of the way they have chosen to relate to the balance of power, especially in East Asia, where they have common interests. Since the present international system is based on a liberal order, which is being implemented and led by the US and by the other western states, we have chosen to apply the liberal theoretical framework and to analyze the way in which emerging powers will cooperate and will peacefully adapt to this order. We have studied the complex interdependences between the emerging powers and the other developed states. We found it important to analyze the relationship between the US and China, the two countries which are in a relationship of strong interdependence with each other, on the one hand, and in commercial war with one another, on the other hand. Although most analysts believe that the chance of war between democratic and economically interdependent powers is reduced, this chapter analyzes the challenges posed by the rise of some undemocratic powers such as China or Russia.

### **Research Conclusions**

The political and economic crises in the last two decades have questioned the optimistic hypotheses formed after the end of the Cold War, which supported the view that the spread of democracy and of free markets will automatically create a just, peaceful and inclusive world. Moreover, international order is challenged, in a surprising manner, not only by founding states (Great Britain through Brexit, The US through the nationalist and protectionist policy of president Trump), but also by rising powers, which aspire to a more important role in global politics. For some, the history and theory of emerging powers is simple and direct. International relations have always represented the story of the ascension and fall of the great powers.<sup>5</sup> (footnote 5)

Concerning the changes and challenges in the global order at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Henry Kissinger stated: “The result is not simply a multipolarity of power but a world of increasingly contradictory realities. It must not be assumed that, left unattended, these trends will at some point reconcile automatically to a world of balance and cooperation – or even any order at all”<sup>6</sup>.

This research started from the general hypothesis that the BRICS countries have noticed an improvement of their position regarding the distribution of global wealth, which they will

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew, Hurrell, *op.cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> KISSINGER, Henry, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*, New York, Penguin Press, 2014, p. 213.

convert into political power. To test this hypothesis, we started by analysing the position of emerging powers in the global economy. In the first decade (2001-2010), the BRICs countries exceeded the expectations by generating growth higher than anticipated, Jim O'Neil declaring that he found satisfying how BRICs countries encouraged and inspired other emerging countries to participate in the global economy, how they helped to restore the economic development of Western countries after the crisis from 2008, and how they brought benefits, through their contribution, to the whole world.<sup>7</sup>

The second decade, however, was not as fruitful as the previous one when regarding the economy of emerging countries, some of them being more or less at the same levels as in 2001, largely due to the coronavirus pandemic, which has amplified the problems that some economies were already facing. Brazil and Russia have the most disappointing results. After an economic recession in 2014-2016, Brazil was recovering itself economically when the pandemic exposed the country to new unprecedented economic challenges. Following the economic sanctions after the annexation of Crimea, President Putin searched to increase the foreign exchange reserves and to isolate the economy in order to make it less vulnerable to external shocks. Having large foreign exchange reserves and low debt, the Russian economy is more stable and controllable, but it will not develop and it will generate more and more discontent on a national level.

At the other extreme, China is probably the country that handled the pandemic the best, by generating economic growth in 2020. Although India had managed to become the 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, it ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in 2020 because the pandemic generated an economic crisis at a national level and had a negative impact on its economy. Despite India's recession, OECD foresaw an economic growth rate of 9.9% in 2021 for this country. Thus, it should become the fastest growing economy in G20 (even though some experts consider these projections far too optimistic due to the uncertainty about the next waves of the pandemic). The inclusion of South Africa in BRICS was considered relevant as it would represent the entire African continent, the discrepancies between this country and the other members being otherwise very large. Facing problems since 2018, the economy of South Africa has been seriously affected by the pandemic, the poverty rate keeps growing, and there has been reported a series of internal political tensions. By analysing the economies of the five countries, we can see that the improvement of their economic position that was initially

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<sup>7</sup> O'NEILL, Jim, *The Growth Map: Economic Opportunity in the BRICs and Beyond*, London, Penguin Books Limited, 2011, p. 7.

identified in the first decade as members of BRICS has been maintained only by China and India. Even though the situation is disappointing in Brazil and Russia, the two states still have the potential to generate growth in the future, but only if the necessary economic reforms and measures are implemented.

Due to the fact that many discussions about BRICS include concepts related to the realist theory, such as the balance of power and hegemony, we have analysed the role of the five emerging powers in the international system starting from this theory. If we analyse the BRICS countries from the perspective of the classical realist theory, the growth of the emerging powers will create tension in the current international system, and the process of power transition will take place through conflict. States are selfish, they seek only their own interests, and, from a realist perspective, all states seek to maximize their power in order to ensure national security in a world of mistrust. Analysing the role that BRICS play in the current system, we came to the conclusion that only China and Russia can be considered superpowers, and that India has the potential to become a superpower in the future. Amongst the five BRICS states, only China competes with the USA for the status of superpower.

By analysing the BRICS emerging powers, we came to the conclusion that the current international system is in a phase of transition, and that there is a number of changes in the distribution of capabilities between units (states). Even though not all BRICS member states will reach their potential, those that will do will influence the next global governance. After analysing a number of statements made public by BRICS, we can assert that one of the main objectives of the BRICS group is to change the unipolar power balance into a multipolar one, as it is already reflected at least in economic terms. The BRICS states ask to be recognized the multipolarity of the international system through a fairer and more equitable representation in the main financial institutions, first and foremost in the financial and economic ones, but not only.

Based on the analysed arguments, we came to the conclusion that the debate between the offensive realists and the defensive ones leans in favour of the offensive realists. In an era in which more and more states have nuclear weapons and in which the technology has greatly contributed to the increasingly efficient and rapid development of weapons, the choice of participating in a war becomes extremely expensive for any of the superpowers. Also, the analysis of the BRICS powers shows us that there is no sign of hard balancing amongst the superpowers in the current international system, while the emerging powers seek a greater recognition of their power in the current international system and in the main institutions

through cooperation. BRICS can accommodate themselves peacefully to the international system, according to the defensive realists, as long as the accommodation will be gradual and the BRICS states will be restrained in pursuing aims, while being accepted as legitimate parts of the system, provided that they seek mainly security and that “they do not challenge the position of the already established superpowers”.<sup>8</sup>

As there is no single winning theory, and the current international system provides examples of areas of conflict where peace was established through cooperation (the European space), we considered that it was important to analyse the BRICS phenomenon starting from the ideas of the liberal theory. Analysing the relations between the Western and the emerging powers, especially the relation between the USA and China, we can notice an increased economic interdependence. John Ikenberry believes that by effectively managing the interactions between the USA and China, the USA will be able to have a constructive influence on China, while finding a strategic balance in relation to it. The next international order will be able to deal with the competition and the cooperation between the two states. As long as the nature of the relations between the USA and China remains stable, and the two states are able to manage their disputes while avoiding the military conflicts, the USA will be a positive external force throughout China’s internal transformation.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, after analysing the current relation between the USA and China, Ikenberry’s argument can no longer be considered sufficiently convincing because the two powers are in a trade war since 2018 and because there is a number of other issues that increase the tensions between them (East Asia, Taiwan, human rights, unfair economic practices etc.).

When we analysed the relation of interdependence between the two states, we took into account certain aspects that define it. The type of trade that the USA have with China requires substantial supply chains and capital investment, which has a stabilizing influence on the relation with the USA and helps China to accommodate itself to the world order. Also, the soft interdependencies can be actively used as a tool to peacefully accommodate the emerging powers. It seems relevant that the BRICS state members that seem to integrate the fastest in the current international order, India and China, have a high level of trade and investment relations, and also a high level of contact relations and interpersonal exchanges. In contrast to India and China, Russia has a trade based on the exchange of resources and a limited level of

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<sup>8</sup> Steven, Lobell, *op.cit.*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>9</sup> John, IKENBERRY, *A World Safe for Democracy. Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order*, Yale University Press, 2020, p. 371.

relations with the outside world at the interpersonal level, and it is also the least integrated in the current order.<sup>10</sup>

One of the main reasons why the growth of the BRICS emerging powers is viewed with scepticism is related to the actions that they will take once the power transition takes place. Some authors believe that BRICS want to overthrow the current order, which is based on democracy and liberal principles. Without the USA as leader of the international order, the institutions that were created at the end of World War II find themselves in danger. Analysing the statements and the behaviour of the emerging powers over the last two decades, there is no reason to believe that they want to change the norms and the institutions of the current political order. And even if the USA might no longer be considered in the future the only superpower in the system, the BRICS countries would still have a lot to gain from the current order and the principles of governance. The economic development of emerging powers depends on the consumer markets from the developed countries, the foreign direct investment and the technological progress from the developed countries. The economic growth from the last two decades has helped the emerging countries to create a middle class at a national level and to lift millions of people out of poverty. The economic interdependence makes the emerging countries vulnerable to the political changes that occur in the developed countries, with cooperation being the best way for the BRICS countries to pursue their goals.

The research on the BRICS countries is far from finished since there are member states that still face a number of challenges. At the beginning, we tried to make an analysis as objective and complex as possible of what BRICS mean and of their evolution over the last decades. The dimension of this research did not allow us to deepen the analysis of the chosen topic by using several other theories of international relations, but we believe that their approach in a future research would bring a series of new perspectives on this phenomenon. At the same time, we consider that it is important to see how the BRICS countries will overcome the coronavirus pandemic and how they will recover economically.

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<sup>10</sup> Philip, Potter, *op.cit.*, p. 68.