

# Assertive BRICS & Iran's Nuclear Issue

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Date:	09-07-2015
Word Count	12.570

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## Introduction

Since the start of the twenty-first century, non-Western countries are rising while at the same time the United States' (U.S.) relative power declines. This resembles a transformation from unipolarity to multipolarity in the world order. Rising powers, and in particular Brazil, Russia, India, China and South-Africa (BRICS), are demanding their stake in international developments. Next to that, their convergence on certain agendas and growing international influence has been noticeable in areas such as climate change, humanitarian intervention, non-proliferation, but also in behaviour at institutions like the WTO, UN and IMF. The same goes for the issue of Iran's nuclear development, which is the topic of this thesis.

Critics are asking what the possible implications are for multipolarity, and how this may affect their country in the future.<sup>1</sup> To start answering this question, it is important to look at the recent developments in the behaviour of the rising states, in order to understand how these states aim to give shape to the changing world. To understand the behaviour of the BRICS countries in the context of their assertive behaviour, this thesis will focus on the international behaviour of the BRICS countries towards Iran's nuclear issue, asking: ***Why, how and to what degree do the BRICS countries behave more assertively towards Iran's nuclear issue?***

According to the Oxford dictionary, assertive behaviour is "*expressing opinions or desires strongly and with confidence, so that people take notice*".<sup>2</sup> Investigating the assertive behaviour of the rising states, this thesis has four main objectives. In chapter one the first two objectives will be addressed, which are, the contextualization of non-Western rising powers, with the main focus on the BRICS countries, and the identification of the more assertive behaviour of the BRICS in IR politics in general. The third objective is the analysis of the BRICS' international assertive behaviour on Iran's nuclear issue, which will be addressed during the case study in chapter two. Finally, this thesis will try to contribute to the understanding and theorization of the behaviour of rising states connected to international issues like the Iranian nuclear issue.

The Iranian nuclear issue is one of the main issues the international order is

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<sup>1</sup> Nau, H. R., & Ollapally, D. M. (Eds.). (2012). *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers: Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China, India, Iran, Japan, and Russia*. Oxford University Press. P.3

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*. Retrieved July 3, 2015, from <http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/assertive>

dealing with now, and by which the behaviour of rising powers can be examined. To answer the research question, theory about the phenomenon of rising states, and in particular the BRICS countries, is needed in order to understand what rising powers are and why they behave the way they do. Rising powers are getting an increasing influential role in world politics, have potential to rise in the power hierarchy and challenge the status quo with their behaviour in order to achieve their individual aims. To analyse the assertive behaviour of the BRICS countries towards Iran's nuclear issue, detailed data collection is needed. The data collection consists of voting behaviour of the BRICS (on the occasion of sanctions, and on the occasion of other resolutions on nuclear development), foreign policy documents, statements (supporting/condemning statements to the address of countries suspected nuclear weapons programs, criticism of the U.S. or other Western countries, critical statements about sanctions) in addition to scholarly articles and books.

Using content analysis to analyse the data, this thesis will find that the BRICS countries do – to a certain extent – behave assertively towards Iran's nuclear issue, both individually and as a group. This assertive behaviour of the BRICS can be seen as efforts to challenge Western hegemony, and a way to assert their independence of the West. However, there are reasons why the BRICS countries are still struggling with their position in the world. As a starting point, the situations of these countries in relation to the issue of Iran may help to understand their constraints in developing in contrast to the hegemon.

## **Chapter I: The BRICS In The International System**

### **1.1 From Unipolarity to Multipolarity**

The world is changing: For the last twenty-five years, non-Western rising countries have grown faster than the developed countries, which indicates a transformation from unipolarity to multipolarity in the world order.<sup>3</sup> However, although many scholars write about the ‘end of the American unipolar moment’, and the ‘abrupt rise’ of the rising powers, which will result in a ‘complete multipolar world by 2025’, much of these projections are probably exaggerated.<sup>4</sup> Right now, the U.S. is still the lone superpower in military, diplomatic and economic terms, and according to Barry Posen, the rising states will certainly undergo some interruptions in their ‘rise’ in the coming years.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that the role of non-Western countries in the world order is slowly changing. Randall Schweller & Xiaoyu Pu argue that there is a cyclical pattern of this transformation from unipolarity to multipolarity. This cycle exist of five phases: “(1) a stable order, (2) the deconcentration and delegitimation of the hegemon’s power, (3) arms build- ups and the formation of alliances, (4) a resolution of the international crisis, often through hegemonic war, and (5) system renewal”.<sup>6</sup> According to their analyses, the current international system is now entering the second phase.

According to Schweller & Pu, the shift to multipolarity tells us that non-Western countries are gaining more power, and that they will join the U.S. within the global system.<sup>7</sup> From the end of the Second World War onwards, the U.S. has accommodated and accepted the now rising powers, as may be conducted from the replacement of the G8 by the G20.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the U.S. power relatively declines while the voices of the rising states become more prominent.<sup>9</sup> However, the apparent shift to multipolarity does not indicate *how* multipolarity will come or whether the

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<sup>3</sup> Nau & Ollapally (2012, 3).

<sup>4</sup> Schaefer, M. E., & Poffenbarger, J. G. (2014). *The Formation of the BRICS and its Implication for the United States: Rising Together*. Palgrave Macmillan. ISO 690. P.1

and Hart, A. F., & Jones, B. D. (2010). How do rising powers rise? *Survival*, 52(6), 63-88. P.63

<sup>5</sup> Posen, B. R. (2009). Emerging multipolarity: why should we care? *Current History*, 108(721), 347-352. P.347

<sup>6</sup> Schweller, R. L., & Pu, X. (2011). After unipolarity: China’s visions of international order in an era of US decline. *International Security*, 36(1), 41-72. P.44

<sup>7</sup> Schweller and Pu (2011, 42).

<sup>8</sup> Hart & Jones (2010, 63) and Nau and Ollapally (2012, 5-6)

<sup>9</sup> Nau & Ollapally (2012, 6)

rising powers will, over time, accept or reject the Western established world order.<sup>10</sup> How multipolarity will arrive depends on how the rising powers want to be, how they will use their enhanced power and what their goals are in the new international system. The behaviour of the rising powers is thus determinative for the shape international politics will take in the future.

## **1.2 The Concept of Rising Powers**

According to Oliver Stuenkel, most scholars agree that a multipolar world makes the world order more complicated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> This is mainly because these rising powers have different views, positions and opinions than the established Western powers.<sup>12</sup> Related to this is the difficulty to define ‘rising powers’. Some scholars like Sauer argue that rising powers are countries that have the capability to “*intervene [...] in international politics*”.<sup>13</sup> Other scholars argue that a rising power is a country with growing economic growth rates and huge economic potential.<sup>14</sup> And some scholars, such as Nye, argue that rising powers are states that possess rising hard and soft power resources.<sup>15</sup> However, in order to understand the concept ‘rising power’, we have to take a step back and think about term conceptualization. Since the concept of the ‘rising powers’ presupposes common characteristics, we will try to find these common characteristics in the following paragraphs to come to a good understanding of the concept and a decent definition of rising powers.

### **1.2.1 Hard and soft Power Resources**

The most important characteristic of rising states is their economic weight.<sup>16</sup> Often is point to the BRICS countries, a term Goldman Sachs came with referring to the strong and fast growing economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China, and since 2010 also South Africa. However, there are more significant characteristics besides a growing economy that determines a rising power.

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<sup>10</sup> Schweller & Pu (2011, 42)

<sup>11</sup> Stuenkel, O. (2013, March 3). Book review: “Emerging powers and global challenges”. Post-Western World. Retrieved April 26, 2015, from <http://www.postwesternworld.com/2013/03/02/book-review-emerging-powers-and-global-challenges/>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Sauer, T. (2011). The Rising Powers and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Regime. Security Policy Brief 27, September 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Hart & Jones (2010, 65)

<sup>15</sup> Nye, J.S. (2004) Soft power: The means to success in politics. Public Affairs.

<sup>16</sup> Tank, P. (2012). The concept of “rising powers”. *NOREF Policy Brief*.P.2

To come to an understanding of the concept of ‘rising powers’, we need to know the definition of ‘power’. For this purpose, I will use the definition of Joseph Nye, who describes power as “*the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcome one wants, which can be done by coercion, payments or attraction*”.<sup>17</sup> According to Nye, the ability to affect others by coercion and payments is termed ‘hard power’, and the ability to affect others by attraction is termed ‘soft power’.<sup>18</sup> When describing a (rising) power, the main emphasis often lies on the hard power resources of a country. Hard power resources are tangible resources like strong and growing economy, military, technology and demographic resources. However, soft power projection is becoming increasingly important in world politics, and thus important to raise a country’s status from a regional power to a rising power. Soft power is linked to the possession of culture, political values and foreign policy resources like institutions, by which you can attract other actors to “*want what you want*”.<sup>19</sup> Thus rising powers do not only have to possess a strong economy, but also other hard and soft power resources. According to Nye, however, the difficulty today is not to acquire these resources, but to convert power resources into influence since “*resources do not constitute power by themselves*”.<sup>20</sup> Thus when a country can translate the power resources into influence, it can really *exercise power*.<sup>21</sup>

### ***1.2.2 The Hierarchy of Power***

To be a rising power, a country should also be recognized as one by other states. According to Vidya Nadkarni and Norma Noonan, there is a hierarchical order of states in the world, which depends on a country’s power resources, scope of influence and the recognition by other states of its status.<sup>22</sup> As Jacek Kugler and Abramo Organski describe, this hierarchical order exists of four levels of powers between states, which is in order of precedence: superpower, great powers, middle powers and small powers.<sup>23</sup> Using this categorization, China is often acknowledged as a great

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<sup>17</sup> Nye, J.S. (2004, 2)

<sup>18</sup> Nye, J.S. (2011) The future of power. Public Affairs. P.6

<sup>19</sup> Nye (2004, 31)

<sup>20</sup> Nye (2011, 8)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Nadkarni, V., & Noonan, N. C. (Eds.). (2013). Rising powers in a comparative perspective: the political and economic rise of the BRIC countries. Bloomsbury Publishing USA. P.6

<sup>23</sup> Kugler, J. A. F, K. Organski. 1989." The Power Transition: A Retrospective and Prospective Evaluation.". The Handbook of War Studies. Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, P72-174.

power and a rival to the United States. Russia, India and Brazil fall in the category of middle powers. They are also recognized as rising powers because first; they have a serious aspiration to great power status, second; their hard and soft power resources increases and third; they are becoming increasingly important in international politics. Also other countries, such as Turkey and South Africa, are seen as middle powers since they are often recognized as important regional powers. According to Pinar Tank, recognition as a regional power is often one of the “stepping-stones” to the position of a rising power.<sup>24</sup> This seems to be true since these countries are often recognized as a rising power, or at least they all share the aspiration to be recognised as one.

### ***1.2.3 Challenging the status quo***

Another characteristic of rising powers is that they are challenging the status quo of global politics.<sup>25</sup> According to the power transition theory of Abramo Organski, the super power’s aim is to *maintain* the status quo of the international system, in which the strongest great powers are *challenging* the status quo because they are dissatisfied with their place in the international system and they try to get a better place for themselves.<sup>26</sup> In challenging the status quo, the rising powers will question Western established principles, bring international instability and try to increasingly exercise power. In the case of the current rising powers, their foreign policies challenge the U.S. hegemony by advocating for multilateralism, giving critique on unilateral action and highlighting the importance of international institutions and organizations.<sup>27</sup> By arguing this, we have to keep in mind Tanks’ argument that the shift in power from the East to the West and the rise of the non-Western powers is not essentially the challenge to the international system.<sup>28</sup> Instead, the real challenge is the existing uncertainty of the purposes the rising states have. It is, therefore, again not the question whether the rising powers will challenge the established system, but *how* they challenge the international system.

In short, rising powers are sovereign states with a rising economy and other strong and rising hard and soft power resources, and are able to convert these

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<sup>24</sup> Tank (2012, 3)

<sup>25</sup> Harden, B. E. (2014). The Diplomatic Ambitions of the BRIC States: Challenging the Hegemony of the West. *Journal of International Relations and Foreign Policy*, 2(2), 01-18. P.13

<sup>26</sup> Organski, A. F. (1958). *World politics*. Knopf.

<sup>27</sup> Harden (2014, 13)

<sup>28</sup> Tank (2012, 4)



resources into influence on a regional and global scale. Through this increasing influential role in international institutions and politics, they get the recognition as a rising state by other countries, they challenge the status quo, and have serious potential to rise in the global power hierarchy. But to know how they will challenge the established order to achieve their aims, and what role the rising powers intend to play in the future international system, we have to look at their behaviour.

### 1.3 The BRICS

In 2001, Jim O'Neill predicted that Brazil, Russia, India and China would play an increasingly important role in the global economy.<sup>29</sup> According to the predictions, these BRIC countries would become a major power in the world economy in the next 50 years, and gain increased political power.<sup>30</sup> After five years of speculations about the idea of an institutionalised BRIC, the BRIC's foreign ministers decided to organize a meeting in New York in 2006.<sup>31</sup> Because of its success, they agreed to meet more frequently, and at the third meeting of the BRIC's they shared the aspiration to become more cooperative with each other and form a political grouping with the objective to "*build a more democratic international system founded on the rule of law and multilateral diplomacy*".<sup>32</sup>

There are different opinions why the BRICs aligned in a political grouping, which resulted in more assertive behaviour and influence in world politics. According to Posen, states do not want to get isolated in a world that is getting multipolar, so they are fanatically in the building of coalitions.<sup>33</sup> And according to Stuenkel, states like the BRICs form a political grouping to reinforce each state's international status, which could be useful for achieving individual objectives in future.<sup>34</sup> An example may be drawn from the London 2009 summit. According Stuenkel and Alan Alexandroff & John Kirton, during this summit the BRIC countries were able to have

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<sup>29</sup> O'Neill, J. (2001). Building better global economic BRICs. P.1

<sup>30</sup> Harden (2014, 2)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Singh, S. P., & Dube, M. (2014). BRICS and the World Order: A Beginner's Guide. Available at SSRN 2443652. P.7

<sup>33</sup> Posen (2009, 349-350)

<sup>34</sup> Stuenkel, O. (2014). Rising Powers and Status: The Case of the First BRICs Summit. Asian Perspective, 38(1), 89-109. P2.

a more unified voice, which has put them in a better bargaining position.<sup>35</sup> Through this improved bargaining position they were able to assert their increased influence, which resulted in the by G20 agreed IMF quota reforms. On top of that, some observers argue that they only aligned in order to strengthen the cooperation between the four countries. And according to Francis Kornegay, the fundamental reason for the establishment of the BRIC grouping was the “increasing assertiveness” by Russia and China to try to change the world’s reserve currency in order to change the global economic order, including the Western dominance over the IMF and the World Bank.<sup>36</sup>

During the first annual summit of the BRICs on June 2009 in Yekaterinburg, it became clear that the BRIC countries transformed themselves from a loose economic grouping into a political bloc with the objective to strive for a more democratic and multipolar world. The timing of this transformation was ideal; it was conducted during highly unusual international economic and political circumstances, whereby the legitimacy of the United States was low.<sup>37</sup> This, in addition to the shifting balance of power, gave the BRICS the opportunity to claim the status as important rising powers and to behave more assertively on the world stage and have more diplomatic influence.<sup>38</sup> In 2010, the *BRIC* countries became the *BRICS* when they included South Africa to the group. Although many scholars argue that the BRICS as a bloc exists of some very different countries, the convergence on certain agendas and the growing assertiveness in global issues among these countries is remarkable as will be demonstrated in the following section.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Stuenkel (2014, 2) and Alexandroff, A. & Kirton, J. ‘The “great recession” and the emergence of the G20 leaders’ summit’. *Rising States, Rising Institutions: The Challenge of Global Governance*, ed. A.S. Alexandroff and A.F Cooper. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press. P.185.

<sup>36</sup> Kornegay, F.A. (2012, March 20). BRICS in search of identity. IGD: Institute for Global Dialogue. Retrieved May 10, 2015, from <http://www.igd.org.za/index.php/179-brics-in-search-of-identity>

<sup>37</sup> Stuenkel (2014, 10)

<sup>38</sup> Pu, X. (2012). Socialisation as a two-way process: Rising powers and the diffusion of international norms. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 5(4), 341-367. P.342

<sup>39</sup> Singh and Dube (2014, 29) and Terhalle, M. (2011) ‘Reciprocal Socialisation: Rising Powers and the West’. *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 341-361. P.345

#### 1.4 Assertive BRICS

In the last decade, the BRICS countries became more assertive in international politics and less dependent on the West. Different scholars, like Marianne Wiesebron and Suresh Singh & Memory Dube have noticed their growing assertiveness, convergence on certain agendas and growing international influence in several fields and institutions of world politics.<sup>40</sup> As Andrew Hurrell notes, the increased attention for these global issues occurs simultaneously with the emergence of the BRICS, which led to a growing consensus that rising states are essential to develop meaningful solutions.<sup>41</sup>

For example, the BRICS are behaving assertively when it comes to their position on climate change. Gideon Rachman argued in his article that their stance in this issue shows that they collectively form a bloc against the hegemon: “*Look for example of how India and Brazil sided with China at the global climate change talks... That is just a taste of things to come*”.<sup>42</sup> During the 2009 Copenhagen climate negotiations, Brazil, India, China and South Africa decided to act as a group, and they agreed to leave the negotiation table together if their minimum position was not met by the Western states.<sup>43</sup> This joint act showed that the BRICS no longer agree with the unilateral arrangements of the West, or as Maximilian Terhalle states, “*the B(R)ICS countries refuse to submit to Western leadership any longer*”.<sup>44</sup> Besides the BRICS’ assertive behaviour during the 2009 Copenhagen Summit, the BRICS also blocked the climate agreement in Durban together.<sup>45</sup>

Since the BRICS acknowledged the importance of the United Nations, they also tried to have more influence in the UN framework.<sup>46</sup> But because the assertive BRICS do not fully agree with every Western-based UN principle, they are rebelling against them. The Western concept of humanitarian intervention and the

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<sup>40</sup> Singh & Dube (2014, 29) and Wiesebron, M.L. (2014, October 16). EU foreign policy towards the BRICS. Retrieved May 16, 2015, from <http://media.leidenuniv.nl/legacy/1.-wiesebron-brics-the-view-from-europe.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> Hurrell, A. (2006). Hegemony, Liberalism and Global Order: What space for would-be powers? *International Affairs*, 82 /1: 3. P.2-3

<sup>42</sup> Rachman, G. (2011, January 3). Think Again: American Decline. *Foreign Policy*.

<sup>43</sup> Hart & Jones (2010, 63)

<sup>44</sup> Terhalle (2011, 341)

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Haibin, N. (2012). “BRICS in Global Governance: A Progressive Force?” *Dialogue on Globalization*. FriedrichEbert-Stiftung.1-6. P.2-3

‘responsibility to protect’ (R2P), for example, is an issue that is interpreted differently by the BRICS, therefore influenced by the ideas and assertive behaviour of the non-Western rising powers. According to Stuenkel, this R2P debate can be interpreted in the context of the Global North, which supports the idea of intervention and R2P, and the Global South (BRICS), which supports sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention.<sup>47</sup> As Justin Morris and Stuenkel note, the BRICS do not fully oppose the R2P principle, but they are mainly cautious about the coercive pillar III of the R2P, which the powerful West could abuse to meet their economic and strategic interests.<sup>48</sup>

This position of the BRICS became clear when the BRICS countries (minus South Africa) took an assertive stance on the humanitarian intervention issue and called it a form of imperialism, whereupon they abstained together in the vote to intervene in Libya “*due to a desire to pursue policies of non-intervention*”.<sup>49</sup> According to Stuenkel and Chris Keeler, because of the BRICS’ negative experience with the intervention in Libya (by which the U.S. exceeded the UN mandate authorizing action, using airstrikes) the BRICS withstood their assertive stance on humanitarian intervention, which resulted in “deadlock” resolution on Syria.<sup>50</sup> This showed that the disagreements between the Global North and the rising Global South on humanitarian intervention and pillar III of the R2P have an impact on the future of the R2P. Jennifer Welsh describes this as well, saying, “*the R2P was born in an era when assertive liberalism was at its height, and sovereign equality looked and smelled reactionary. But as the liberal moment recedes, and the distribution of power shifts globally, the principle of sovereign equality may enjoy a comeback*”.<sup>51</sup>

Although the BRICS may be more in favour of sovereignty, the debates within the R2P are not about whether to act at all, but about *how* to act.<sup>52</sup> As Morris notes, Brazil’s ‘Responsible while Protecting’ and China’s ‘Responsible Protection’, initiatives as a new norm of intervention, give an interesting view of how tensions

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<sup>47</sup> Stuenkel, O. (2014). The BRICS and the Future of R2P. Was Syria or Libya the exception? *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 6(1), 3-28. P.11

<sup>48</sup> Stuenkel (2014,26) and Morris, J. (2013). Libya and Syria: R2P and the spectra of the swinging pendulum. *International Affairs*, 89(5), 1265-1283. P.1276

<sup>49</sup> Keeler, C. (2011, October 12). The End of the responsibility to protect? *Foreign Policy Journal*

<sup>50</sup> Keeler (2011) and Stuenkel (2014,19)

<sup>51</sup> Welsh, J. M. (2010). Implementing the “Responsibility to Protect”: Where Expectations Meet Reality. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 24(4), 415-430.

<sup>52</sup> Bellamy, A. J. (2011). Libya and the Responsibility to protect: the Exception and the Norm. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 25(03), 263-269. P.265

about pillar III can manifest themselves into assertive behaviour.<sup>53</sup> However Stuenkel argues that the rise of the rising powers compels them to participate more than before, Pu notes that these initiatives also show the increasing willingness of rising powers to assert their own preferences and opinions to form the global debate on international norms.<sup>54</sup>

Besides the United Nations, the BRICS also started to behave more assertively in other institutions. The ‘Doha Round of trade negotiations’ and the ‘WTO’s Cancun meetings’ at the beginning of this century opened a way for the rising powers to let their voice be heard and behave more assertively in the economic arena.<sup>55</sup> During these meetings, the rising powers expressed their demands for fair trade and ‘globalization with equity’, they protested against the ‘Singapore Issues’ and protectionism in the WTO and they uttered their anger about the Western imposed restrictions against non-Western countries.<sup>56</sup> To unite all the demands of the non-Western middle powers, the ‘India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum’ (IBSA) emerged, through which the assertive rising powers could express their unified economic demands better in order to get a more prominent (bargaining) place in the economic international order.<sup>57</sup>

The BRICS countries also behave assertively in the non-proliferation regime. India is a classic example of this, since the country did not agree with the arrangements proposed by the U.S. on nuclear proliferation, and decided not to sign to Non-Proliferation Treaty.<sup>58</sup> According to Leonard Weiss, the Indian Government often called the U.S.-led NPT regime “*discriminatory*” and “*a system of nuclear apartheid*”.<sup>59</sup> Although the BRICS countries have different interests in the nuclear (non-proliferation) sphere, they can find common ground on nuclear energy. As Richard Weitz argues, the BRICS share a “*common pro-nuclear energy perspective*”,

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<sup>53</sup> Pu (2012, 342) Morris (2013, 1279)

<sup>54</sup> Stuenkel (2014, 26) and Pu (2012, 342)

<sup>55</sup> Singh & Dube (2014, 39-40)

<sup>56</sup> Jordaan, E. (2012). South Africa, multilateralism and the global politics of development. *European Journal of Development Research*, 24(2), 283-299. P.295-296

<sup>57</sup> Jordaan (2012, 296)

<sup>58</sup> Garcia, M. (2012). Global Swing States and the non-proliferation order. German Marshall Fund of the United States. P2-3

<sup>59</sup> Weiss, L. (2010). India and the NPT. *Strategic Analysis*, 34(2), 255-271. P.260

which gives them a chance to become a dominant united force in the nuclear order.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the BRICS find common ground on Iran's nuclear issue, an issue on which the BRICS countries behave more assertively, both individually and as a group. In order to support this argument, the next chapter of this thesis will apply a case study to investigate how, why, and to what degree the BRICS behave more assertively towards the Iranian nuclear issue.

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<sup>60</sup> Weitz, R. (2014, August 13) How BRICS can advance global non-proliferation agenda. *Russian Direct*. Retrieved May 18, 2015, from <http://www.russia-direct.org/opinion/how-brics-can-advance-global-nonproliferation-agenda>

## **Chapter 2: Case study: Iran's Nuclear Issue**

### **2.1 Iran's nuclear issue**

Iran started with pursuing nuclear activities in 1957. Initially, the United States helped Iran with their nuclear program through the 'Atoms for Peace Initiative', but they ceased their support in 1979, when the Shah was overthrown and Khomeini took power over Iran and ended its nuclear program.<sup>61</sup> During the 1980s, the program was resumed with IAEA involvement and the help of several countries, including Russia and China.<sup>62</sup> In 2002, an opposition group (the Mujahedin-e Khalq) leaked information to the U.S. including that Iran had been constructing secret nuclear enrichment facilities, which were not declared to the IAEA.<sup>63</sup> The United States immediately reacted to this saying that Iran was making a nuclear bomb and was a danger for the international community. However, Iran argued that their nuclear program was only for peaceful purposes, which is their inalienable right according to Article IV of the NPT.<sup>64</sup> Due of a lack of a diplomatic relationship between the U.S. and Iran, three European powers (Britain, France and Germany) started negotiations trying to solve the crisis in 2003.<sup>65</sup> Iran decided to agree voluntarily with some confidence-building measures (the Paris Agreement), which included closer monitoring and the temporarily suspension of their Uranium enrichment, while the West should come with an agreement with which Iran could satisfy the West that its program was purely peaceful.<sup>66</sup> The approach of the European powers seemed promising at first, but failed in the end: The West wanted Iran to stop their enrichment program permanently, but Iran rejected this proposal saying that it has the right under the NPT to enrich uranium.

In 2006, the issue was transferred to the UN Security Council (UNSC), and the European negotiation group was joined by the United States, Russia and China (P5 of the UNSC + Germany).<sup>67</sup> Although the IAEA never found evidence of a nuclear weapon program, the West still blamed Iran from making a nuclear bomb. But

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<sup>61</sup> Friedland, E. (2014). Fact Sheet. The Iranian Nuclear Program. *Clarion Project Research*. P.3

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Pieper, M. (2014). Chinese, Russian, and Turkish Policies in the Iranian Nuclear Dossier: Between Resistance to Hegemony and Hegemonic Accommodation. *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, 2(1). P.17

<sup>64</sup> Squassoni, S. (2009). The Iranian Nuclear Program. *Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Future of International Nonproliferation Policy*. P.294

<sup>65</sup> Pieper (2014, 17)

<sup>66</sup> Squassoni (2009, 287)

<sup>67</sup> Pieper (2014, 18)

also under the UNSC, Iran refused to give up its right under the NPT, therefore the West started sanctioning and threatening with military action against Iran, arguing that Iran “*was failing to meet its international obligations*”.<sup>68</sup> Both Western and Non-Western countries have tried to negotiate a deal with Iran in recent years (think about the Tehran Declaration in 2010), but they never made it to a successful deal. However, a promising interim agreement between Iran and the P5+1 was signed in November 2013, called the Geneva Accord and the Joint Plan of Action, of which the final deal was first supposed to be reached by June 30<sup>th</sup>, which was extended until July 7 2015.<sup>69</sup> On July 7, the U.S. State Department has announced that they will not extend the deadline, but would continue the talks until July 10.<sup>70</sup>

While the West is accusing Iran of non-compliance, Iran tried to counter these accusations, arguing that Iran’s nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes and that it has the inalienable right under the NPT to enrich uranium. This dispute over Iran’s nuclear program and their rights and obligations as a member of the NPT makes the NPT the center of this dispute. According to Flynt Leverett & Hillary Mann Leverett, the dispute over Iran’s nuclear program is driven by the various ways in which the NPT can be interpreted, which are rooted in different understandings of the global order.<sup>71</sup> The United States, as the only hegemon, wants to maintain its dominance and tries to secure their security interests. Since 9/11, the threat perception for the West has moved from the Soviet Union (during the Cold War), to the Middle East with the “*rogue states*”.<sup>72</sup> For their own security interests, the U.S. hegemony placed greater emphasis on the non-proliferation aim of the NPT in which they interpret the right to peaceful nuclear programs and disarmament goals as less important than the non-proliferation goal. The U.S. argues that “*there is no right to enrich*”, and that not every country (like Iran as a non-weapon state under the NPT)

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<sup>68</sup> Matson, K. (1999, September 1). A Briefing on Iran's Nuclear Program From the discovery of atom power, to the nuclear dilemma, its solution, and Iran. *LewRockwell*. Retrieved June 22, 2015 from <https://www.lewrockwell.com/1999/09/kaleb-matson/a-briefing-on-irans-nuclear-program-from-the-discovery-of-atom-power-to-the-nuclear-dilemma-its-solution-and-iran/>

<sup>69</sup> Friedland (2014, 4)

<sup>70</sup> Peralta, E. (2015, July 7). Iran, World Powers Will Work Past Deadline Toward Nuclear Deal. NPR. Retrieved July 9, 2015, from <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/07/07/420776190/as-another-deadline-looms-theres-still-no-sign-of-nuclear-deal-with-iran>

<sup>71</sup> Leverett, F. & Leverett, H. (2013, April 29). Nuclear Iran: What’s at Stake for the BRICS. *The BRICS Post*. Retrieved June 16, 2015 from <http://thebricspost.com/the-iranian-nuclear-issue-whats-at-stake-for-the-brics/#.VZBNRBptmko>

<sup>72</sup> Pretorius, J., & Sauer, T. (2014). The nuclear security discourse: Proliferation vs disarmament concerns. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 21(3), 321-334. P.322



could and should possess the ‘fuel cycle technologies’ where nuclear bombs can be made of.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the United States launched a number of international counter-proliferation initiatives and told Iran they had to stop or at least suspend their uranium enrichment.<sup>74</sup>

Being the hegemon, the U.S. wants to maintain the status quo, and they want to determine the goals of international policy by which they interpret the rules in a way it suits the *results* they want to achieve with the rules they made, therefore they also act in order to impose these rules with their interpretation.<sup>75</sup> However, many non-Western countries have criticized the U.S.’ priority on non-proliferation. They argue that because of the emphasis on non-proliferation, the United States disregards the nuclear disarmament aim of the NPT, and it threatens their right to pursue a nuclear program for peaceful purposes, including enrichment.<sup>76</sup> These states, including Iran and the BRICS, interpret the three aims of the NPT (disarmament, non-proliferation and right to peaceful nuclear programs) as equally important, and argue, for that reason, that Iran has the good right to enrich uranium.<sup>77</sup>

In the end, the nuclear issue is not really about nuclear weapons, but is about whether the United States can uphold its role as a leader. The West is having issues with Iran over multiple things, and they are afraid that Iran could threaten Western interests. Therefore, the U.S. policy towards Iran’s nuclear issue is a way to maintain their dominance.<sup>78</sup> Iran’s fight against nuclear proliferation on the other hand, together with the BRICS assertive behaviour in this issue, can be seen as efforts to challenge Western hegemony.<sup>79</sup>

## 2.2 Assertive BRICS

Although the BRICS countries all have very different nuclear policies, they can find common ground on Iran’s nuclear issue. And with their assertive behaviour and similar political attitudes towards Iran’s nuclear issue, the BRICS are challenging the

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<sup>73</sup> Groll, E. (2013, November 24). Did the United States just grant Iran the right to enrich uranium? *Foreign Policy*.

<sup>74</sup> Pretorius & Sauer (2014, 324)

<sup>75</sup> Leverett & Leverett (2013)

<sup>76</sup> Pretorius & Sauer (2014, 326)

<sup>77</sup> Leverett & Leverett (2013)

<sup>78</sup> Vezirgiannidou S.E. (2013). The United States and rising powers in a post-hegemonic global order. *International Affairs*, 89(3), 635-651. P.637

<sup>79</sup> Warnaar, M. (2013). *Iranian Foreign Policy During Ahmadinejad: Ideology and Actions*. Palgrave Macmillan. P.145

unipolar world order and test their independence of the West.<sup>80</sup> For example, the BRICS are behaving assertively by drawing red lines on the Western approaches and policies towards Iran and their unilateral interpretation of the NPT through disapproving all of the unilateral (non-UN) sanctions and disapproving the excessive pressure on Iran, calling for negotiations on the basis of dialogue and cooperation, emphasizing Iran's right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, moving slowly on, object or even vote against UN sanctions, and warning against violations on the "territorial integrity and sovereignty" of Iran.<sup>81</sup> As will be demonstrated hereafter, this assertive behaviour is noticeable in each single BRICS's country foreign policy as well in their policy as a group.

### **2.2.1 China**

Assertive behaviour towards Iran's nuclear issue is clearly present in China's foreign policy. While the United States argues that Iran has no right to enrich uranium, China argued on many occasions that Iran does have the right to the peaceful use of nuclear power and thus to enrich uranium. For example, in April 2013, Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei stressed "*as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran possesses the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes while following relevant international obligations*".<sup>82</sup> In addition, Chinese representatives often speak up against unilateral sanctions against Iran. Besides the official UN sanctions against Iran, the United States often imposed extra unilateral sanctions on Iran to influence their policies, including their uranium enrichment program. China refuses to follow these unilateral sanctions and advocates negotiations on the basis of dialogue. In 2012 during the BRICS Summit in Delhi, Chinese trade Minister Chen Deming said: "*We don't find any violation of the UN resolution. China wants to develop normal trade relationship with all countries including Iran, [...] and China does not have to follow any domestic law of any particular country. Also, we don't want to see any negative implications on domestic rules and laws of a particular country on the entire*

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<sup>80</sup> Warnaar (2013, 76)

<sup>81</sup> Xing, L. & García Agustin, O. (2014). Constructing and Conceptualizing "Interdependent Hegemony" in an Era of the Rise of the BRICS and Beyond. In X. Ling, *The BRICS and Beyond. The International Political Economy of the Emergence of a New World Order*, 53-75. P.53

<sup>82</sup> Xuequan, M. (2013, April 10). China urges conditions for resolving Iran nuclear issue. English News.cn. Retrieved June 7, 2015, from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/10/c\\_124564922.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/10/c_124564922.htm)

*international community*".<sup>83</sup> In addition, current Foreign Minister of China, Wang, noted this year that "whatever the circumstance, we firmly support talks, oppose the use of violence and disapprove unilateral sanctions".<sup>84</sup> Although China disapproves the unilateral sanctions of the EU and U.S., it has always voted for UN sanctions against Iran in the past few years. However, China has opposed many times, or moved more slowly on Iran sanctions than the U.S would have liked, or they tried to make the sanctions less severe. China (and the other BRICS) never just follows the U.S., but always tries to show their independent ideology and policy. For example, the U.S. wanted to prohibit all trade relations with Iran when Iran failed to stop its nuclear activities by August 31 in 2006. Because Russia and China found this U.S. conceived sanction too severe, they made objections.<sup>85</sup> Because of this assertive behaviour, the resolution was amended several times until a compromised version, which also suited China and Russia, was passed.<sup>86</sup>

### **2.2.2 Russia**

Besides the fact that Russia objected to too severe sanctions together with China in 2006, in 2010 Russia also refused to support a new round of sanctions (resolution 1929) against Iran unless the U.S. would soften or lift some other sanctions. Again, Russia did not just follow the superpower, but stood up for Iran and their own interests, which led to several concessions and the attenuation of sanctions against Iran.<sup>87</sup> And in 2015, assertive behaviour of Russia and China was noticeable when they objected the 'snapback provision' (possibility to reapply the sanctions) proposal

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83 Mishra A.R & Roche, E. (2012, August 5). BRICS say will follow UN, not US sanctions against Iran.

Livemint. Retrieved June 7, 2015, from

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/HaWDoaLRPU9UMpvSBYWO6K/BRICS-say-will-follow-UN-not-US-sanctions-against-Iran.html>

84 China urges Iran to uphold its right to 'peaceful use of nuclear power'. (2015, February 16). RT Question More. Retrieved June 9, 2015, from <http://rt.com/news/232623-china-pushes-iran-nuclear/>

85 UN Security Council Resolutions 1737 and 1747. The Reut Institute. Retrieved June 8, 2015, from <http://reut-institute.org/Publication.aspx?PublicationId=1582>

86 Security Council resolution 1737 (2006) [on measures against the Islamic Republic of Iran in connection with its enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research and development]. Unbisnet.

Retrieved June 8, 2015, from

[http://unbisnet.un.org:8080/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=1034M03069317.5853&menu=search&aspect=power&npp=50&ipp=20&spp=20&profile=voting&ri=&index=.VM&term=1737&matchoptbox=0%7C0&oper=AND&x=18&y=6&aspect=power&index=.VW&term=&matchoptbox=0%7C0&oper=AND&index=.AD&term=&matchoptbox=0%7C0&oper=AND&index=BIB&term=&matchoptbox=0%7C0&limitbox\\_1=VI01+%3D+vi\\_s&ultype=&uloper=%3D&ullimit=&ultype=&uloper=%3D&ullimit=&sort=](http://unbisnet.un.org:8080/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=1034M03069317.5853&menu=search&aspect=power&npp=50&ipp=20&spp=20&profile=voting&ri=&index=.VM&term=1737&matchoptbox=0%7C0&oper=AND&x=18&y=6&aspect=power&index=.VW&term=&matchoptbox=0%7C0&oper=AND&index=.AD&term=&matchoptbox=0%7C0&oper=AND&index=BIB&term=&matchoptbox=0%7C0&limitbox_1=VI01+%3D+vi_s&ultype=&uloper=%3D&ullimit=&ultype=&uloper=%3D&ullimit=&sort=)

87 Davis, J. K., & Pfaltzgraff, R. L. (2013). *Anticipating a Nuclear Iran: Challenges for US Security*.

Columbia University Press. P. 204. P.342

of the West during the P5+1 and Iran negotiations to make a nuclear deal, arguing that all the sanctions against Iran should be lifted straightaway.<sup>88</sup> Russia has often tried to object or minimize the severe sanctions on Iran, claiming that there is “*no evidence of any nuclear weapon program in Iran*”.<sup>89</sup> In addition, Russia takes an assertive stance against the United States when they argued that sanctions should not be used to change Iran’s behaviour because it is “*an instrument for regime change in Iran*”, and such “*measures (threats, sanctions and pressure) would be counterproductive*” and will “*drive Iran in a corner*” which makes it even harder to do concessions with them regarding its nuclear weapons program.<sup>90</sup>

Apart from the fact that Russia takes an assertive stance in the unilateral sanctions matter, Russian representatives have on numerous occasions supported Iran’s right to nuclear development as well. Although the U.S. would like to isolate Iran, Russia continued their involvement with Iran as much as possible after UN sanctions.<sup>91</sup> Russia has good relations with Iran, and their enhanced economic and military cooperation, together with Russia’s policies toward the whole Middle East challenges the U.S. and their security interests.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, the close relationship with Iran is important for Russia in order to stand up to the West and be more independent.<sup>93</sup> Russia’s assertive stance against the Western hegemony was also noticeable in 2011, when they argued that a published report by the IAEA in November 2011 on Iran’s nuclear program was not objective, but influenced by the United States, therefore Western biased. In a statement of the Russian Foreign

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88 LeVine, S. (2015, April 1). On sanctions relief, Russia and China are on Iran’s side. Quartz. Retrieved June 20, 2015, from <http://qz.com/374516/on-sanctions-relief-russia-and-china-are-on-irans-side/>

89 Putin ‘No information on Iran’s work on nuclear weapons’. (2009, December 3). Sputniknews. Retrieved June 10, 2015, from <http://sputniknews.com/russia/20091203/157086953.html>

90 Borger, J. (2011, November 9). Russia rejects further sanctions of Iran over nuclear programme. *The Guardian*. Retrieved June 9, 2015, from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/nov/09/russia-rejects-iran-sanctions-nuclear>, and

Landler, M & Clifford J.L. (2009, October 13). Russia resists U.S. position on sanctions for Iran. *New York Times*. Retrieved June 10, 2015, from [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/14/world/europe/14diplo.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/14/world/europe/14diplo.html?_r=0), and

Koryashkin, P. (2010, February 15). "A Military Strike at Iran Would Be a Colossal Mistake": An Interview with Russian Security Council Deputy Secretary Vladimir Nazarov. *Kommersant*. Retrieved June 10, 2015, from <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/nazarov160210p.html>

91 Bridge, R. (2012, June 7). Russia supports Iran's right to civil nuclear energy – Putin. RT Question More. Retrieved June 8, 2015, from <http://rt.com/politics/russia-iran-sanctions-un-cooperation-us-268/>

92 Borshchevskaya, A. (2015, March 13). Russia leveraging the Iran nuclear talks to its advantage. *Business insider UK*. Retrieved June 8, 2015, from <http://uk.businessinsider.com/russia-using-the-iran-talks-to-gain-influence-2015-3?r=US>

93 Omelicheva, M.Y. (2012). “Russia’s Foreign Policy Toward Iran: A Critical Geopolitics Perspective” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 14, no. 3; 331-344. P.

Ministry Russia argued that the report is “*a compilation of well-known facts that have intentionally been given a politicized intonation*”, and the authors “*resort to assumptions and suspicions, and juggle information with the purpose of creating the impression that the Iranian nuclear program has a military component*”.<sup>94</sup> With this statement, Russia openly criticized the West and thereby assertively challenged the status quo of global politics.

### **2.2.3 India**

Of all states, India holds an exclusive place in the non-proliferation regime. India has never signed the NPT, is building a nuclear program, and made a nuclear deal with the U.S. in which it can purchase fuel and technology for its nuclear program. India’s assertive behaviour is similar to that of the other BRICS. The country has traditionally a close relationship with Iran (and their gas supplies), therefore it has been unwilling to impose severe sanctions on Iran. In the case of the unilateral sanctions of the U.S., India insists that the sanctions on Iran should not affect their trade ties with the sanctioned country because they are “*not bound by these unilateral sanctions against Iran*”.<sup>95</sup> In addition, India believes that the solution towards Iran’s nuclear issue “*can only be found through dialogue*” and that Iran has sovereign right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.<sup>96</sup> India has in the past, just like Iran, blamed the NPT for its non-compliance to the agreements that are made under the NPT (about the right to peaceful use of nuclear energy).<sup>97</sup> Like Iran today, India had been supporting the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes under the NPT for decades.<sup>98</sup>

Although India assertively challenges the West with its position on Iran’s nuclear issue and its close ties with Iran, India’s new friendship with the U.S. has

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94 Barry, L. (2011, November 9). Russia Dismisses Calls for New U.N. Sanctions on Iran. New York Times. Retrieved on June 10, 2015, from [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/10/world/europe/russia-dismisses-calls-for-new-un-sanctions-on-iran.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/10/world/europe/russia-dismisses-calls-for-new-un-sanctions-on-iran.html?_r=0)

95 BRICS: Not bound by ‘unilateral’ sanctions on Iran (2012, March 28). RT Question more. Retrieved on June 11, 2015, from <http://rt.com/news/brics-iran-us-sanctions-684/>

96 Chalmers J. & Thatcher J. (2012, March 29). BRICS flay West over IMF reform, monetary policy. *Reuters*. Retrieved on June 11, 2015, from <http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/03/29/india-brics-iran-imf-idINDEE82S04820120329>

97 Kumaraswamy, P.R. (2007, May 27). Nuclear Iran: India looks trough the energy prism. The Alliance Center for Iranian Studies. No 12. Retrieved June 11, 2015, from <http://humanities.tau.ac.il/iranian/en/previous-reviews/10-iran-pulse-en/115-12>

98 Ibid.

created ambiguity in India's foreign policy towards Iran.<sup>99</sup> India, for example, always voted with the majority in the IAEA, because as they argued, Iran has voluntarily signed the NPT and should for that reason also comply with the rules of the IAEA.<sup>100</sup> India thus on the one hand supports Iran's peaceful nuclear ambitions, but on the other hand they also emphasize that Iran has to conform to its international obligations. This position became clear in several summits as well. During the Russia-India-China (RIC) Foreign Minister's meeting on April 13, 2012 in Moscow, the RIC countries argued that Iran has the inalienable right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and they expressed confidence in the need to negotiate these issues on the basis of political and diplomatic dialogue and through negotiations between Iran and the IAEA.<sup>101</sup> On top of that, during the India-Russia Annual Summit in December 2012, they also stated that Iran *"has to comply with the provisions of the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions and extend full cooperation to the IAEA"*.<sup>102</sup>

#### **2.2.4 Brazil**

During the last decade, Brazil has set out a more assertive foreign policy under Lula da Silva (2003-2010) to strengthen Brazil's position as a global player, and they started to assert its influence on a global scale in order to strive for a world order based on multipolarity.<sup>103</sup> This assertive foreign policy was also noticeable in the Iranian nuclear issue. Because Brazil had a similar experience with Western countries against their nuclear program years ago, they understand the position of Iran and support Iran's nuclear program, with which they challenge the West. In 2007, Lula da Silva stated, *"Iran has the right to proceed with the peaceful nuclear research and should not be punished just because of Western suspicions it wants to make an atomic*

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99 Cordesman, A. H., Gold, B., & Coughlin-Schulte, C. (2014). Iran: Sanctions, Energy, Arms Control, and Regime Change. Rowman & Littlefield. P.61

<sup>100</sup> Kumaraswamy (2007)

101 Das Kundu, N. (2012, May 14). Russia-India-China: trilateral cooperation and prospects. Valdai discussion club. Retrieved June 11, 2015, from <http://valdaiclub.com/asia/42620.html>

102 Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. (2012, December 24). Joint Statement on the 13th India-Russia Annual Summit: "Partnership for mutual benefit and a better world". Retrieved June 11, 2015, from <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/20993/Joint+Statement+on+the+13th+IndiaRussia+annual+Summit+Partnership+for+mutual+benefit+and+a+better+world>.

103 Wigell, M., Kurki, K., Archer, T., Kononenko, V., Nojonen, M., & Väyrynen, R. (2011). Assertive Brazil: An emerging power and its implications. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, FIIA Briefing Paper, 82.

*bomb*".<sup>104</sup> In addition, Lula da Silva also made the comparison with Brazil, stating "*If Iran wants to enrich uranium, if it wants to handle the nuclear issue in a peaceful way like Brazil does, that is Iran's right*".<sup>105</sup>

In contrast to the isolation policy of the U.S. towards Iran, Brazil has tried to improve its relations with Iran and tried to advocate a placatory and cooperative approach towards the country.<sup>106</sup> Besides Brazil conducts a complete different policy towards Iran than the U.S., Brazil behaves assertively by openly criticizing this isolation policy of the West and advocating for dialogue: "*I told President Obama, I told President Sarkozy and I told Chancellor Angela Merkel that we will not get good things out of Iran if we corner them. You need to create space to talk*".<sup>107</sup> What is more, at a summit of Latin American leaders in 2010, Lula said, "*Peace in the world does not mean isolating someone*", followed a month later with the statement that "*it is not prudent to push Iran against a wall, the prudent thing is to establish negotiations*".<sup>108</sup>

In 2010, Brazil and Turkey made an assertive statement when they tried to solve Iran's nuclear issue by making a deal with Iran based on earlier proposals made by the P5+1.<sup>109</sup> They signed the "Tehran Declaration" with Iran on May 17, 2010, which showed that Brazil could contribute as a rising power to the solution of an important international disagreement. On top of that, with this action, Brazil communicated to the world that the country supports Iran's right to develop nuclear power for peaceful purposes. The West rejected the agreement by imposing new sanctions on Iran in the UN Security Council. This made Brazil and Turkey furious because they argued that the content of the deal was in line with the demands the US

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104 Ferrand, N. (2010, June 25). The growing concern of Brazil & Iran. The Americas Report. Retrieved June 11, 2015, from <http://www.theamericasreport.com/2010/06/25/the-growing-concern-of-brazil-iran/>

105 Brandimarte, W. (2007, September 26). Brazil's Lula defends Iran's nuclear rights. Reuters. Retrieved June 11, 2015, from <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2007/09/25/uk-iran-nuclear-lula-idUKN2536221720070925>

106 Wigell, Kurki, Archer, Kononenko, Nojonen, & Väyrynen (2011, 6)

107 Lula backs Iran's nuclear programme (2009, November 24). Aljazeera. Retrieved June 15, 2015, from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2009/11/20091123202823289828.html>

108 Brazil rebuffs US pressure for Iran sanctions (2010, March 3). BBC News. Retrieved June 15, 2015, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8547150.stm>

109 Ozkan, M. (2010). Turkey–Brazil Involvement in Iranian Nuclear Issue: What Is the Big Deal?. *Strategic Analysis*, 35(1), 26-30. P.27

described during the talks.<sup>110</sup> They decided to have themselves voiced through blocking the move of the United States to impose new sanctions on Iran in the UN Security Council (resolution 1929), saying that they “*could not have voted in any different way except against*”.<sup>111</sup> With the frustration over U.S. rejection and over the support from China and Russia of the U.S. sanctions, Brazil stated, “*It is time that in grave matters of war and peace, emerging nations have their voices heard. This will not only do justice to their credentials and abilities; it will also be better for the world*”.<sup>112</sup> Brazil has its voice heard and through blocking the U.S. sanctions it has showed the direct consequences of their assertive behaviour.<sup>113</sup>

### **2.2.5 South Africa**

South Africa’s position on Iran’s nuclear issue is quite similar to the rest of the BRICS countries. Since South Africa joined the NPT, it has always defended the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, which is evident in a statement of South Africa’s ambassador Ebrahim Mohammad Sali in 2010: “*Any signatory to the NPT reserves the right to make use of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. This is Iran’s right and no one can deprive you from your right*”.<sup>114</sup> South Africa has often challenged the West by speaking out their distrust of the unilateral West and the Western-based institutions on many occasions, while supporting a more multilateral world based on multilateral institutions. As a member of the IAEA, South Africa has resisted to refer Iran to the UN Security Council, because the country stated that the West dominates the UNSC.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, South Africa has often tried to make the UNSC sanctions against Iran less severe. For example, in March 2007 South Africa has called for a weakening of proposed sanctions against Iran and asked for a 90-day

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<sup>110</sup> Brazil vents frustration with West over Iran deal (2010, June 22). *Today’s Zaman*. Retrieved June 15, 2015, from [http://www.todayzaman.com/diplomacy\\_brazil-vents-frustration-with-west-over-iran-deal\\_213822.html](http://www.todayzaman.com/diplomacy_brazil-vents-frustration-with-west-over-iran-deal_213822.html)

<sup>111</sup> Security Council resolution 1929 (2010) [on measures against the Islamic Republic of Iran in connection with its enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research and development]. *Unbisnet*. Retrieved June 20, 2015, from <http://unbisnet.un.org:8080/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=14348729M2RU4.2085&profile=voting&uri=full=3100023~!926973~!0&ri=1&aspect=power&menu=search&source=~!horizon>

<sup>112</sup> Sauer, T. (2011). *The Emerging Powers and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Regime. Security Policy Brief 27*, September 2011.

<sup>113</sup> Hart & Jones (2010, 64)

<sup>114</sup> South Africa backs Iran nuclear right. (2010). *Islamic Republic News Agency*. Retrieved June 19, 2015, from <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/fa/145245.html>

<sup>115</sup> Jordaan, E. (2012, 291)



time out stating that this time could be used to have negotiations with Iran to find a solution for the nuclear issue, stating “*Sanctions should never be adopted in haste when other tracks for the peaceful resolution of a situation should be addressed*”.<sup>116</sup> Although the resolution was passed unanimously, South Africa showed their position as an assertive rising power, which challenges the unilateral West. The country continued with arguing that the Western dominated UNSC is not a proper place to deal with Iran’s nuclear issue and expressing the need for international action through multilateral institutions.<sup>117</sup>

In addition, South Africa also challenged the West when it worked together with Brazil and Turkey to raise objections to the U.S.’s idea to use the Additional Protocol as a condition to supply. The Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) exists of a voluntary group of states that coordinates nuclear exports, and sets up guidelines for these nuclear exports.<sup>118</sup> By doing so, the U.S. once wanted to make the Additional Protocol a condition to supply: to transfer the fuel cycle technology. However, the rising powers Brazil, Turkey and South Africa took an assertive stance and raised objections against the U.S. proposal.<sup>119</sup> They felt that the Additional Protocol condition was a new obstacle for emerging and developing countries’ ability to get access to nuclear technology.<sup>120</sup> Because of this assertive behaviour, the superpower was forced to compromise, which worked in favour of the rising powers.

### **2.2.6 The BRICS**

Since the BRICS countries are a political grouping, they are also behaving more assertively towards Iran’s nuclear issue as a group. Because the foreign policy of each BRICS country towards Iran’s nuclear issue contains similar agenda points, as we have seen in above paragraphs, the BRICS as a group can make their own nuclear proliferation agenda and thereby challenge the position of the West. In 2012, the similar agenda of the BRICS resulted in a statement of their official position on the

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<sup>116</sup> Aziaku, G. (2007, March 20). SA seeks amended UN sanctions draft on Iran. *Mail and Guardian*. Retrieved June 19, 2015, from <http://mg.co.za/article/2007-03-20-sa-seeks-amended-un-sanctions-draft-on-iran>

<sup>117</sup> Graham, P.M. (2014). South Africa. *Freedom House*. Retrieved June 19, 2015, from [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH\\_Demo\\_Reports\\_South\\_Africa\\_final.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_Demo_Reports_South_Africa_final.pdf)

<sup>118</sup> Kerr, P. K. (2012). Nuclear Energy Cooperation with Foreign Countries: Issues for Congress. DIANE Publishing. P. 10

<sup>119</sup> Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG). *NTI: building a safer world*. Retrieved June 19, 2015, from <http://www.nti.org/treaties-and-regimes/nuclear-suppliers-group-nsg/>

<sup>120</sup> Kerr, P. K. (2012, 11).

Iranian nuclear issue: *“We recognise Iran’s right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy consistent with its international obligations, and support resolution of the issues through political and diplomatic means and through dialogue between the parties concerned”*.<sup>121</sup> During the declaration, they also warned the West that the issue should not escalate, because that could have *“disastrous consequences of which will be in no one’s interest”*.<sup>122</sup> Two years earlier, during the second BRIC summit in 2010, the Foreign Minister of Brazil, Celso Amorim already stated that they have similar views on the issue, saying, *“we see great affinity with the points of view of each country”*, and *“our impression is that the effectiveness of sanctions is debatable”*.<sup>123</sup>

While the West launched a number of international counter-proliferation initiatives, the BRICS are not supportive in these non-proliferation sanctions, which they see as adverse and discriminatory. Therefore, the Brazilian President said that the BRICS would reject all the U.S. sanctions on Iran, both at present day and in the future. The sanctions the U.S. wanted to impose on Iran in 2012 could cause fluctuations in the international oil prices, which could result in supply shortages. Therefore, South Africa's Trade Minister Rob Davies similarly said: *“I think that we all broadly agree with the proposal, the terminology that was made, that if there are UN Security Council sanctions then we are all bound by that, but if there are sanctions that are imposed by other countries unilaterally, they shouldn't have to apply to us”*.<sup>124</sup> Besides the fact that the BRICS rejected the U.S. sanctions on Iran, they also tried to work around the U.S. sanctions against Iran together. For instance, the BRICS use banks outside of the global system and set up new trade agreements and energy deals with Iran.<sup>125</sup> Because the unilateral sanctions of the U.S. also had an effect on the BRICS firms, they argued that these measures are seen by them as *“an extra-territorial attempt to coerce the BRICS to apply Western policies and*

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<sup>121</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (2012, March 29). Fourth BRICS Summit - Delhi Declaration. Retrieved June 19, 2015, from <http://mea.gov.in/bilateraldocuments.htm?dtl/19158/Fourth+BRICS+Summit++Delhi+Declaration>

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Liáng jūn (2010, April 16) Brazil sees affinity with China over Iran. *English People’s Daily Online*. Retrieved June 19, 2015, from <http://en.people.cn/90001/90776/90883/6953397.html>

<sup>124</sup> BRICS: Not bound by ‘unilateral’ sanctions on Iran (2012, March 28). *RT Question more*. Retrieved on June 19, 2015, from <http://rt.com/news/brics-iran-us-sanctions-684/>

<sup>125</sup> Stuenkel, O. (2012, July 4). Could BRICS challenge the West on Iran? *Post-Western World*. Retrieved June 19, 2015, from <http://www.postwesternworld.com/2012/07/14/could-brics-challenge-the-west-on-iran/>

*preferences*".<sup>126</sup> This assertive behaviour, which entails that the BRICS refuse to imply the U.S. sanctions and also work around the imposed sanctions not only challenges the position of the West, but also shows their own (independent) agenda of nuclear non-proliferation.

During the fifth (2013) and sixth (2014) BRICS Summit in South Africa and Brazil, the BRICS position on Iran's nuclear issue was still the same. Their statements were quite similar to the other statements made previous years as well, besides that in 2013, the BRICS assertively demanded talks between the IAEA and Iran, saying "*we support resolution of the issues involved through political and diplomatic means and dialogue, including between the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Iran*".<sup>127</sup> In addition in 2014, the BRICS also highlighted their happiness about the Geneva 'Joint Plan of Action' pact between Iran and the P5+1, which was set up in November 2013 in order to work towards a long-term agreement between the U.S. and Iran.

### **2.3 BRICS ambiguous policy**

As has been analysed in above paragraphs, the BRICS interpret the NPT differently from the West, and challenge the West around Iran's nuclear issue with their assertive behaviour in order to get more influence and become a great power in a multipolar world. However, the BRICS advocate a world (and a security culture) that is not hegemonic, - they still stick to the unilateral power structures - which means that the United States has been confronted with assertive rising states that are showing their closeness with Iran, but also keep supporting the U.S. on the nuclear issue of Iran.<sup>128</sup>

Several examples demonstrate that the BRICS states indeed support the West. A case in point is the BRICS' voting behaviour in the UNSC. Although the BRICS accuse the IAEA and the UN Security Council of being unilateral and Western dominated, the BRICS countries have always (except Brazil) voted in favour of the UN Security Council resolutions, whereby sanctions would be imposed on Iran, and Iran had to suspend their enrichment program. Another example may be found in the unilateral

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126 Weitz, R. (2014, August 13). How BRICS can advance global nonproliferation agenda. Russia Direct. Retrieved June 19, 2015, from <http://www.russia-direct.org/opinion/how-brics-can-advance-global-nonproliferation-agenda>

127 Fifth BRICS Summit Declaration and Action Plan (2013, March 27). Retrieved June 19, 2015, from <http://www.brics5.co.za/fifth-brics-summit-declaration-and-action-plan/>

128 Djallil, L. (2011). China and the Iranian nuclear crisis: between ambiguities and interests. *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 10(2), 227-253. P.227

sanctions by the BRICS. The BRICS countries have argued that they do not accept the unilateral sanctions of the U.S. as being legitimate, and they stated that they would not follow these unilateral sanctions.<sup>129</sup> However, all the BRICS have reduced on their transactions with Iran. For example, under U.S. pressure, India and China reduced its acquisition of oil from Iran to get sanction waivers, and South Africa even stopped with buying crude oil from Iran.<sup>130</sup> The other BRICS have also limited some kinds of trade with Iran<sup>131</sup>. By doing this, as Pieper describes, the United States gets the feeling that these unilateral sanctions (although they are not accepted as legitimate) do help non-Western states to comply with U.S. policy and preferences.<sup>132</sup> Therefore, the unilateral sanctions, which are also followed by the BRICS to a certain extent, are an utterance of hegemonic power structures.<sup>133</sup>

The reason for the ambiguous policy of the BRICS is their dependence of the hegemon, both materially and politically.<sup>134</sup> For example, China and India need Iranian crude oil supplies, therefore they purchase oil from Iran and increase their relationship with the country. However, they are careful with the sanctions the United States has set out, since they do not want to get in a dispute with the West. India is afraid that the improvement of the relationship with Iran would undermine the strategic partnership it has with the U.S., and China is afraid that it would harm the commercial relations between China and the U.S. and Middle East.<sup>135</sup> This leads to an ambiguous policy in which China and India on the one hand enhance relationships with Iran, but on the other hand stay at the right side of the U.S. and avoid sanctions by reducing the amount of crude oil they buy from Iran. Russia is also flexible and does (sometimes) comply with the U.S. approaches towards Iran, which became apparent when they did not deliver the S-300 defence system to Iran as a result of the ‘reset-policy’ of the U.S. and Russia.<sup>136</sup> The Iranian nuclear crisis is about power politics and the changing world order by which the United States’ power as a hegemon is declining and that of the rising powers is increasing. Because a

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<sup>129</sup> Pieper, M. (2014). Chinese, Russian, and Turkish Policies in the Iranian Nuclear Dossier: Between Resistance to Hegemony and Hegemonic Accommodation. *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, 2(1), 17. P21

<sup>130</sup> Cordesman, Gold and Coughlin-Schulte (2014, 72)

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Pieper (2014, 23)

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Pieper (2014, 18)

<sup>135</sup> Burton, G. (2015). Pulling Their Punches: BRIC Foreign Policies in the Middle East. In *Great Powers and Geopolitics*. Springer International Publishing. P.218

<sup>136</sup> Pieper (2014, 26)

completely alternative international order (in which the world is not unipolar anymore) is not present yet, the BRICS' ambiguous foreign policy is the result of their strategic balancing between opposition against and accommodation of the hegemon.

## Conclusion

With the emergence of the rising powers in the twenty-first century, the world is slowly changing from unipolarity to multipolarity. How multipolarity will arrive depends on how the rising powers want to be in the new international system, how they will use their enhanced power and what their goals are. Therefore, the behaviour of the rising powers is determinative for the future of international politics. This thesis looked at the assertive behaviour of five rising states, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (the BRICS). The BRICS convergence on certain agendas and their growing assertiveness and influence in global issues is striking. This is not only noticeable in the fields of climate change, humanitarian interventions or at institutions like the WTO, but is also noticeable at the Iranian nuclear issue.

In order to fully understand the behaviour of the BRICS countries in the context of their assertive behaviour, this thesis employed a case study on the BRICS' assertive behaviour towards Iran's nuclear issue, questioning: *Why, how and to what degree do the BRICS behave more assertively towards Iran's nuclear issue?*

The Iranian nuclear issue provides an opportunity for the BRICS to assertively show their independence of the West and advocate their multipolar world objective. In the end, the nuclear issue is not really about nuclear weapons, but it is about whether the United States can uphold its role as a leader. The West is having issues with Iran over a number of things, and they are afraid that Iran could threaten Western interests. Therefore, the U.S. policy towards Iran's nuclear issue is a way to maintain their dominance. Iran's fight against nuclear proliferation on the other hand, together with the BRICS assertive behaviour in this issue, can be seen as efforts to challenge Western hegemony, and a way to assert their independence of the West.

As was shown in the individual analysis, the BRICS countries behave individually and as a group assertively towards Iran's nuclear issue. For example, they are drawing red lines on the Western approaches and policies towards Iran and their unilateral interpretation of the NPT through disapproving all of the unilateral (non-UN) sanctions and disapproving the excessive pressure on Iran, calling for negotiations on the basis of dialogue and cooperation, emphasizing Iran's right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, moving on slowly, object or even vote against UN sanctions, and warning against violations on the sovereignty of Iran.

But the degree to which the BRICS behave more assertively and independently is debatable. Despite the fact that the U.S. has been confronted with

assertive rising states that are showing their closeness with Iran, they also keep supporting the U.S. on the nuclear issue of Iran. This means that although the BRICS disapprove the unilateral behaviour of the West and behave assertively in international politics to advocate their multipolar world objective, the BRICS do not fundamentally challenge the unilateral power structures right now. The reason for the ambiguous policy of the BRICS is their political and material dependence of the hegemon. Iran's nuclear issue is about power politics, and the BRICS' ambiguous foreign policy is the result of their strategic balancing between opposition against and accommodation of the United States. The U.S.' power is declining, but a completely alternative international order is not present yet. For now, as the case of the Iranian nuclear issue shows, the BRICS will maintain their 'accommodation of the hegemon' policy as long as the United States is the most powerful country.

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