Review of International Studies (2010), 36, 877–879 © *2010 British International Studies Association*
doi:10.1017/S0260210510001348

Introduction: special section on regional powers in a changing global order

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World politics is characterised by the coexistence of two clearly discernable and somewhat contradictory forces. On the one hand we have the continued and pervasive influence of a number of major powers, such as the US, the EU, and Japan, whose ability to shape outcomes is by no means diminished, and which may receive an additional impetus with the emergence of a new and energetic leadership in Washington, DC. On the other hand, we are also witnessing the rise of so-called 'emerging powers'. States such as China, Russia, Brazil, India, Mexico, South Africa, Venezuela and others are increasingly assertive in their demands that they should have a place at the tables where decisions affecting the world are made. These demands are backed by their growing economic and political significance on the regional, continental, and global levels.

Not only are the emerging regional powers demanding more voice in international affairs, whole regions feel that their demands are not sufficiently represented on the global agenda. They demand a regional power shift with regards to the global governance institutions that partly reflects a power shift in the material basis of the international order. On the one hand, a region like Asia, would like to see its growing weight in the international economic order to be reflected in global decision making. On the other hand, regions like Africa or the Arab countries may fear that their interests may be sub-represented in the emerging global order. So the rising regional powers are expected to articulate not only their own specific interest in global governance institutions but also the interests of the corresponding regions.

The revisionist aspirations of emerging powers, and the rekindling of conference diplomacy under the influence of a revitalised US administration, contribute to a sense that the architecture and output of global governance is changing dramatically, and that this change will continue for a considerable time. This change affects traditional institutions of the Bretton Woods system such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as well as more informal institutions like the G8 meetings. Emerging powers have created their own coordination forums such as the India–Brazil–South Africa 'trilateral development initiative' or the recently institutionalised BRIC-summit meeting comprising of Brazil, Russia, India and China. Emerging powers have been invited to G8 meetings and the prospect looms of a regular, coordinated process of consultation between the G8 and a growing number of these emerging powers on matters ranging from climate change and the global food crisis on the one hand, to measures to get multilateral trade talks back on track on the other. In addition, emerging powers are vocal and increasingly influential in the G20 group of major economies tasked with the challenge of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001348 Published online by Cambridge University Press

coordinating and monitoring individual and collective attempts to reverse the global recession. At the same time, as members of the G20+ of developing nations they have challenged the EU and the US during the course of the current round of World Trade Organization global trade negotiations.

The emergence of alternative sources of ultimate power in world affairs and a reconfiguration of the practice and institutions of multilateral governance pose a number of questions: Will this emergence lead to more inter-state conflict as power-transition theories suggest, or will the emerging powers become fully socialised into and coopted by the norms and practices of the 'Western' international society as presided over by the US, the EU, and Japan? What effects will the diffusion of power have on the effectiveness and sustainability of existing and to-be-formed global regimes? How will the emergence of the regional leaders/hegemons/powers affect the prospects of peace and the provision of other public goods within their region? Will the diffusion of power lead to a redistribution of the resources, opportunities, and benefits of the global economy?

This special section of the *Review of International Studies* is inspired by the belief that these questions have not received the analytical attention that they deserve, despite the burgeoning literature on regionalism and regional dynamics in world politics. As the Introduction to a recent special number of RIS states, 'Regions, regionalism and regionalisation matter. While globalisation secures much attention in the study of world politics, scholars of regionalism see regions as the fundamental, even driving force of world politics.'[1] While we agree wholeheartedly with this comment, we suggest that one further dimension of the world-political importance of regions should not be overlooked, namely that in almost all cases regions provide the *locus standi* that enable emerging powers to stake and protect their claims on the global stage. It is on the basis of their identification with and preponderance within a region, and their willingness to provide at least some of the public goods on which the region's cohesion and well-being depends, that emerging powers are *emerging*. Emerging powers, we suggest, tend to be regional leaders or are at least aspiring to regional leadership. Of course, being embedded in a region can be both an enabling and constraining factor. It is also possible that tension can exist between the type of role that a regionally-embedded emerging power wants to play on the global stage and its role as a leader/hegemon in its region. This is especially noticeable in terms of emerging powers from the developing world who have set themselves the task of revising the rules and practices of global governance in favour of their and their allies' interests.

We as yet do not dispose of adequate analytical tools and frameworks to define regional powers, and to study their strategies at the regional level as well as their influence on the regional governance structures and dominance patterns. There is also a shortage of analytical instruments for the analysis of the interplay between the global and the regional projections of regional powers. The articles[2] brought

[1] Rick Fawn, '"Regions" and their study: wherefrom, what for and whereto?', *Review of International Studies*, 35 (2009), p. 5.

[2] All the articles, except Sandra Destradi's, build on presentations delivered at the First Conference of the Regional Powers Network, Hamburg, Germany (15–16 September 2008), {http://www.giga-hamburg.de/english/index.php?file=rpn.conferences.html&folder=rpn}. The original proceedings of the Conference have been published as *Regional Leadership in the Global System: Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, ed. Daniel Flemes (Ashgate, 2010).

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together in this special section propose a variety of conceptual, analytical, and methodological tools to start filling these gaps. These tools are intended to assist with the analysis of strategies used by emerging powers in their regional contexts, but also with appreciating and evaluating their role as pivotal, and potentially revisionist states at the intersection between the global and regional order. The content of the different articles of this section will be summarised in the first article which gives a broader introduction to the study of regional powers.

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