

BUCERIUS SUMMER SCHOOL ON GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

13 -25 August 2017

Emerging Powers and Global Governance

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[*this version, October 2017*]

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights and discusses three riddles inherent to emerging countries' attitudes towards the existing Global Governance (GG) network. The riddles address, respectively, a contradiction related to the decaying aspect of the order, a lack of perception about the shifting centre of world power and the heterogenous views emerging countries hold on many key GG instances.

An additional section elaborates on the influences of the disparities within the far from homogenous 'emerging countries group', singling out the main role China has been and will continue to play. It also compares their attempts with one of the main lines of reform debated since the first period of the French Revolution, by introducing the idea of The Saint-Just Curse.

The three riddles place great uncertainty on the true meaning and efficacy of the efforts by emerging countries at changing or transforming the existing GG. Moreover, the disturbance to the previous statements, due to the presence of the unique emerging group actor which is China, further complicates the analysis. Finally, a common feature of all attempts, The Saint Just Curse, signals a lack of creativity by the group.

Summing up, under the light of the arguments here developed, it is not at all sure that the needed re-shaping of the present GG will be a major outcome of the emerging countries international role.

1. Introduction: Three Riddles.

Global Governance (GG) has nowadays manifold and oftentimes unsuspected forms of influence and control, some debatable, others dearly needed. Institutions like the IMF or the WTO, or the COP – Conference of the Parties and its scientific arm, the IPCC - International Panel on Climate Change, may immediately come to mind when talking about the subject: namely those referring specifically to world economic managing and regulation, or the present climate debate.

Sticking to the global commons, many other realms of international interaction need wise GG measures, to ensure a smooth operation of daily activities. Air and maritime transportation, as well as legal regimes on the sea in general, together with those for the space and the electro-magnetic spectrum and the web galaxy are examples where highly technical instances intertwine with the political objectives and capabilities of the different nations. From broad codes of conduct and procedures -many cared for by the United Nations- to deal with specific tasks and responsibilities, under episodes of war, to the planning, co-ordination and organisation of planetary football events -under the questionable responsibility of FIFA (*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*)-, GG touches areas that cannot be dissociated from normal life in every country on earth, even if in a more, or less friendly or invasive way.

It is a current *cliché* that the basic structure and determinant vectors of this encompassing hierarchical network, rather than architecture, had its original outline at the end of World War II, being subsequently developed under the direct supervision and control of the US, the hegemonic power which -together with different allies, conditional on the circumstances- forged the existing GG.

I do not intend to discuss here neither the role of the hegemon nor whether it made a good or bad job out of its responsibilities. The manifold details and ways to evaluate the existing order are not the objective of this panel. What matters here is that, today, after full seventy years of construing and living within this GG framework -which naturally evolved

along this time- there is a generalised consensus that the system is outdated and in need of change. But it is exactly at this present juncture point that the problems and confusion arise.

Many different voices pledge for their own, most favourable solutions, while the boldest controllers of the existing network, the hegemon foremost, struggle to keep likely changes under control.

The issue of the reform of the UN-Security Council provides a good example of the complexities inherent to any transformation. Candidates, both from emerging (Brazil, India) and developed (Germany, Japan) countries, faced support and opposition from select Council members -where two emerging countries sit (China and Russia)- while striving to bind alliances with nations outside the Council, particularly regional neighbours, whose behaviour proved unexpected in several cases. As Foucault¹ reminded us, power, however emanating from a central focus -like the hegemon, in our case-, inevitably distributes itself among other actors who, depending on the situation, may exert considerable influence or damage.

In spite of this state of flux, that gives way to different aggregations of the elements who fight for a new order, there remains a sense in discussing the position of the so-called group of emerging countries. If one tries to do this, one will identify three main riddles in the common aspects -let's assume they exist- they bring forward to international fora and high tables. My purpose here is to highlight and discuss these riddles, what I do in the next three sections.

Section 5 elaborates on the influences of the disparities within the far from homogenous 'emerging countries group'. It also roughly compares their attempts with one of the main lines of reform debated during the first period of the French Revolution; what leads to the concept of the Saint-Just curse.

¹ French philosopher Michel Foucault extensively studied the relationship between power and knowledge, producing original insights on the distribution of power within a given society and how different agents, beyond the hegemon (in our words), can capture or grab instances of power. Though his analyses are directed toward the self and corporal/body relationships, some can be fruitfully applied in the international relations setting. Foucault (2001) is a collection of his works (in English) that shows they are not too far from our concerns.

A final section concludes on a not very positive note as regards an effective role of emerging countries in changing the present GG status.

2. The First Riddle: to destroy or not to destroy, that's a non-trivial question.

There is near unanimity, in all official statements of emerging countries leaders, or in their several specific groupings -like the BRICS, or the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation, for instance- that *emerging countries, in principle, do not want to destroy the existing order, but to change it from within*. Examples abound, the BRICS offering several of them; indeed, the whole narrative underlining the discussions around the BRICS Development Bank provides many emblematic instances. Also, the Chinese, on the road to the creation of the AIIB–Asia International Infrastructure Bank -which eventually engaged significant developed (Western) economies-, oftentimes repeated the same guiding principle.

International finance, investment and infrastructure promotion, digital economy developments, world technology flows are indeed major though not exclusive areas where this apparently constructive objective is persistently hailed.

Nevertheless, as signalled in the Introduction, this very order they want to change from the inside is either falling into pieces or being eroded by a new reality to which it is, in many aspects, completely alien.

Does then their often-announced strategy make sense? What is really needed: “change from within” or radical change? Destroy in a creative way, or infiltrate in existing, decaying or already bluntly inadequate institutions more representatives from emerging countries? Duplicate, through the creation of several *doppelgänger*, a parallel, mirror-image order, just to say that they have full control of the latter?

These are questions that must be addressed if one wants to seriously think about reform, even from within. The answers will depend on the true objectives set by the group. If the goal is to acquire more visibility in general, or more voice -in Hirschman (1970)'s

sense- in the international arena, as some BRICS intellectuals pose, then some of the above strategies may make sense. But this has nothing to do -may even be orthogonal to- with reforming or changing the present GG architecture.

The example of the international banks is enlightening. Though it is still too early to evaluate the New Development Bank, hasn't it been nearly faithfully reproducing the behavioural and procedures pattern of the World Bank, only with a portfolio of projects targeted to a somewhat different and more concentrated regional realm? Isn't the AIIB ultimately a clever soft power tool for China, exactly as the World Bank has been for the hegemon?

Are we talking about change or control shift? Change or transformation, or rather translations of governance and scope of influence, preserving the same *Gestalt*?

Properly addressing this riddle would be beneficial for developing countries, perhaps opening to them the scope of available transforming power they may have, and not necessarily from within.

3. The Second Riddle: a mismatch of relevance.

Kishore Mahbubani² has been one of most stalwart heralds that geographic relevance in the planet, under the economic, population and world influence metrics, has been steadily shifting to the East, while the Western cocoon of developed nations -the hegemon included- very slowly flounders; with many of them either unaware or refusing to accept this ever clearer major trend.

If we look at the perhaps top three crude measures of capitalist importance: effective demand/consumption, total output/production, and creative destruction, it is in Asia that they are progressively assuming a foremost position.

² Among many always lively and compelling texts, Mahbubani (2008) is an emblematic one.

Sceptics raise the enormous disparities and lack of adequate infrastructure in India, the always delicate balance between freedom and effective political and economic governance in China, the dire structural problems in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, and many other shortcomings as proof that Mahbubani and many fellow analysts are wrong. Others claim that this blunt assertion forgets a potentially booming Africa³ -and its plethora of natural endowments- and even the American continent below the Rio Grande.

These are wrong counter arguments. Asian problems may slow somewhat developments, and even pose real trouble to some of them, but are unable to deter a dynamics that, unavoidably led by China, is already in full motion. Other regions will not lose their significance but, for many reasons -and mostly constraints- their time has not arrived yet.

Acceptance of this fact inevitably leads to the corollary that changes in the GG structure, in their varied outcomes, will inevitably incorporate this trend. However, emerging countries -perhaps too much absorbed by their concern with the Western powers- excel in conducting policies, or pledging for transformations that do not account for this major evolution.

The fact that two among its leading drivers, China and India, are in this region may nuance such a mistake. But this perhaps turns the riddle into a conundrum, as both do not share the same world views and nurture different visions and desires about their access to and behaviour in the high tables. The Shanghai Co-operation Organisation, a Chinese endeavour where India since 2017 also fully stands⁴, may signal to an innovative, and at least accommodating initiative within the present situation.

Many emerging countries lie however outside Asia, and taking the group as a whole it is worrying to see the lack of concern with this relevant fact. Results are thus a sad evidence of a mismatch between the efforts directed to the GG debate and the sometimes sheer absence of those incorporating such a main, crucial trend.

³ As implicitly (or explicitly) suggested in Moyo (2009), for instance.

⁴ Together with Pakistan, it must be highlighted.

4. The Third Riddle: *confusión de confusiones*.

Any governance structure is the outcome of different purposes, objectives, desires, and pursuits of several actors who, in principle, know what they want. How can a fragmented, divided group, like emerging countries, uphold a position in this fierce, absolute power debate?

The example of the China-India pair was briefly mentioned in the previous section; it suffices to add any new member to it and the possibility of divergence increases, be it South Africa, Colombia, Indonesia, Mexico or Brazil. In my country, in particular, the present state of flux in the domestic politics -something not necessarily akin to emerging countries themselves- makes it debatable to extract or rather identify a position towards most of the themes of the GG debate. Not that all those nations actively involved in this debate have a clear idea of their goals, uncontested in their respective domestic arenas, but the point is that the state of confusion, and sheer disagreement is much more acute among emerging countries themselves, be it for their regional and neighbourhood constraints, expectations of profitable alliances with specific Western (developed) constituencies or targeted micro-power goals.

The BRICS, independently of the many criticisms directed against them, continue to be a significant example of a kind of union -sometimes very loose, other times rather focussed- that may provide a clue on how to aggregate emerging countries preferences without aiming at total, universal agreement. In a more practical, though more ambitious mode, the afore mentioned Shanghai Co-operation Organisation may become another successful format. The discreet, much older, and not unfrequently lambasted ASEAN also deserves deeper attention and analysis; its much-criticised absence of powerful institutions and clout, in general, may be one of the secrets of its survival;

Nevertheless, something like a Wallace line⁵ in international politics delineates a huge and deep gap between the however successful and innovative experiments above from

⁵ The Wallace Line, drawn by the British biologist Alfred Russel Wallace, is an intellectual construct. The line separates the isle of Bali from that of Lombok (in nowadays Indonesia), continuing northwards to separate Borneo from Sulawesi. It is a brilliant hypothesis to explain why the fauna to the left of the line is

any effective measure transforming the present GG. Without a substantial reduction in the evident *confusión de confusiones*, the latter seems a hard achievement for the set of emerging countries.

5. A Double Sensitivity Analysis: China and the Saint-Just Curse.

China

It might be argued that, behind the three riddles above lies the assumption that emerging countries should bring forward a common stance to the GG debate. As implied by other statements in this paper, GG change could either be the progressive outcome of a complex, adaptive process, or of radical, sometimes disruptive, propositions. Neither possibility requires a unified position from the community of emerging nations. Notwithstanding, thinking of this community as a bloc helps in identifying common features -be they assets, liabilities or riddles- that may be of value when analysing the several individual positions.

Symmetrically, despite their divergences, developed economies like, whenever possible, to present or fight for their requirements in the GG network from a joint, unified position, something that strengthens any standpoint.

There are however disturbances to this model in both sides, and in the case at stake China represents the most serious one.

China is powerful, is the most credible competitor to the present hegemon -though being by no means clear what kind of hegemon it wants to become-, has financial resources, and knows quite well its objectives and how they unravel along the timeline. It then follows

so different from that at its right -where Australia lies-, despite the whole area having been a continuum during the Ice Age. The line thus traces exactly a trajectory along a sort of channel where the depths were so high -and sometimes still full of water- to discourage the crossing from one land mass (islands, nowadays) to the other, their closeness notwithstanding. The rather unique ancestral fauna of Australia, was one of the riddles partially solved by the line (together with its earlier separation of (and isolation from) the Southeast Asia mass).

that, even when trying to not do so, it ends up by leading or rather, framing many of the attempts of their fellow emerging countries in the GG debate. It is a central power in Asia - to where global power is shifting, largely thanks to it- and a main creator of the parallel institutions we've mentioned before.

Nobody knows the ultimate *Gestalt* of the desired Chinese global order -and much less, when it shall be apparent-, but nobody doubts that they will not deviate much from their goals, adherence to the emerging countries group being always contrasted against the gains and deviations from their own project.

This, for sure, nuances, and complicates, the status of the three riddles.

Saint-Just

During the early nineties discussions in the *Assemblée Nationale* and, after, at the *Convention*, in the fervent times of the eighteenth century French Revolution, Louis Antoine Léon de Saint-Just became famous for his fight for institutions for the new republic, the guarantors -rather than a rigid law system- of the true libertarian spirit of the new times. In an extreme viewpoint -shared also with the Marquis de Sade-, Saint-Just clearly advocated: the existence of more laws than institutions leads to monarchy and despotism, while more institutions than laws make for the republic⁶.

It is either surprising or deceiving -depending on the standpoint- that this debate remains, to a certain extent, open. In International Relations theory, and giving due account to the unavoidable evolution of concepts -even those of institutions themselves-, all schools under the institutionalism umbrella still share some points with Saint-Just's perceptions.

It is also curious that, all pursuits where the three riddles have been or may be identified are concerned with institutions; their reform "from within" or they replacement -unfortunately, by a mirror entity.

⁶ Antoine de Saint-Just's formulation can be found in his writings *Institutions Républicaines*, published in 1800, after his death in the guillotine (1794), and reprinted, for instance, in Saint-Just (2003). [The Marquis de Sade ideas are interspersed in his curious works, perhaps not the kind of books usually in the reading list of international relations or public policy university courses. *Juliette (ou Les Prospérités du Vice)* - available in the net, together with other texts of the Marquis, at www.sade-ecrivain.com- is particularly informative on his views about the above point (which, it must be warned, are further elaborated and developed into his peculiar world outlook). His ideas have inspired numerous authors in philosophy and psychoanalysis, though, apparently till now, none in politics or public policy...]

No emerging country has come with an innovative idea, not even a modest and not too disruptive one like regionalising GG units. I do not pledge for a return of the laws versus institutions late eighteenth century debate, but what about reducing -not transforming- the number of existing institutions and combining them with bottom-up initiatives, by organised groups of the world society? Initiatives that could start in a country or group of countries and then, through NGOs, professional associations or segments of the productive sector -or equivalent groupings with a given, strong communality- be spread to the whole planet, or at least relevant parts, as regards the phenomenon at stake?⁷

It is mystifying to register the lack of creative re-arrangements or new alternatives to the decaying GG by the emerging countries themselves, a group where new energies and concepts, together with economic predominance, should precisely emerge.

6. Conclusion.

We have outlined three riddles that place great uncertainty on the true meaning and efficacy of the attempts by emerging countries at changing or transforming the existing GG.

Moreover, in a subsequent section, we raised two issues related to this analysis.

One has to do with a disturbance to the previous statements, due to the presence of a unique actor in the emerging group which is China. The other is a common feature of all attempts described, which we have called The Saint Just Curse, that signals a lack of creativity by the group.

Summing up, evidences up to now, under the light of the arguments here developed, do not assure that the needed transformation of the present GG will be a major outcome of the emerging countries international role.

⁷ Advocacy on this or similar kinds of approach, in the climate governance debate, can be found in Drummond and Flôres (2014), Flôres (2016) and Keohane and Victor (2015).

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