

## Copenhagen's New Strategic Geography:

### 'Stormy weather' on road to 2011?

*"We need a new brand of climate-change diplomacy to unlock a global settlement. South Africa can and must lead the charge in this, based on our impeccable ability to reconcile competing and conflicting agendas and world views."<sup>1</sup>*

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As South Africa prepares for its hosting of the UNFCCC climate negotiations in 2011, it is instructive to revisit the highly contentious politics of the Copenhagen talks and its prognosis for Mexico. Additionally, given that 2010 is the United Nations Year of Biodiversity and China has declared this the 'Year of the Tiger,' there may be something to said for looking beyond politics and the 'geopolitics of politics' on climate change to actual initiatives that might be undertaken by South Africa. But, if South Africa is to come out of 2011 better than Denmark came out of hosting Copenhagen, a political analysis of that negotiation's multiple dynamics is in order. The Copenhagen climate talks of 2009 was about much more than climate change. There were multiple 'national interest' agendas in play at the talks and summit that spoke to a much larger global 'big picture': namely the reordering of power in the international system; the chaotic unfolding of a multipolar post-Western order.

#### Deciphering the politics of 'hopelesshagen'

The post-mortems on Copenhagen were almost uniformly down-beat. In South Africa, *The Sunday Independent* ended 2009 on an editorial note of 'hopelesshagen' in describing the outcome of the summit in Denmark. Among other misfortunes, the Danish kingdom had the dubious honour of hosting an opening chapter in a titanic 'G2' tug-of-war between emerging global power China and incumbent hyperpower, America; between Washington's newly minted history-making black president, Barack Obama who literally had to 'elbow' his way toward the 'Copenhagen Accord' and China's wiley veteran, Premier Wen Jiabao. Indeed, had Premier Wen had his way in snubbing and manoeuvring around President Obama, 'hopelesshagen' would have spelled Obama's political Waterloo in more ways than one. Without the Copenhagen Accord and his eleventh hour role in forcing issues, he would have gone back to Washington essentially as a 'lame duck' reflection of the very 'weakness' that his right-wing opponents are eager to pin on him.

Indeed, Obama's rude awakening from his over-reaching outreach diplomacy, compliments of China in the wake of his Beijing visit (which was carefully stage-managed by the Chinese to an unprecedented degree compared to past U.S. presidential visit to China) set in train what was to become a downward spiral in bilateral Sino-U.S. relations. Yet, the U.S.-China tiff in Denmark was but the tip of the iceberg of dynamics in play at the summit. As such, for South Africa's purposes, there is a need to try and unpack, not only the political dynamics of Copenhagen, but the new structure of global power relationships emanating out the crucible of its deliberations.

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The perceived stratification of power reflected in Copenhagen was first described by this author in an op-ed article appearing in the January 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of *The Sunday Independent* under the heading "A new world order is ushered in." Complementary analyses of the politically restructuring implications of Copenhagen that reached similar conclusions include an article penned immediately on the heels of Copenhagen by Indian analyst Pallavi Aiyar titled "UN Climate meet showed the old North-South divide outdated" and "Copenhagen changed the political climate" by assistant professor of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, Jian Junbo. None of these analyses, however (including this author's *Sunday Independent* op-ed), provide the extent of in-depth political analysis on Copenhagen that this seminal gathering deserves. Nevertheless, they do more or less, taken together, summarise the essential outlines of what might be considered 'the next phase' in international politics on the road to multipolarity.

What they share in common is acknowledgement of an essentially two-tiered structure of power with a de facto, but tension fraught, Sino-American 'G-2' at the apex of a broader 'emerging powers' phalanx of greater and lesser non-Western state actors. The common denominators among this broader echelon are 'the three amigos' of China, India and Brazil; a trinity accompanied by either Russia in BRIC or South Africa in Copenhagen's improvised 'BASIC' which, looked at another way, can be viewed as IBSA+China. This, indeed, may be at the expense of the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Trilateral Dialogue Forum – and South Africa's interest about which more is said later. Otherwise, into this league of 'emerging' economies are others represented in the G-20, the status of which has superseded the predominantly Western-cum-European-dominated G-7/8. Given the admittedly unsatisfactory outcome of Copenhagen in which the European Union (EU) had to take a back seat, these new power line-ups underline the continuing, though diminished, leadership of the U.S. in tandem with what one author has dubbed 'The New Powers.'<sup>2</sup>

Thus, falling back on *The Sunday Independent* op-ed, the unsatisfactory outcome of Copenhagen confirmed Europe's relative decline coming on the heels of the EU's selection of barely visible personalities as its president and foreign affairs chief. Europe became almost as marginalised as the developing world's G77; the G77, however, making a major bid to influence Copenhagen's outcome.<sup>3</sup> This was attempted in the person of one who came to be viewed as a proxy of Beijing (given China's alignment with the G77) in the Sudanese delegation's Lumumba d'Aping; d'Aping having been chosen to speak on behalf of this developing countries grouping comprising a large number of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small-Island States. D'Aping's rhetorical over-kill, however, along side the militant obstructionism of the Latin American Bolivarian caucus

led by Venezuelan President Cesar Hugo Chavez appeared to backfire on them and on their benefactor, China; making it appear that Beijing was a behind the scenes divisive factor in promoting obstruction. For much of the developing world, the Copenhagen Accord, as a political outcome to fight another day, was better than nothing even as many felt that no accord was better than a bad accord. Here, realist pragmatism won out over maximalist positions except for the Latin American Bolivarians.

From the perspective of Chinese analyst Jian Junbo, "the fledgling international order seen emerging from Copenhagen is one dominated by groupings such as the informal G-2, and the BASIC, BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and Group of 20 (G-20) countries."<sup>4</sup> Indian analyst Pallavi Aiyar saw this emergence as exemplifying "how the geostrategic contours of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are shifting," albeit a shifting of contours that are in flux but nevertheless, clearly discernable: "The shaping and breaking of old and new alliances, and the multiple centres of power that the Copenhagen talks wound around, heralded the emergence of the kind of multipolar world that could have scarcely been imagined a decade ago."<sup>5</sup> In Aiyar's view, "the greatest loser of the new strategic geography is Europe," an assessment echoed by Junbo.<sup>6</sup> He noted that "although they are often considered as key players and pioneers in preventing climate change, the influence of Europe and developed countries like Japan was seen as diminished" along with "the voice and influence of smaller countries in Africa and Latin America."<sup>7</sup>

Such an assessment begs questions about the role of G77+China Lumumba d'Aping and the allied Bolivarians which, ostensibly was to advance the influence of these smaller states. Furthermore, Junbo's assessment of the diminished influence of the LDCs may be additionally reinforced by his contention that "another actor which lost influence in Copenhagen was the United Nations itself."<sup>8</sup> This certainly seems the case in light of perceptions that the UNFCCC framework may be too unwieldy to accommodate such complex negotiations involving so many UN member states, and the reason why Copenhagen splintered into a multiplicity of 'behind closed door' small groupings. This, in turn, resulted in the opening up of a trust deficit, especially in the wake of the U.S.-BASIC improvisational encounter giving rise to the Copenhagen Accord. Between BASIC on the one hand and the Bolivarians on the other, the global South cohesion of the developing countries within the G77+China came under severe strain. This occurrence is something that the Africa Group, and especially Tshwane-Pretoria, needs to seriously factor into the 2011 preparatory calculus in terms of how relations with developed countries are navigated.

In what has always tended to be a Euro-American show at global negotiations, Copenhagen underlined the need for a reconceptualising of the terms of multipolarity in what Vi-

yar's calls "the new strategic geography."<sup>9</sup> For one thing, the global power distribution has never been a truly 'unipolar' as popularly conceived but, rather, 'uni-multipolar' in the conception of the late Samuel Huntington (of better known 'Clash of Civilizations' fame).<sup>10</sup> Collectively, U.S.-BASIC represents the emergence of a deracialized default vanguard anchored in the G-20 in an increasingly diffuse distribution of power in world politics. Europe's relative decline is not the only indicator. The widening cleavage within the global South between the 'emerging economic powers' led, at Copenhagen, by the BASIC four (extending to some members of the 17-nation Major Economies Forum like Indonesia, including a 'major emitters forum') on the one hand and the less and least developed countries (LDCs) on the other makes for the blurring of North-South polarity; a binary further diminished by the increasing currency of a U.S.-China 'G-2.' This is in spite of Beijing's discomfort with such a notion and how it undermines its preferred identity as a 'developing country.' Pallavi Aiyar underlines this point.

He stresses that, while "all poles are equal, some, *or more precisely two*, are more equal than others."<sup>11</sup> (italics added) In elaborating, he points out: "At the climate talks, there may have been the G77, the Umbrella Group (of the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand), the Aosis (Association of small island states), the LDCs (least developed countries) and the BASIC group, but over and above all these alliances, there was a G-2 universally acknowledged as holding the keys to any deal, comprising the US and China."<sup>12</sup> Thus has Beijing unwittingly manoeuvred itself into a very un-SunTzu-like corner, it's apparent double-gaming at Copenhagen was seen by some as a major factor sharpening divisions among developing countries wherein China might actually be considered an 'ex-officio' member of the obstructionists. Hence China's need to tread carefully between its putative emerging global power status, yet insistence on being classed as a 'developing country.'

By insisting on this identity within the G77+China, Beijing seeks to avoid sharing responsibility and burdens with industrialized countries in the North-South politics of redress which dictates substantial resources transfers to the South to assist developing countries in combating the worst effects of global warming. Indeed, this must be mandatory on any global governance agenda supported by Africa as it is the most vulnerable region of the world to this threat amid an exploding population that will see it reach 2 billion by 2050 (outstripping both China and India). Jian Junbo, in his analysis, candidly confirms Beijing's 'developing country' motives: "As a developing country, China wants to be involved in international affairs without burdening itself with too many responsibilities" which is why it is so uncomfortable with Barack Obama's attempt to foist upon it a G-2 "partnership."<sup>13</sup> Junbo continues: "A formal G-2 framework would present China with too much account-

ability, while rules would be constructed by the US" – or, he could have added, jointly by Washington and Beijing.<sup>14</sup>

If, however, China would like to evade co-responsibility with the U.S. and hide behind it from accountability, it seems that India wanted to similarly hide behind China – that is, up to a point as it has now joined South Africa and Brazil in formally associating with the Copenhagen Accord.<sup>15</sup> Indeed China followed suit right on the heels of India less it find itself isolated within BASIC and more broadly within the politics of climate change diplomacy; but also the fact that there is an apparent Sino-Indian agenda distinct from that of South Africa and Brazil. Also, in essence, BASIC would have reverted back to IBSA had China not followed suit in associating with the accord. In any case, India's appears to have been a successful strategy at Copenhagen as China took all the flak even as India, according to some reports, was just as resistant to binding accountability and responsibility as Beijing.

Aiyar views India's strategy as having been "to clearly pin its colours to the China mast. As Indian minister for environment Jairam Ramesh repeatedly boasted, India and China were meeting up to six times a day to coordinate their negotiating positions" though Aiyar hastens to add that "while India may be part of BASIC, New Delhi would do well to keep it in mind that it is not part of the G-2."<sup>16</sup> Otherwise, it "suited China well to have the backing of other emerging economies like India and Brazil in the context of the climate conference. Without this support, Beijing would have been isolated and found it considerably harder to position itself as the spokesperson for the developing world."<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, Aiyar's conclusion is telling. From the vantage-point of Delhi, he observes that "whether or not the India-China strategic alliance on climate translates into any longer term partnership remains an open question. What is more clear is that the UN conference has demonstrated how the line dividing [sic] the world into North and South, rich and poor, is no longer straightforward or even appropriate. Between these two poles, there is now a distinct core of countries in the 'centre.' As Ramesh has taken to saying, 'BASIC is a basic reality.' India has chosen to count itself in that centre, a choice that clearly unhinges it from the South. It is also a choice, the consequences of which will be difficult to undo, going forward."<sup>18</sup> The forgoing synergies between Aiyar and Junbo in their analysis of Copenhagen's implications for how international politics are being reconfigured begs urgent questions for South Africa as a member of the BASIC 'centre' as it contemplates its role in 2011. There are a number of issues that Tshwane-Pretoria must sort out, not the least of which is how it strategically positions itself within the fluidities of this 'new strategic geography.'

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### South Africa's predicament

If BASIC is the new 'centre' in the post-Copenhagen politics of climate change, and India along with China and Brazil place themselves in that 'centre,' then South Africa might well constitute the 'the centre of the centre' in the proverbial and uncomfortable sense of being 'caught in the middle'; caught betwixt and between three sets of geopolitical-economic and environmental contradictions: the emerging economic 'big powers' among its BASIC allies, China and India especially; the traditional developed country powers of the G7 (which still form the 'inner sanctum' that 'calls the shots' within the G8 and expanded G20); and the Africa Group, extending into the broader G77.

Being 'caught in the middle' can be tantamount to being situated in an untenable position unless there is a clearly defined, coherent and disciplined strategic sense of direction. Hence, as South Africa looks toward the BASIC meeting it is hosting in April and its hosting of the next 'Copenhagen' (hopefully not a repeat) in December 2011, its diplomacy will have to very deftly navigate the concentric circles of Tshwane-Pretoria's geopolitical paradigm: Africa and Southern Africa as the epicentre of its national interests (grounded of course in its own domestic imperatives); flowing from that, South-South cooperation; and the global imperatives impinging on its domestic and African agenda necessitating 'North-South bridge-building.' Inherent in this navigational paradigm is an essential independence that South Africa must cultivate both within and outside BASIC addressing its 'core business': Africa. Thus, the fact that South Africa could be perceived by China and India – or 'Chindia' for purposes of Copenhagen's climate politics – as having been co-opted by the developed countries on the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) should raise serious questions of strategy and tactics confronting Tshwane-Pretoria in how it balances its diplomacy within BASIC and the emerging powers and G77 on the one hand and in its dealings with the U.S., U.K. and other developed powers on the other.<sup>19</sup>

This means disaggregating BASIC into its individual country components and their respective strategies. Holdouts China and India had been the most reluctant to accede to Copenhagen Accord association. Had China not joined India in association, BASIC would have ceased to be IBSA+China. It would have lost its cohesion, belying the fluidity of the new strategic geography within the core climate coalition of the emerging powers, with Brazil and South Africa coming across as much closer to the accord's mainstream than either of the two Asian giants. The fact that Beijing and New Delhi had resisted signing onto the accord, however, did not necessarily mean they had not been doing their due-diligence in undertaking serious measures to cut emissions, implement conservation measures and effect a 'green' technological transition to a low-carbon

regime. Indeed, they are on record in making serious commitments. But both appeared to have wanted to distance themselves from the accord's language committing those associated with it to monitoring and verification measures even as a non-binding political statement.

Now, both China and India have more firmly, though reluctantly, into the company of developed and other emerging powers alike as well as most developing countries in associating with the accord even as none are satisfied with it. South Africa and the Africa Group and the Small Island States are also committed to retaining the Kyoto Protocol which the developed countries want to scrap, a major source of North-South tension. There is also a North-South divide over funding a 'green transition' in the developing world. But, apart from these and other substantive and highly technical issues, there are larger strategic dilemmas facing South Africa in how it navigates these 'potholes.'

Part of South Africa's predicament is that unlike its BASIC coalition partners, it cannot aspire to 'great power' status as a mega-state on the scale of China, India and Brazil. Yet, as a smallish middle-income country, South Africa is an economic 'giant' in continental terms even as it is out-stripped in population by the likes of Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). But it outstrips them and the rest of the continent in emissions, amongst the largest in the world. To further confound matters, as Africa's 'giant,' South Africa is a political dwarf internationally, yet continues 'punching above its weight' internationally. UN secretary-general Ban-ki Moons appointment of presidential planning minister Trevor Manuel to a high-level advisory group on climate change finance is indicative.<sup>20</sup> Hence, a paradoxical predicament at the heart of an apparent confusion of identity in how Tshwane-Pretoria should navigate in the rough and tumble of international diplomacy. Because of its apartheid past, its post-apartheid rulers are reluctant to exert decisive leadership in inter-African diplomacy for fear of South Africa coming across as a hegemon which, in objective terms, it can't escape anyway.

Non-African actors expect it to represent Africa in international fora while the rest of Africa has little choice but to acquiesce in South Africa's leadership which its leaders stress is in the service of Africa's agenda. At the same time, South Africa values its status as Africa's 'emerging power' in the big league of such hegemons as China, India and Brazil. Overall, this is a situation seemingly fraught with questions of national self-confidence exacerbated by the apparent loss of IBSA's momentum as India's and Brazil's great power ambitions have drawn them away from this trilateral grouping toward BRIC (Brazil-Russia-India-China), a situation compounded by BASIC's emergence spawned by Copenhagen.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, amid pressure on South Africa from both China and India against allegedly being co-opted by the developed countries, IBSA might have been a more effective platform for Tshwane-Pretoria in navigating climate change politics. Climate change, after all, is a major plank in IBSA's agenda for which the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) had drawn up an outreach strategy when India pulled the plug on last October's summit to have been held in Brazil. In a sense, BASIC is a case of 'beware what you wish for' as it amounts to IBSA+China in as much as South Africa originally wanted Beijing included in what became IBSA – idealistically branded as a 'troika' of democratic regional powers of the global South in the vanguard of South-South cooperation. Now, BASIC-cum-IBSA+China could end up functioning more as an instrument of 'Chindian' synergy in joint Beijing-Delhi coordination of their climate diplomacies under an 'emerging power' banner.

The fact that India seems to have initially distanced itself from China in associating with the accord, appeared to emphasize IBSA's value. Now that China has joined in association, the essential dynamics of BASIC, in the absence of a functioning IBSA, still retains its validity given Sino-Indian ambivalence about the accord inhibiting their freedom of action as fast-growing mega-powers. Not that South Africa is without leverage. Small power though it is in global terms, the rest of Africa constitutes its 'strategic depth' in a manner that can serve as a geopolitical 'force multiplier' given South Africa's economic reach throughout the continent. As Diana Games aptly points out, "South Africa remains a major player on the continent despite the increased engagement of emerging market competitors such as China and the continued presence of traditional investors."<sup>22</sup>

Irrespective of the civilisationally ingrained compulsions toward hierarchy that may motivate the power calculus of some of its BASIC partners, a greater display of self-confidence by South Africa in the conduct of its climate diplomacy could be a source of leverage in dealing with emerging and traditional powers alike. But for this to happen, Tshwane-Pretoria will have to make a choice in the run-up to the April BASIC summit and beyond toward 2011 between clubbing with the great powers, traditional and emerging alike, and consolidating its positioning with the Africa Group in advancing a Common African Position relative to all other coalitional formations, including especially the obstructionist Bolivarian Caucus with which Sudan was aligned in a manner some interpreted as a proxy for China – and India (given India's close coordination with its Asian rival). In short, South Africa may need to adopt a more independent posture as a 'swing actor' between China and India on the one hand and the U.S. and the EU on the other in the pan-African service of an 'Africa 1<sup>st</sup>' posture.

Underlining the need for such independence viz-a-viz the West as well as its BASIC partners is the Anglo-American 'own goal' scored in the U.S.-U.K. opposition to South Africa's application for a World Bank loan for the embattled Eskom's coal-fired Medupi power station.<sup>23</sup> However, this issue seems a bit more complicated compared to pressures exerted from the BASIC end emanating from China and India. Although, some see the World Bank loan as helping Eskom facilitate new and lower carbon technologies such as large-scale thermal and wind power, this is offset by what is reported to be "a broad-based coalition of local civil society groups within SA, and global nongovernmental organisations" voicing opposition to the World Bank loan bid.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, this controversy also comes at a time when South Africa's state-of-the-art Pebble Bed Modular Reactor (PBMR) is also in trouble due to the absence of an investor to offset government's support and resignation of their CEO.<sup>25</sup> South Africa, therefore, is navigating a very difficult and complicated challenge in how it mobilises a mix of technological resources and innovations to effect a clean energy transition while also balancing its diplomacy within and outside of BASIC. Indeed, Aiyar's suggestion that the 'BASIC centre' falls outside the South may be inaccurate if association with the Copenhagen Accord is anything to go by.

The real 'centre,' at least in so far as climate politics is concerned, definitely includes a major part of the South, including the Africa Group and South Africa within it as well as Brazil and India. China along with the Latin American Bolivarians comprising Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Ecuador (in tacit alignment with China and India at Copenhagen) fall outside the accord-aligned centre which overlaps into the camp of the developed countries. However, issues of retaining Kyoto and the funding of the mitigation, adaptation, technology development/transfer and capacity-building chain divides North and South. This places the developed countries at the opposite end of the climate political spectrum from emerging powers and developing countries. Furthermore, despite differences in positioning within BASIC, there is a working consensus that has united Brazil, South Africa, India and China in allowing them to coordinate strategy as a global South/emerging power leadership collective.

South Africa's challenge is to safeguard its strategic autonomy within BASIC in a manner allowing it to advance the African agenda going forward toward Mexico in December, and on into 2011 when it will host the climate summit. The fact that Tshwane-Pretoria will host 2011 is testament to its proactivity in this regard and should give it the confidence to assert its prerogatives as Africa's leading power. This could be reinforced by the prospect of Tourism Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk succeeding Yvo de Boer as the UN's climate chief.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, this prospect may well have triggered India's and Chi-

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na's decision to associate with the Copenhagen Accord as New Delhi is putting up as its candidate (supported by China), environment secretary Vijai Sharma amid developed country's scepticism about India's climate diplomacy.<sup>27</sup>

New Delhi is much more sensitive to Western opinion than is China. In any case, to optimise its position, South Africa must appropriate for itself the latitude within BASIC to come to terms with developed countries without allowing itself to be intimidated by charges of co-optation by its larger BASIC partners. Its approach has to be 'multi-vectored' emphasizing its strength: 'brideg-building' which is part of its strategic paradigm. That may well depend, however, upon the extent to which the U.S. and the EU are forthcoming in accommodating the 'middle ground' occupied by South Africa and allies in the Africa bloc and the G77 minus the Bolivarians. Meanwhile, apart from navigating the post-Copenhagen politics of climate change and the technological controversies associated with it having to do with energy options, another critical dimension on the 2010 agenda is biodiversity.

2010 has been designated the UN Year of Biodiversity. This provides South Africa yet another opportunity to project its leadership in areas where it actually has a comparative advantage given its conservation track record and infrastructure in and outside government. Specifically, it is in the realm of spatial development initiatives (SDIs) undertaken since 1994 between South Africa and neighbouring countries featuring trans-frontier conservation areas (TFCAs) where great strides have been made. These could be built upon in a manner that would reinforce a key area of the climate change summit that has benefited from an otherwise woefully inadequate accord: the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD). While the TFCA/SDI formulation has played a major, but unsung, role in integrating post-apartheid South Africa developmentally into the region encompassing the Southern African Development Community (SADC), it appears that it has been approached narrowly from an environmental-conservationist perspective as opposed to its possible wider applications in dovetailing the REDD agenda with Africa's peace and security agenda in such regions critical to Africa's strategic stability as the Great Lakes; a region marking the east-central African extremity of the Central African Rainforest Initiative.

This region is also one coming under logging pressure and the clearing of land for dam construction by Chinese contractors, with logging and dam construction emerging as a major environmental threat throughout the forested parts of Africa and Southeast Asia. However, within the context of REDD and the 2010 highlighting of biodiversity, the nature reserves and national parks ringing the Albertina Rift adjoining the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda appear to make for a natural trans-frontier convergence for stimulating regional cooperation as a corollary to UN and multinational peace-building efforts where

South Africa is already heavily invested. Another area in need of attention is Madagascar, where land-use inspired political turmoil resulting in its suspension from SADC constitutes a major threat to the safeguarding of its unique biodiversity and where, in spite of South Africa's impressive wildlife conservation resources and infrastructure, Madagascar's fauna have received little if any attention.

### Conclusion

The Great Lakes and Madagascar are just two of what constitute a daunting biodiversity security agenda in the greater Afro-Malagasy bio-region. Taken together with the broader climate change challenge, the 2010 focus on biodiversity emphasizes the need for a truly holistic approach in African environmental strategy that addresses the inter-linkages between energy and food security with water resources and river-basin management (as in the eternal off-and-on deliberations of the Nile River Basin Commission and attendant geopolitical tug-of-war between Egypt and Ethiopia with wider security implications throughout greater Northeast Africa and the Red Sea) intersecting with Africa's demographic expansion toward a projected 2 billion in 2050, already at 1 billion now alongside China and India. Thus is climate change but the tip of the iceberg of a larger ecological challenge that governments must confront within the new global geopolitical landscape.

### Policy considerations

*Multi-vectored strategic autonomy:* South Africa should aim for a posture of 'strategic autonomy' within and outside BASIC in its own national interest informed its domestic, regional and continental agenda. Though it enjoys good bilateral ties with each BASIC partner, the fluidity of the dynamics within this coalition underline the need for South African independence within it. Then, there is also the imperative that within Tshwane-Pretoria's strategic geo-concentric paradigm, North-South 'bridge-building' must be accommodated within the political dynamics of climate diplomacy. Strategy within and external to BASIC should aim to be pragmatically independent with the objective of advancing a common African climate agenda that promotes Africa's environmental interests and provides South Africa the latitude to engage all other groupings in its furtherance. However, the corollary to such a strategy as South Africa pursues its periodic BASIC consultations should be to undertake a comparable consultative process within the Africa Group; one of constant review of the adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer/development and capacity-building cluster of issues as they affect Africa.

*The Marthinus van Schalkwyk candidacy:* With President Jacob Zuma having nominated South Africa's tourism minister to succeed Yvo de Boer as the UN's climate chief in the run-

up to South Africa hosting the 2011 climate summit, mobilizing support for his candidacy will reinforce Tshwane-Pretoria's position within and outside BASIC and in advancing Africa's agenda in climate diplomacy in navigating between developed countries and its emerging power allies to the benefit of developing countries generally. The fact that he is credited with having played a key role in formulating the 'Bali roadmap' underlines his credibility for this difficult position. The fact that China is reportedly backing India's candidate for UN climate chief instead of van Schalkwyk is instructive the divergence within BASIC between South Africa and Brazil on the one hand and Sino-Indian synergy on the other.

*Whither IBSA(?):* South Africa should use the occasion of the upcoming BASIC consultation it is hosting in April to engage India and Brazil on the future of IBSA on the sidelines of this deliberation; to have a candid joint assessment of IBSA as a platform for climate and other South multilateral diplomacy, in the process gain clarity on how it figures within the context of BASIC and BRIC and whether or not it. This is important from South Africa's standpoint given what it has invested in IBSA as a platform for South-South cooperation in as much as a clarification of IBSA's status will help it better define a way forward for itself in engaging both India and Brazil within and outside BASIC on a bilateral basis. However such a trilateral consultation goes, should it happen, India's alignment with Brazil and South Africa in associating with the Copenhagen Accord (and apparently pulling China in its wake) is a testament to how useful IBSA could be as a 'middle ground' coalition in given global negotiations, especially climate diplomacy.

*Whither PBMR(?):* Not until August 2010 will government make a final decision on the fate of its cutting-edge Peeble Bed Modular Reactor nuclear initiative. The decision to cut funding for this technology was a fateful one, putting its future at the cross-roads with possible implications for the country's science and technology innovation credibility and how it fashions a mix of alternative energy options that moves South Africa toward a low carbon future. Apart from the sentiments of anti-nuclear advocates, nuclear options are an inescapable dimension to global efforts to move away from fossil fuels though it is argued that nuclear energy is far from 'carbon neutral.' The question of investment obstacles needs to be interrogated in terms of how better to mobilize external investment buy-in for PBMR to ensure that South Africa remains a player in the field and market for civilian nuclear technology – and to preserves its skilled human resources and expertise on nuclear energy.

*The UN Year of Biodiversity:* Here, within the spirit of REDD, South Africa should undertake two initiatives. First, it should convene a Great Lakes summit to explore the instituting of a trans-frontier conservation initiative that can achieve a number of objectives: safeguard the network of national parks

and nature reserves that surround the Albertina Rift adjoining the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda while protecting critically endangered fauna; promote a conservation strategy that provides a feed-in for the DDRRR dimensions of peace-building and post-conflict recovery in demilitarising the region in tandem with a more robust UN peacekeeping commitment. Potential partners such as the Peace Park Foundation, the World Wildlife Fund and the Worldwide Fund for Nature should be mobilised on behalf of exploring the feasibility of such an initiative aimed at promoting regional cooperation in conservation and economic development. Second, South Africa ought to consider promoting the involvement of the country's wildlife conservation institutional resources in engaging Madagascar in the protection of its world-famed unique and highly endangered fauna at a time when Madagascar is going through a difficult period of political uncertainty that could further place its biodiversity at risk. For example, a captive breeding and research programme for Malagasy carnivores featuring its apex predator, the Fossa (*Cryptoprocta ferox*) could be a possible flag-ship initiative in forging links between South African and Malagasy conservation communities. It could also be applicable to the Great Lakes region and perhaps wider focus as South Africa already has the infrastructure to serve as an 'Ark' of biodiversity preservation in Africa and the global South.

### Endnotes

- 1 "In this environment, we need a new brand of climate diplomacy," by Kuseni Dlamini, Sunday Independent, March 7, 2010, p. 15 (Dispatches)
- 2 *The New Powers*, by Amrita Narlikar is in press.
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- 4 "Copenhagen changed the political climate," Jian Junbo, *Asia Times Online*, January 13, 2010, p.1.
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