

A stylized world map composed of a grid of grey dots, with several dots highlighted in red to represent specific countries or regions.

## Between Principles and Pragmatism

Perspectives on the Ukraine Crisis from  
Brazil, India, China and South Africa

FELIX HETT AND MOSHE WIEN (EDS.)

May 2015

- In the EU, the Ukraine crisis is often portrayed as an epochal conflict with global consequences. To test this assumption, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) asked four authors from Brazil, India, China and South Africa to explain how foreign-policy elites in their countries regard the crisis. Does it pose a challenge to the international order – or is it a singularly »European« problem?
- Responses vary, but some similarities are found in all four papers: Whilst the conflict is indeed seen as serious, it is not perceived as critical – the way it is in Europe. Ukraine makes fewer headlines in Brazil or South Africa than in the EU, yet it is debated in expert circles, and its global implications are recognised.
- The governments of the BRICS countries advocate a peaceful approach to conflict resolution. All of them have voiced their respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. For both India and China, which are threatened by latent separatist conflicts, the inviolability of borders and the rejection of outside interference are cherished principles.
- In the competition between principles and pragmatism, however, the latter seems to prevail: Criticism of Russia's actions vis-à-vis Ukraine is hardly voiced in public by government officials. Apparently, counterbalancing the West's perceived dominance in international relations is thought to be more important than upholding principles. Realpolitik appears to be the order of the day in the BRICS capitals.



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## Introduction

*Felix Hett and Moshe Wien*

The Ukraine crisis is now in its second year. On 18 March 2014, the Russian Federation annexed the Crimean peninsula. A few weeks later, the Ukrainian government launched an »anti-terror operation« in the Southeast, which gradually evolved into an open war with Russian-backed separatists. A deep rift grew between Russia on one side, and the European Union and the United States – commonly referred to as »the West« – on the other.

To policymakers and experts in Berlin, Brussels, Moscow and Washington, the Ukraine crisis naturally tops the agenda. The conflict is often portrayed as epochal, with global consequences, even as a re-enactment of the Cold War that was supposed to have ended 25 years ago. Are these descriptions accurate?

To evaluate the Western assumption, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) asked four authors from Brazil, India, China and South Africa – which, with Russia, make up the BRICS alliance – to explain how foreign-policy elites in their countries view the Ukraine crisis. Does it really pose a challenge to the international order? Or is it a singularly »European« problem? What are the possible consequences for cooperation within the BRICS group?

The responses vary, of course, but some similarities are found in all four papers: Whilst the conflict is indeed seen as serious, it is not perceived as critical as it is in Europe. Ukraine makes fewer headlines in Brazil or South Africa than in the EU, yet it is debated in expert circles. All the governments advocate a peaceful resolution to the conflict. All of them have voiced their respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. For both India and China, which are threatened by latent separatist conflicts, the inviolability of borders

and the rejection of outside interference are cherished principles. The right to national self-determination is less emphasised.

Another commonality is that in the competition between principles and pragmatism, in the BRICS countries the latter seems to prevail. Despite their principled opposition, criticism of Russia's actions vis-à-vis Ukraine is hardly expressed in public by government officials. Apparently, current Russian behaviour is not perceived to be much of a threat in Beijing, Brasilia, New Delhi and Pretoria. On the contrary, the conflict tends to be described as Moscow's reaction to »Western« actions in Ukraine. The Ukrainian »Euromaidan« is not seen as an indigenous, civil-society protest movement; indeed, the change of government in Kiev in February 2014 is portrayed as a Western sponsored coup d'état. In expert discourses, the Ukraine crisis is easily integrated into a worldview according to which the conflict is part of the slow transition of the global order: Western dominance is replaced by a multipolar system – a process that is essentially positive and will lead to more »justice« internationally. This take on global politics is very similar to the Russian discourse, as exemplified by the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation adopted in 2013.

All four papers emphasise the need to maintain good relations with Russia. Although Western sanctions against Russia appear to offer export opportunities for BRICS businesses, they are generally opposed. Cooperation in the BRICS format is expected to continue. In light of this, it is important to recall why the BRICS community was founded: to counterbalance the West's international dominance. Cautious positioning with Russia is a logical way to ensure the BRICS' long-term goals. Realpolitik appears to be the order of the day in the BRICS capitals.

## Brazil: Balanced Neutrality

*Wladimir Pomar and Valter Pomar*

The Brazilian government first reacted to the Crimea crisis in a speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Luiz Alberto Figueiredo, on 19 March 2014 during an official meeting with his French counterpart, Laurent Fabius, in Paris. Figueiredo said that Brazil was monitoring the situation and supported United Nations efforts to help Russia and Ukraine to find a negotiated solution. He let it be understood that Brazil would not condemn Russia's actions, emphasised Brazil's friendly relations with Ukraine, and appealed to both Moscow and Kiev »to act with moderation«. Brazil supports the Minsk II Agreement of 11 February 2015 and the ceasefire, believing that this path is necessary to engage all parties in seeking a peaceful and permanent solution to the conflict.

### Brazilian Neutrality

Brazil's traditional position is non-interference in other countries' internal affairs. In the last century, Brazil had no territorial disputes with its neighbours. It defends the right to self-determination, but stresses the need for negotiated solutions to disagreements and conflicts.

Brazil's even-handed position regarding the Ukraine crisis is to advocate a political solution. On the question of Crimea, Brazil is officially neutral, an approach that is particularly supported by agricultural business circles who view the Russian–Western crisis as an opportunity to increase exports to Russia. However, there is hardly any public debate on the subject, mainly because of the large physical distance between Brazil and Ukraine.

### Good Relations with Russia and Ukraine

Brazil maintains significant political, economic and scientific relations with both Russia and Ukraine. Russia is a BRICS member and a very important market, especially for some agricultural sectors. Shortly after Russia had imposed an embargo on food products from the EU, US, Canada and Australia, the Russian Minister of

Agriculture announced that 100 Brazilian cattle farmers had been authorised to export to Russia. Sectorial advisers say that this creates opportunities, particularly for producers of chicken and cattle meat. Both Russia and Ukraine support Brazil's aspirations for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Ukraine and Brazil operate the Alcantara Base in Maranhão state together. In the last decade, they invested over USD 1 billion in a joint space and satellite project. Brazil also seeks to maintain good relations with Ukraine because of the 500,000 Ukrainians who live in the country.

### Sanctions and Geopolitical Implications

Brazilian business representatives say that sanctions were imposed on Russia without any consultations with Brazil, and that Brazil's commercial relations cannot be decided by other nations' foreign policies. Brazil views the sanctions as counterproductive: they complicate efforts for frank, direct dialogue between the two sides and their allies. Brazil is very concerned about proposals to arm any side in Ukraine, as this could deepen the conflict and create incalculable political and humanitarian impacts.

Brazil, like the other BRICS countries, thinks that the evolution towards a new world order should be gradual, and based on compromise. They all believe that the EU and US should not have supported a coup in Ukraine and that the West is attempting to undermine Russia as a strategic competitor. Underlying this conflict is geopolitical rivalry: Russia is fighting the old US plan to weaken Russia internationally by removing Ukraine from its sphere of influence. The West's over-reaction with regard to Crimea's reunification with Russia puts the other BRICS members in an awkward position. Territorial integrity, non-interference and respect for international law helped BRICS evolve into an economic union, geopolitical project and quasi-organisation. Policymakers in Brazil, India, China and South Africa avoid discussing the Russia–Ukraine conflict publicly and hesitate to express their views about recent events. Officially, BRICS is cautiously uncritical of Russia.



Following their meeting in The Hague in late March 2014, the BRICS foreign ministers expressed their view of the roots of the Crimean conflict. The ministers condemned Western sanctions, opposed the idea of »expelling« Russia from the G20 and condemned the G7 for boycotting Russia.

Like the other BRICS countries, Brazil would prefer not to see the situation in Crimea evolve into a third global war, not even a cold one. It is particularly concerned that deterioration of the situation in Ukraine could trigger a domino effect.

# India: The Quest for Balance in Asia

*C. Raja Mohan*

India's muted response to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the continuing crisis in Ukraine has been greeted with some concern in the West because it does not square with India's image of a rising democratic power and a strategic partner for the United States and the West. Russian President Vladimir Putin's public praise of India's »level-headed stance« has added to European misperceptions about New Delhi's approach. This essay explains India's position on Ukraine by examining New Delhi's historic relationship with Moscow, its attitudes regarding issues of territorial sovereignty and intervention, concerns about the breakdown of European geopolitical harmony and its consequences for the Asian balance of power.

## Delhi's Position

Despite President Putin's appreciation of India's position on Ukraine, the Government of India neither endorsed Russia's annexation of Crimea nor condemned it publicly. In a statement issued on 18 March 2014, following a conversation between Putin and then-Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the Indian Foreign Office stated: »The Prime Minister thanked President Putin for explaining the Russian position with regard to recent developments in Ukraine. He emphasised the consistent position India has had on the issues of unity and territorial integrity of countries. The Prime Minister expressed the hope that all sides would exercise restraint and work together constructively to find political and diplomatic solutions that protected the legitimate interests of all countries in the region and ensured long-term peace and stability in Europe and beyond.«

If this elliptical reference to territorial integrity was the closest New Delhi came to publicly disapproving of the Russian annexation of Crimea, there can be no doubt about India's long-standing opposition to breaking up existing territorial states in the name of self-determination. Given the range of secessionist movements that have confronted India since independence, New Delhi has been an unwavering champion of the territorial integrity of states. The only exception to this was India's

support for the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971. India has also been wary of great power intervention in the internal affairs of developing states because of »humanitarian concerns« or the »responsibility to protect«. Although it is a democracy, India has maintained considerable distance from the post-Cold-War international interventionist agenda, both unilateral and multilateral. India, which has sought to build a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation through democratic processes, believes external intervention does not necessarily lead to either peace or stability.

Russia's use of a referendum to legitimise the annexation of Crimea is especially unacceptable to India given its contention with Pakistan over the state of Jammu and Kashmir since the subcontinent's decolonisation and partition in 1947. Pakistan does not view the conflict as a territorial dispute with India but calls it a matter of self-determination for the people of Kashmir. Despite past agreements between India and Pakistan about resolving the issue through bilateral negotiations, Pakistan insists on third-party involvement including the United Nations and emphasises the need for a »plebiscite« in Kashmir.

## Public Debate

New Delhi's reluctance to publicly chastise Moscow, its long-time partner, has met with little criticism in India. The political classes and strategic community bear much good will towards Putin, who is seen as saving the bilateral relationship from irrelevancy in recent years. In the 1990s, as Moscow sought to integrate itself with the West and build a »Common European Home« from the Baltic to the Pacific, India found it hard to get post-Soviet-Russia's attention. It was only when Putin took charge at the turn of the new millennium that the bilateral relationship took a turn for the better.

India's foreign policy establishment views the crisis in Ukraine as a regional issue in Europe that could have long-term consequences for Asia. Realists in New Delhi see the crisis as a consequence of the structural tension



between the EU and NATO's eastward expansion and Moscow's determination to restore its traditional sphere of influence in the »near abroad«. They recognize that Russia and the West have been unable to either follow the rules of the road drafted at the end of the Cold War or devise new ones that are mutually acceptable. They regret that the West took Moscow for granted and did not integrate it into the Western order on reasonable terms. They also note that Putin might have missed opportunities for a diplomatic solution soon after annexing Crimea.

### Western Sanctions

India has generally tended to oppose the West's frequent sanctions following the Cold War. India has always respected those imposed by the United Nations Security Council, but opposed the West's imposition of unilateral sanctions. Yet India is realistic enough not to jeopardise its own interests in the name of principled opposition. India's reluctance to back Western sanctions on Russia is not just based on principle: it also recognises the need for political prudence when dealing with major powers. Whether it was the question of isolating China in the 1950s or Iran in recent decades, New Delhi has argued that coercive measures are unlikely to help resolve differences with large states. India has been encouraging a political resolution to the 2014–2015 Ukraine crisis by taking into account the legitimate interests of all parties – including those of Ukraine's minorities and neighbours. New Delhi wonders if America and Europe really have the stomach for a prolonged confrontation with Russia within the heart of Europe. More importantly, India believes tensions in Europe will distract Western attention from the much bigger challenges that Asia presents.

### Asian Balance

New Delhi believes that if the European crisis lasts too long and Russia drifts away from the West, Moscow will draw closer to Beijing and complicate India's strategic calculus in Asia. To be sure, India belongs to the BRICS with Russia and China and shares many international goals with them, such as the promotion of a multipolar world. But New Delhi is deeply apprehensive about what a rapidly rising China means for its national security. Balancing China has been an unstated but central premise

of India's foreign and national security policies for many decades. In the 1960s and 1970s, its partnership with the Soviet Union helped India to balance China's power in and around the subcontinent. Since the end of the Cold War, increased engagement with the United States has become a critical instrument for building India's own »comprehensive national power«, catching up with China and structuring a stable balance of power in Asia. In the last few years, the deepening partnership of Moscow and Beijing has caused considerable concern in New Delhi. Worse still, the history of India's geopolitics suggests that tensions between Russia and the West have seen the latter cut political slack for China. The most unintended consequence of the Ukrainian crisis might well be that China's political leverage with Russia and the West expands and significantly constrains India's foreign and security policies.

## China: Ukraine Crisis as a »Lose-Lose« Game

*Feng Shaolei*

### China's Official Position

Since the crisis began in Ukraine in late 2013, Chinese leaders have expressed their respect for its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the same time, they have acknowledged the complicated history of Crimea that influences contemporary developments. The Chinese government proposed the creation of an international coordination mechanism to seek consensus for a political settlement and urged all parties to not exacerbate the situation. China supports the international community's efforts in this matter.

On 4 March 2014, during a telephone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping expressed his belief in Putin's ability to negotiate a political solution. China is interested in maintaining regional and global peace and stability. On 15 March, the United Nations Security Council voted on the US resolution condemning the Crimean referendum: 13 members voted in favour of the resolution and Russia vetoed it; China abstained. In various Security Council debates later in the year and in early 2015, the Chinese Ambassador to the UN Liu Jieyi stated that in keeping with China's impartial approach to Ukraine, it will continue to promote peace talks and seek a political solution. The legitimate rights, interests and claims of all regions and ethnic groups in Ukraine must be accommodated and a balance of interests reached among all parties.

German and French mediation led to the Minsk II Agreement on 11 February 2015. On 6 March, China's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Wang Min urged its implementation by all parties. Ten days later, at the National People's Congress (NPC), Premier Li Keqiang expressed hopes for harmonious coexistence between neighbours, common development and win-win outcomes for Europe and other countries.

### Crimea and Territorial Disputes in Asia

When debating whether the Crimean conflict bears any resemblance to territorial conflicts in Asia, several aspects

should be taken into account: China has already resolved many territorial issues with its neighbours. However, some disputes remain. As in all territorial disputes, these not only relate to the country's national sovereignty, but also to local rights and domestic interests. Whilst territorial disputes are generally influenced by the regional environment, developments in the international community, and geopolitical conditions, there are critical differences between the crisis in Crimea and those in Asia:

NATO's eastward expansion since the end of the Cold War has greatly impacted the Eurasian geopolitical sphere. No similar expansion or major changes are occurring in Asia, which is therefore not susceptible to large-scale conflicts like those in Ukraine and Crimea.

Asian countries, which boast the world's fastest growing economies, seek to solve problems through political negotiation, and shun armed conflict. History shows that economic development does not necessarily prevent conflict or wars. Nevertheless, with Asia becoming the world's economic engine, there is an increased likelihood that peace will be maintained in the region.

The history of Asia is also different. In the early 1970s, when Europe was still fighting the Cold War, China had already begun to normalise relations with the United States, Japan (as early as 1972), and other countries. However, Asia must still grapple with fallout from the Cold War.

Finally, an important characteristic of contemporary Asia lies in its high degree of openness. Many Asian countries depend on the United States for security but expect China to play a bigger role economically. This duality helps them to develop in relative peace. European countries may play a positive role in this process, which can be seen in their constructive approach to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

### Public Debate on Ukraine and Crimea

The Chinese are discussing the Ukrainian crisis and the Crimean issue in academic circles, the media, and even

at private events. This phenomenon is unprecedented. Whilst Chinese academics and the general public widely support the government stance, they take issue with some important points, such as the root causes. Some see the developments as the Russian reaction to Western expansion and arrogance – after Russia's turn-of-the-century hopes for a comprehensive cooperative relationship with the United States were dashed. Not just Russia is to blame.

Others believe that Ukraine's political instability and corruption caused it to neglect its development priorities and get caught between East and West. Still others consider that although East Slavic peoples share the same culture and religion, they differ greatly in terms of political culture. Such complicated issues cannot be quickly resolved by military expansion or sanctions. Some experts view the events as Russia's backlash to the EU Eastern Partnership Programme, which has now been halted in Ukraine.

Many observers agree that since Ukraine is a special political unit at the East/West intersection, its neutrality in political and security affairs is essential for safeguarding stability and peace in Eurasia. Chinese academics reflect that, prior to 2013, Russia and the EU had almost equal influence in Ukraine. Now Russia has got hold of Crimea and lost Ukraine, whilst the West has won Ukraine but lost Russia. The confrontation in Ukraine has been a »lose-lose« game. Consequently, the new form of dialogue between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union that is currently being discussed should present a promising opportunity for both sides.

Neither the Chinese media nor Chinese academics accept the increased militarization in Ukraine and the region, which they view as increasing long-term instability in Eurasia and turbulence in Russia and Europe. Whether it is a »new type« of Cold War or the »old-fashioned« variety, it is sure to cause broader damage – for the US and China, too. The fact that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is once again heading the agenda of international scholars is not a good sign.

The Chinese are debating whether Ukraine is a global issue or just a regional hot spot. Some scholars argue that the Ukrainian crisis is a regional conflict with outstanding features: It is a conflict that is taking place where European and Asian civilisations intersect on the Euro-

asian continent – against the background of competing patterns for regional integration.

Others view Ukraine as a major global crisis: The conflict touches on the question of the legitimacy of the post-Cold-War international order. This was established as a result of wars that led to international laws and regulations defining the rights and interests of victors and vanquished, as well as spheres of influence. However, the relatively peaceful end to the Cold War made it difficult to distinguish the winners from the losers. As a result, there was a regulatory vacuum after 1991. Russia counters Western criticism of its annexation of Crimea by stating that the West had been able to expand into the Soviet Union's former sphere of influence because of the lack of international norms.

The Ukrainian issue is definitely a severe challenge to the global peace order. It is neither an individual incident, nor is it irrelevant to others. The international community must consider if the Westphalian model has become outdated. Chinese academics and media are also discussing international law: Which should have priority – national sovereignty and territorial integrity or national self-determination? Although strict observance of international law is generally encouraged, some of its important documents are ignored. For example, Germany, France, and Poland officially witnessed the Kiev Agreement on 21 February 2014, but ignored it just a day or two later. This is a rare phenomenon in the history of European politics.

The Chinese government always advocates that all countries should peacefully co-exist and respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries, whether big or small, strong or weak. As a multi-ethnic country that is united in diversity, China has a deep understanding of the historical responsibilities and severe challenges for emerging countries to maintain their unity on one hand and defend their right to national self-determination on the other. None of these essential Chinese positions has changed in principle with regard to the Ukraine crisis. China respects Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as all nations' right to national self-determination. However, the current issue in Crimea is not just a simple question of national self-determination. Whilst it bears some resemblance to the Kosovo issue, the complicated history and contemporary background make it a special case.

## Sanctions

The Chinese government and scholars are also concerned about the effect of Western sanctions on Russia. Important Chinese representatives have assured President Putin and other Russian representatives that China will never support sanctions against Russia; they reiterate that the Ukrainian crisis can only be solved through dialogue and negotiation.

Although Western sanctions against Russia are reported to have deeply affected its economy, President Putin's announcement that the Russian Federation budget would have a RUB 1.2-trillion surplus suggests that 2014 was not such a bad year. Whilst Russia is unable to obtain capital and technology from the West, external pressure and the crisis are reinforcing the Russian »siege mentality« and maintaining Putin's approval rate at about 80 per cent.

Over time, Western sanctions against Russia may cause both sides to lose out as Russia imposes counter-sanctions, stops importing Western goods, and offers Asian and the BRICS countries opportunities to expand their market shares in Russia. Western sanctions are further forcing the Russian financial market and military enterprises to turn to other regions and countries. Once these important Russian markets are lost, the West may find it hard to get them back. Moreover, sanctions between the West and Russia could seriously impact the global economy's difficult recovery. Sanctions have caused new hardships for Russia but its internal diversity and external multilateralism make it difficult to defeat.

## The BRICS' Stance on Crimea

When Russia annexed Crimea, the BRICS countries almost simultaneously opted for neutrality. They reacted with caution, criticising Western pressure on Russia with regard to Ukraine. In March 2014, all the BRICS countries apart from Russia abstained from voting on a UN General Assembly resolution that criticised Russia's acceptance of the Crimea referendum. That same month, BRICS foreign ministers chastised their Australian counterpart for proposing that Russia be excluded from the G20 summit; they condemned hostile manoeuvres and advocated equal distribution of G20 governance rights amongst all members.

These collective actions – taken after cautious, objective and principled consideration – signal the BRICS countries' unwillingness to join the West's isolation of Russia and also that they have become more influential and independent. Their close economic interaction with both Russia and the West makes them reluctant to take sides. The BRICS face their own latent threats of separatism, and condemn hegemonic control of world affairs.

Despite being affected by the financial crisis, the BRICS were able to maintain relatively good momentum in 2013, with an average growth rate of 5.7 per cent. Both the net value of trade between the BRICS and their interdependence have grown. The New Development Bank's founding in July 2014 reflected the BRICS' increased cooperation. The BRICS countries share objective grounds for their cautious, steady approach to the Ukrainian crisis and the Crimean issue.

# South Africa: Treading a Fine Line

Simon Allison

## Introduction

The Russian annexation of Crimea put South African foreign policymakers in a difficult position. On one hand, the new, post-1994 South Africa is a vocal proponent of sovereignty, respect for existing borders and non-interference in the internal affairs of states; this, along with a strong commitment to human rights, is the ideological basis of its foreign policy. On the other hand, and more pragmatically, South Africa dare not upset the strategic partnership it is cultivating with Russia. This paper examines how South Africa has sought to tread the fine line between these competing and at times contradictory impulses.

## Context

The ideological basis for new South Africa's foreign policy was formulated in 1993 by Nelson Mandela in a seminal *Foreign Affairs* article. He emphasised the centrality of human rights in international relations, writing that just and lasting solutions to the problems of humankind can only come through the worldwide promotion of democracy, and that respect for international law should guide relations between nations.

South Africa has also strongly embraced the African Union's principle of the inviolability of borders and placed sovereignty at the heart of its foreign policy. South Africa has no serious border disputes.

South African principles cannot be enforced internationally, however: It maintains friendly relations with neighbouring Swaziland, for example, despite that country's poor human rights record.

Initially, South Africa's ideology was expressed in its relatively neutral position with regard to the major powers, as evidenced by its firm support for the Non-Aligned Movement. But this changed in December 2010, when South Africa was formally invited to join the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) group, making it the BRICS. This diplomatic coup positioned South Africa as one of the five major emerging powers. Since then, South Africa has worked

hard to solidify its position in the group: hosting a BRICS summit in 2013, pledging serious money (USD 10 billion) for a new BRICS bank, and working to improve relations with other BRICS members, especially China and Russia.

The relationship between Russia and South Africa's ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), began in the Soviet era, when the USSR provided military and financial support to the ANC, and also educated and trained many of its leaders.

## Responding to the Crisis in Ukraine

South Africa has consistently advocated a peaceful, negotiated settlement to the crisis in Ukraine. On 2 March 2014, as the crisis was escalating, its Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) issued this statement: »Consistent with our foreign policy that favours and promotes peaceful resolution of conflicts, South Africa urges the protagonists in the stand-off to settle the crisis through dialogue. We will continue to monitor the situation and encourage international diplomatic efforts meant to produce a lasting peaceful solution.«

This position has not wavered with the changing situation on the ground. On 28 March, after Russia officially annexed Crimea, DIRCO advocated a similarly low-key approach: »South Africa encourages the various parties to strengthen all diplomatic efforts to produce a sustainable and peaceful solution, including through appropriate international fora. It is essential that a political path be supported by a united, cohesive international effort towards a negotiated political settlement reflective of the will of the people aimed at establishing a democratic pluralistic society, in which minorities are protected.«

This statement was released a day after the United Nations General Assembly resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine. South Africa abstained, and has not condemned Russia's actions, despite its stated commitment to the inviolability of state borders. Furthermore, South Africa has discouraged any forceful or punitive measures, including sanctions.

DIRCO's statement of 28 March read: »South Africa is of the view that the escalation of hostile language, the imposition of sanctions and countersanctions, the use of threat of force and violent actions do not contribute to the peaceful resolution of the situation and the economic stability of Ukraine and the region.«

DIRCO has discouraged attempts to isolate Russia, and criticised suggestions to exclude Russia from the G20 group of nations (unofficially, it was also against excluding Russia from the G8). Instead, it has advocated a diplomatic solution and expressed concerns that over-reacting to the situation would be dangerous and short-sighted.

Such a response is typical from South Africa, which advocates mediation over military intervention, and champions its own model for national reconciliation based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Exceptions, like South Africa's contribution of troops to the UN peacekeeping force in the DRC, are usually made under a United Nations mandate. However, South Africa prefers to encourage incremental rather than monumental change, for example, in Zimbabwe, where South Africa believes it has helped Robert Mugabe's government to become more moderate.

### Strengthening the Relationship

While also careful not to condone Russia's actions in the Crimea and Ukraine, South Africa has demonstrated that the situation has barely impacted the Russia–South Africa relationship, which is growing in strength. In addition to their BRICS memberships, the two countries are negotiating a nuclear deal.

In August 2014, President Jacob Zuma visited Moscow, ostensibly on a »medical holiday«. While there, he brokered the terms of a controversial agreement which positions the Russian company Rosatom as the front-runner for an estimated RUB 1 trillion (EUR 77 billion) contract to build a new nuclear power station in South Africa. Details of the supposedly secret agreement reveal a long-term commitment binding South Africa to Russia for decades to come.<sup>1</sup>

1. Faull, L. (2015): Exposed: Scary details of SA's secret Russian nuke deal. Mail & Guardian. Available at: <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-02-12-exposed-scary-details-of-secret-russian-nuke-deal> (accessed 28 April 2015).

Analysts and media generally believe that these ties are likely to deepen. »South Africa's approach must be understood in the context of a desire to see the balance of forces change to reflect the rise of emerging powers. The West's unilateral actions since the end of the cold war have not sat well with the South African government. Civil society elements aligned to the ruling tripartite alliance have condemned what they perceive as Western propaganda against Russia and the West's involvement in stirring unrest in Maidan Square, Kiev. Furthermore, from a realpolitik perspective, South Africa accords its alliance with the BRICS states high priority,« said Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, chief executive of the South African Institute for International Affairs.<sup>2</sup>

### Conclusion

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine are not headline issues in South Africa. Nonetheless, South African policymakers take them seriously, and consistently call for a peaceful resolution and negotiated settlement. However, they argue against imposing sanctions and refrain from condemning Russian actions. The strengthening of ties between Russia and South Africa indicate that on this issue, South Africa's sympathies lie closer to Russia than to Ukraine.

2. Sidiropoulos, E. (2014): South Africa's response to the Ukrainian crisis. Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre Policy Brief. Available at: [http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow\\_site/storage/original/application/1d676013a28a2c93f0abf4a5dfc4567b.pdf](http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/1d676013a28a2c93f0abf4a5dfc4567b.pdf) (accessed 28 April 2015).



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