

THE COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICA AND RUSSIA

Deon Geldenhuys

**Department of Politics and International Relations
University of Johannesburg, South Africa**

Abstract

Following an international trend, South Africa and Russia entered into a "strategic partnership" in 2006 and in 2013 upgraded it to a "comprehensive strategic partnership". This article examines the formal architecture of the partnership by means of Wilkins's "strategic partnership model". One of very few analytical devices for the study of bilateral partnerships between states, Wilkins's template probes three phases in the development of such alignments, namely their formation, implementation and evaluation. Based on a set of international instruments devised by South Africa and Russia, the institutional features of their comprehensive strategic partnership are set out and a tentative evaluation of its operation is offered. A comparative dimension is introduced by referring to formal aspects of South Africa's strategic partnerships with its other BRICS partners, namely China, India and Brazil.

1. Introduction

It is an age-old phenomenon that certain bilateral relationships between states are in some ways "special" or "privileged" and hence more important, better or closer than "ordinary" inter-state ties. In the 19th century, for instance, relations between Germany and Austria and between Russia and France were considered as exceptional by the parties involved (Evans and Newnham 1992: 304). In modern times the notion of a 'special relationship', especially when written in capital letters, is reserved more or less exclusively for that between America and

Britain (Evans and Newnham 1992: 304). The term itself was coined by Winston Churchill in March 1946, when he was the leader of the Opposition in the British Parliament. In an historic address delivered in Fulton, Missouri, Churchill warned that "an iron curtain has descended across the Continent" (Europe) and that Western powers should stand together against the perceived Soviet threat. What he called "a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States" would be at the heart of a united front. Such a "fraternal association", as Churchill portrayed it, "requires not only the growing friendship between our two vast but kindred Systems of society, but the continuance of the intimate relationship" in the military and security domains (Modern History Sourcebook, undated). The so-called Atlantic Alliance between Britain and America endured — with ebbs and flows — throughout the Cold War. In part due to the huge inequalities between the two partners in economic and military terms, the designation "special relationship" lost favour in recent years. In 2011, President Barack Obama and Prime Minister David Cameron opted for the expression "essential relationship" between the United States (US) and Britain (quoted by Blanco 2011: 15).

Many other states have since 1945 also claimed a form of "specialness" for their bilateral relationships. Consider, for instance, ties between some former imperial powers and their ex-colonies, which are said to constitute "families of nations" (Haugevik 2010: 2-3); the Commonwealth, born of the British Empire, is the best-known embodiment of such an historical association.

Since the 1990s states began displaying a preference for the adjective "strategic" to depict bilateral relationships that are supposed to be deeper and stronger than "standard" interactions, but usually without extending to alliances (understood as formal agreements for military cooperation in the face of common threats). The terms "strategic partnership" and "strategic relationship" are nowadays used the world over (Blanco 2011: 1-2). Among numerous examples are strategic partnerships/relationships between India and the US (Teja 2014: 183-194), Syria and Iran (Lawson 2007: 29-47), the US and Israel (Miller 2013: 1-6), the US and Saudi Arabia (Miller 2013: 1-6), China and South Korea (Kim 2008: 97-121), and Brazil and Japan (Lessa 2010: 123). Variations on the "partnership" theme include "constructive strategic partnership" (as the US and China envisaged in the 1990s) (Shambaugh 2004: 97); "comprehensive strategic partnership" (as between

Russia and South Africa); "privileged strategic partnership" (Russia and India); and "fundamental partnership" (the US and Brazil) (Lessa 2010: 120). Reference can also be made to the "consultative partnership" and the "dialogue partnership" that preceded Russia's 2005 "progressive and comprehensive partnership" with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN 2005). South Africa and the US, in turn, in 2010 concluded a Memorandum of Understanding for the Establishment of a Bilateral Strategic Dialogue.¹⁾

Considering the proliferation in strategic partnerships (hereafter abbreviated SP or SPs) between countries, International Relations scholarship in this area is lagging behind state practice. This exploratory article uses one of the few existing analytical devices to examine the formal structures and processes of the SP between South Africa and Russia and offer a preliminary assessment of the operation of the partnership. The creator of the framework, Wilkins (2008), distinguishes between the phases of formation, implementation and evaluation in the development of SPs. A comparative dimension will be introduced by brief references to the same three elements in South Africa's SPs with its other BRICS partners, namely Brazil, India and China.

It should be acknowledged that Russia and South Africa each has many other SPs too. The Russian Federation maintains SPs with, among others, India (Das Kundu 2013; Mansingh 2005: 2221; Hancock 2007: 91-2.), Italy (Italian Ministry of Foreign and International Cooperation 2012), Brazil and the European Union (EU) (Moshes ca 2013). In 2002 Russia and the US issued a joint declaration announcing that their relationship was progressing "from one of strategic competition to strategic partnership". This was followed up six years later with the two powers' Strategic Framework Declaration that gave more substance to what they called "the changed nature of our strategic relationship" (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics 2002; Council on Foreign Relations 2008; Legvold 2009: 78-93). The countries with which South Africa has bilateral SPs include India, Indonesia, Brazil, China, Canada, Mexico (Blanco 2011: 4) and the US (Cook 2013: 27). A multilateral strategic partner is the EU (Olivier 2006: 175-86; Helly 2012: 1-6; The South Africa-European Union Strategic Partnership Joint Action Plan 2007).

2. Defining strategic partnerships

It is perhaps appropriate that Russia shares centre-stage in this inquiry because it is credited with pioneering SPs as an element of its "multi-vectored" approach to international security. Moscow's 1996 SP with Beijing was its first and remains pre-eminent among Russia's extensive network of such alignments. Representing also the first explicit application of the term "strategic partnership" to an inter-state relationship, the Russo-Chinese partnership is according to Wilkins (2008: 358-383) still "exemplary of the phenomenon" (see also Jacobsen 1998: 1-11; Kerr 2005: 411-417; Hancock 2007: 88-90; Yue 1998: 83-123; and Lo 2004: 295-309).

SPs display great diversity in terms of their normative basis, goals, scope (issue-areas covered) and structures created. As Moshes (ca 2013: 1) correctly points out, "'strategic partnership' is a fairly imprecise term used indiscreetly around the world to label quite diverse types of relationships". Because of its loose usage, or what Lessa (2010: 119) calls its "vulgarization", the concept runs the risk of becoming meaningless (Wilkins 2008: 359.) It is truly a "contested policy concept" in international relations (Schmidt 2010). On the assumption that it represents a particular type of "cooperative relationship" (Blanco 2011: 15) or form of alignment (Wilkins 2008: 359-60.) between states, a case can be made for proposing a definition of an SP. It falls somewhere between a formal agreement for military cooperation in the event of aggression (that is, an alliance) and a bilateral agreement for limited cooperation in some functional area like trade or telecommunications. Mansingh (2005: 2221) argues that an SP comes about when

[t]wo governments agree to raise the level of their regular interactions to embrace levels from the lowest to the highest, to deal with the great variety of issues that concern each of them in a cordial and holistic manner seeking cooperation and understanding, and to make long-term commitments for mutual benefit and furthering their respective goals, but do not enter into alliance.

By this definition SPs encompass multiple issue-areas instead of only one. While the latter may in theory be possible (Blanco 2011: 16), SPs in practice tend to be comprehensive rather than confined in scope. This being the case, it may be a tautology to speak of a "*comprehensive* strategic partnership". For the purposes of this article, the policy-makers'

preference for designating the SP between South Africa and Russia as "comprehensive" will be respected.

A feature of SPs that Mansingh underplays, is the structures typically created. In European diplomacy, an SP is characterised by, among other things, "a complex network of institutional forums and thematic dialogues that incorporate from technical working groups to meetings of Heads of State and Chiefs of Government" (quoted by Lessa 2010: 128).

Mansingh's definition of an SP, with the addition of the reference to formal structures, suggests that the adjective "strategic" is more than an empty label to express some vague but elevated status. It does not carry a military connotation, but is consistent with the use of the term "strategy" in a business environment, namely a long-term plan of action designed to reach a particular goal or to bring about a desired future. Not surprisingly, the concept "strategic partnership" is derived from business and organisation studies (Wilkins 2008: 363).

In sum, then, SP should at a minimum mean a longer-term contract and programme of action to bind states together in cooperative ventures in one or more fields of mutual interest for their common benefit.

A moot point is whether such a partnership should, apart from the pragmatic considerations mentioned, also contain a normative element. Vahl (cited in Blanco 2011: 7) regards common values, shared interests and mutual understanding as "essential criteria for a 'partnership' as opposed to mere 'cooperation'". This view implies that a partnership involves more than a contractual relationship between parties engaged in a joint venture. Does a bilateral SP then require a strong bond of friendship between the states involved? While such a partnership cannot be formed between two enemies (Blanco 2011: 19), a coincidence of interests and aims between the parties short of a friendship (or "intimate relationship") (Roshchin 2006: 599-624; Berenskoetter 2007: 647-76) based on shared values and historical ties, may suffice. After all, as Lord Palmerston famously observed, "Nations have no permanent friends or allies, they only have permanent interests".

Finally, the variety of designations used could suggest that an SP represents a particular level in a hierarchy of alignments: partnership → consultative partnership → strategic partnership → comprehensive strategic partnership → special and privileged strategic partnership (Langa 2014; Das Kundu 2013). To establish whether such

advancement between distinct classes of partnership is a general rule, will of course require a far more detailed comparative analysis than the current inquiry. The Russo-South Africa partnership indeed points to some linear progression, as will be illustrated.

3. Wilkins's strategic partnership model

The official partnership between South Africa and Russia will now be examined in terms of a "strategic partnership model" devised by Wilkins (2008: 363-367). What he also calls his "simple cognitive template" is not merely an untested academic construct but has been employed by Wilkins to analyse the SP between Russia and China. His point of departure is that strategic partnerships go through three "sequential phases of development", namely formation, implementation and evaluation. Each of these will be explained and applied to the partnership between Russia and South Africa.

The inquiry will be mainly institutional, highlighting the formal structures and processes constituting the Russo-South Africa SP. These are enshrined in four key documents adopted by the two partners. The most recent is the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Africa, issued by Presidents Vladimir Putin and Jacob Zuma in 2013. It was preceded by the conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship and Partnership between the Republic of South Africa and the Russian Federation in 2006. The treaty was in turn based on the Declaration on Principles concerning Friendly Relations and Partnership between the Republic of South Africa and the Russian Federation signed in 1999. Seven years earlier the two countries made a joint statement on the establishment of diplomatic relations, which materialised in 1992.

The elements of comparison, alluded to in the introduction, are derived from another set of partnership agreements concluded by South Africa, namely the Tshwane Declaration on Reaffirming the Strategic Partnership between South Africa and India (2006), the Declaration on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Republic of South Africa (2010) and the Beijing Declaration on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Republic of South Africa and the People's Republic of China (2010). Here too, the comparisons will focus

on the formal aspects of the three SPs.

3.1 First stage: Partnership formation

The evolution of the SP between South Africa and Russia can be traced through three of the four international instruments mentioned. In their Declaration on Principles issued in 1999, Presidents Yeltsin and Mandela solemnly proclaim that their countries—

will develop relations of comprehensive practical partnership, according to the goals and principles of the UN Charter, based on commonality of their vital national interests, and on the ideals of freedom, democracy, equality and the universally recognised principles and norms of International Law.

Seven years later, in the Treaty of Friendship and Partnership, Russia and South Africa recommit themselves to "develop relations of partnership" on exactly the same foundation just mentioned. The term "strategic partnership" does not feature in either of these documents, however. It was only in Moscow in 2010, after talks with President Dmitry Medvedev, that Zuma stated unequivocally that the 2006 treaty "affirmed the South Africa-Russia strategic partnership" (Beginning of Russian-South African talks in expanded format 2010). The Putin-Zuma Joint Declaration of March 2013 acknowledges that the two states' SP was indeed consummated with the Treaty of Friendship and Partnership of 2006. The declaration of 2013 also announces, in the words of its title, "...the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" between South Africa and Russia. Curiously, though, the two parties use their joint statement to "formally proclaim the establishment of relations of strategic partnership between them", as if such arrangements had not existed previously. Whatever the reason for this formulation, the fact is that Russia and South African formally entered into an SP in 2006 and appear to have taken their bilateral relationship to the more exalted level of a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2013. What do the official documents reveal about the considerations behind the partnership between Moscow and Pretoria?

The formation of SPs is, according to Wilkins (2008: 363-364), shaped by four main factors: environmental uncertainty, strategic fit, system principle and elite involvement.

The first of these means that SPs typically emerge in reaction to

uncertainty in the international environment. "Actors join together to increase their capabilities and flexibility to counter this uncertainty", Wilkins (2008: 364) explains. The partners may have common threat perceptions, but these are not the decisive factor for collaboration as they are for conventional alliances.

There is some acknowledgement of environmental uncertainty and threats in some of the four bilateral documents under consideration. In the 1999 Declaration on Principles, Russia and South Africa voice their "concern over continuing ethnic and religious conflicts and acts of terrorism endangering internal and international stability" and also over "the threat that is constituted by all weapons of mass destruction" and by the accumulation of conventional armaments "beyond the level required for self-defence". There is a further reference in the document to "the threat of land mines". Instructively, the Declaration commits the two partners to cooperate in combatting these various threats. It is unlikely, though, that shared perceptions of threats are critical factors behind the establishment of the Russo-South Africa SP; most of the threats mentioned were probably experienced far more acutely by Russia (which in 1999 had the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation [NATO] and Chechnya on its mind), than by South Africa. Considerations of mutual economic benefit, it will be argued, are probably the main driver of the partnership.

Given environmental uncertainty, the parties involved would then constitute an SP based on mutual interests and possibly also shared values (or ideology). Partners should furthermore bring "some worthwhile capability or benefit, especially complementary resources", to their alignment. At the same time an attraction of an SP during the formation phase is its informal nature and "low commitment costs" (as opposed to an alliance) (Wilkins 2008: 364).

Where does the comprehensive SP between Moscow and Pretoria stand in terms of strategic fit? It will be recalled that in both the 1999 Declaration on Principles and the 2006 Treaty of Friendship and Partnership the two parties refer to the "commonality of their vital national interests" as a foundation for their partnership. These interests seem to be taken as self-evident because they are not spelled out in any of the four documents. State interests are also mentioned in the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of 2013. Russia and South Africa also pledge not to become involved in any alliance or armed conflict directed against the

other party or to join any agreement that will infringe upon the sovereignty, territorial integrity or "national security interests" of the other side. The latter formulation suggests that the parties may have divergent interests (in the security field) alongside their unspecified but supposedly compatible vital interests.

What Wilkins (2008: 364) refers to as values or ideologies (and the four core documents also called "ideals" and "principles"), can be treated as elements constituting the normative content of the agreements. The normative dimension covers three levels, namely the domestic, bilateral and global. The Joint Statement on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations, although hailing from a time when South Africa was in a transition from minority to majority rule with FW de Klerk still in power and Boris Yeltsin presided over a turbulent post-communist Russia, already had a clear normative thrust and perhaps paved the way for what was to follow in the subsequent agreements between Moscow and Pretoria. In an expression of a shared domestic normative framework, the two parties in 1992 firmly committed themselves to—

the implementation of profound transformations in their respective countries, which ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including political and civil rights, adequate socio-economic living conditions for all without any discrimination whatsoever.

In like vein the 1999 Declaration on Principles Concerning Friendly Relations and Partnership expresses the two partners' pledge "to ensuring respect for basic human rights and freedoms and to promoting the reform and development of their respective societies in the interest of all their citizens".

The Joint Statement of 1992 also provides a normative context for the two countries' fledgling bilateral relations by declaring a shared resolve to "build their relations on the basis of mutual commitment to the principles of freedom, democracy, supremacy of law and universally recognised norms of international law in accordance with the UN Charter". These very sentiments are echoed in the 1999 Declaration on Principles. The Treaty of Friendship and Partnership of 2006 contains a revisionist element by committing the parties to "work towards a more just and democratic multipolar world order", but then endorses the global *status quo* by affirming "non-intervention in each other's internal affairs, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, [and] adherence to other commonly accepted principles and norms of International Law". In

a typically realist idiom the Joint Declaration of 2013 proclaims that the partnership between Russia and South Africa "is based upon the principles of sovereignty, equality and territorial integrity of States, non-interference in their internal affairs, mutual respect and mutual benefit".

System principle refers to a general common purpose around which an SP is organised. This purpose "becomes solidified into an overarching framework of mutual agreement and understanding" and provides the *raison d'être* for the partnership. The system principle should in due course be "distilled into a set of specific common goals" (Wilkins 2008: 364).

The four instruments mentioned enshrine a set of system principles or common purposes that underpin the SP between South Africa and Russia. The system principles apply to the global and bilateral spheres. At the global plane they desire "a more just system of international relations based on the sovereign equality of all states and peoples and supremacy of the law under the central role of the United Nations Organization" (Joint Declaration 2013) and seek "the successful functioning of the universal system of collective security based on the United Nations Charter" (2006 Treaty of Friendship and Partnership; also see the Declaration on Principles 1999). In the bilateral context the system principles are to "strengthen friendship, promote mutual understanding, all-round cooperation and equitable relations" (2006 Treaty of Friendship and Partnership) and enhance mutual "progress and prosperity" (Joint Declaration 2013).

The system principles in turn give rise to a range of shared goals between South Africa and Russia, the pursuit of which is the essence of their SP. The parties will work towards:

- enhancing the "efficiency" of the United Nations (UN) (2006 Treaty of Friendship and Partnership) through "the reform and the rational modernization of that institution" (Declaration on Principles 1999);
- advancing cooperation in the UN, other IGOs and beyond to bring about the peaceful settlement of conflicts and ensure international peace and security (2006 Treaty of Friendship and Partnership; Declaration on Principles 1999);
- promoting "global disarmament and ... the consolidation of regimes of nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction", and also focusing international attention on the excessive build-up of

- conventional weapons (Declaration on Principles 1999; also see the 2006 Treaty of Friendship and Partnership);
- ensuring greater international attention to African issues (2006 Treaty of Friendship and Partnership); and
- supporting attempts to "safeguard the global environment, natural riches and the optimal use of non-renewable resources" (Declaration on Principles 1999).

According to Wilkins (2008: 364), an attraction of an SP during the formation phase is its informal nature and "low commitment costs" (as opposed to an alliance). In their Joint Declaration on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, Russia and South Africa indeed declare that theirs "does not seek to create a military-political alliance" (and "is not directed against any other State or group of States"). The immediate costs of the commitments undertaken by the two partners may well be modest, but the partnership has a strong formal rather than informal character in terms of the areas of co-operation identified and the official structures involved.

Finally, the building of a strategic partnership is "a top-down or elite-driven process", Wilkins (2008: 364) argues. A partnership's prospects therefore depend on the direct involvement and support of top leaders from the partner states. The mere fact that President Zuma met his Russian counterparts (Medvedev and Putin) in Moscow at least six times between 2010 and 2015 (Joint news conference 2010; *Business Day*, 11 September 2013;²⁾ *The Times*, 17 August 2014; *City Press*, 31 August 2014; *News24*, 31 August 2014; *Beeld*, 8 July 2015), suggests that there is indeed high-level political commitment to the partnership. It is worth recording that President Mandela and his then deputy Thabo Mbeki had also paid official visits to Russia (Filatova and Davidson 2013: 463-464).

How do the formative elements in South Africa's SPs with the other three BRICS member countries compare with those recorded above? Common values feature prominently in the Tshwane Declaration on Reaffirming the Strategic Partnership between South Africa and India (2006). "In sharing the fundamental values espoused by Mahatma Gandhi", the two partners profess their "unflinching belief in the peaceful resolution of disputes and the recognition of the rights of nations to self-determination and freedom". South Africa and India are also said to "draw their strength and inspiration from the diverse, multi-

cultural societies constituting their respective nations". The normative foundation of the Indo-South Africa SP is also found in the shared belief that "the best assurance for continued peace and prosperity lies in the adherence to democratic governance that is rooted in the respect for human dignity and the fundamental rights of all people". The Tshwane Declaration furthermore expresses the parties' "deep conviction that peace and development are indivisible and that good governance was the best-known way to ensure both". The 2002 Declaration on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between the Federative Republic Brazil and the Republic of South Africa in like vein acknowledges that they "share democratic values and are countries with multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies". One of the areas in which South Africa and Brazil undertake to cooperate, is in protecting human rights and freedoms "at all levels of society". Such sentiments are, unsurprisingly, absent from the Beijing Declaration on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Republic of South Africa and the People's Republic of China (2010).

The latter document does, however, identify common ground between China and South Africa on global issues such as strengthening South-South cooperation, "multilateralism and the democratization of international relations", reform of the UN, and promoting peace, security and development in Africa. In their 2006 Declaration, Brazil and South Africa state that their SP "will be based on shared values, ideas and approaches to global, regional and inter-regional issues". Specific mention is then made of "an aspiration for a more common, equitable, transparent and democratic global order", reform of the UN and "joint problem-solving and bridge-building diplomacy". The Tshwane Declaration issued by South Africa and India in 2006 likewise proclaims that their SP is "guided by the common vision of a global order marked by peace, security and equity". South Africa's SPs with all four of its BRICS partners thus display a mildly revisionist external orientation.

3.2 Second stage: Implementation

The implementation phase involves "the diffusion of an institutional structure" that regulates interaction between the partners (Wilkins 2008: 364). The formal structure specifies the rules, policies and procedures of the partnership, identifies the bureaucratic elements of each state that will interact with its counterpart (for example, executive, military,

financial or public agencies), and demarcates the scope of the partnership by means of functional areas of cooperation (for example, diplomatic, security/military, economic, social/cultural). Economic cooperation is typically at the heart of the collaboration and a central driver of the partnership. Wilkins (2008: 365-366) arranges the linkages between the states involved along two axes: hierarchical connections and functional areas. The lowest hierarchical connection is the domestic public, followed in rising order by private enterprise, state corporations, military establishment, and the executive branch of government at the top. In terms of "coupling", however, it is deepest at the public level. The five functional areas are arranged in terms of increasing scope: diplomatic security (at the lowest end of the spectrum), defence/military, economic, societal and cultural (the greatest scope). By examining "the multifarious linkages between states" on both the axes, Wilkins (2008: 366) determines "the degree to which the partners are coupled": loosely, moderately or tightly.

A central document in institutionalising relations between South Africa and Russia is the Treaty of Friendship and Partnership of 2006. It provides for "regular dialogue at the level of political leadership" and for "regular consultations at different levels" in accordance with the Protocol on Consultations between the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of South Africa and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (1994). In addition the 2006 treaty calls for "contacts" between the parliaments of the two states; cooperation between their armed forces and defence industries; and cooperation in a variety of other fields including science and technology, trade and the economy, transportation, aviation and space, power generation, health care, education, culture, sport, and between Russia's administrative territories and South Africa's provinces.

The 2013 Joint Declaration's core paragraph "envisages the elevation of varied and multifaceted ties between them to a higher and qualitatively new level as well as imparting them with a special character of close and dynamic cooperation", which is presumably what is meant with a "comprehensive" SP. The "long term perspective", adopted in what amounts to a plan of action, in turn points to the strategic nature of the upgraded partnership. The document identifies seven areas for intensified bilateral cooperation:

— *political*, including regular high-level meetings between South

- Africa and Russia and closer cooperation at the UN and within the BRICS framework;
- *trade and economic*, involving priority sectors such as trade and investment, banking, mining, nuclear power, agriculture and transportation;
 - *parliamentary*, calling for regular inter-parliamentary exchanges;
 - *defence*, including military and military-technical cooperation;
 - *science and technology*, requiring cooperation in fundamental and applied scientific research;
 - *humanitarian*, covering fields such as culture, languages, education, sport and mass media; and
 - *integration organisations*, referring to cooperation between Eurasian and African regional organisations.

There is an eighth open category (styled "other fields"), which refers to cooperation against "international terrorism, separatism, organised crime, illegal trafficking in narcotics".

By late 2014 Russia and South Africa had signed over 40 bilateral agreements, memorandums of understanding and the like, including the four core instruments already cited. The De Klerk government entered into four agreements with the Russian Federation, while the Mandela government added a further 17. Since 2000 South Africa and Russia signed another 17 or so bilateral accords.

The two parties' first agreement on trade and economic cooperation was reached already in 1993 (Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Trade and Economic Co-operation). Further agreements focusing on economic ties followed in 1995 (Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to Taxes on Income), in 1999 (Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Promotion and Reciprocal Protection of Investments) and 2005 (Memorandum of Understanding and Co-operation between the Republic of South Africa and the Russian Federation, which involved their respective government agencies charged with promoting international business ties). It should be added that the strengthening of economic

relations also features prominently in three of the key documents mentioned repeatedly, namely the Declaration on Principles concerning Friendly Relations and Partnership (1999), Treaty of Friendship and Partnership (2006) and Joint Declaration on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2013).

Another important area in the bilateral partnership concerns military/ defence matters, as witnessed in the Agreement on Co-operation between the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of South Africa and Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (1995), Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Military-Technical Co-operation (1995), Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa as represented by the Department of Defence and the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation concerning Defence Intelligence Cooperation (2000), Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation concerning Protection of Classified Defence and Defence-Industrial Related Information (2005) and Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Reciprocal Protection of Intellectual Property Rights used and established in the Course of Bilateral Defence-Industrial Cooperation (2006).

Outside the military realm, bilateral agreements and understandings have been reached in several functional areas of cooperation that now form part and parcel of the SP:

- *science and technology* (Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Scientific and Technological Cooperation 1993 and 2014; Memorandum of Understanding between the Council for Geoscience of the Republic of South Africa and the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation on Co-operation in the Field of Geology 1998; Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Co-operation in the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy 2004; Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Field of the Exploration and Use of Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes 2006);

- *labour* (Joint Statement on Social and Labour Co-operation between the Minister of Manpower of the Republic of South Africa and the Deputy Minister of Labour of the Russian Federation 1994);
- *arts and culture* (Declaration of Intent on Cooperation in the Fields of Arts and Culture between the Republic of South Africa and the Russian Federation 1995, and Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Field of Culture 1999);
- *education* (Protocol between the Government of the Republic of South Africa through its Department of Education and the Government of the Russian Federation through its Ministry of Education on Cooperation in the Field of Education 2002, and Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Mutual Recognition and Equivalence of Educational Qualifications and Academic Degrees 2013);
- *health* (Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Field of Health and Medical Science 2006);
- *sport and recreation* (Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Fields of Sport and Recreation 1998);
- *tourism* (Agreement on Tourism Co-operation between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation 1998);
- *transport* (Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Field of Maritime Transport 2005, and Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation for Promotion of Aviation Safety 2013);
- *water, forestry and plants* (Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Co-operation in the Field of Water Resources and Forestry 2007, and Agreement between the Govern-

- ment of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Co-operation in the Field of Plant Quarantine 2010);
- *fisheries* (Statement of Intent between the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of the Republic of South Africa and the Federal Agency for Fisheries of the Russian Federation on Cooperation in Fisheries 2013);
 - *mining* (Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of South Africa on Cooperation in the Platinum Group Metals 2013);
 - *energy* (Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Field of Energy 2013); and
 - *crime fighting* (Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation in Respect of Co-operation in the Field of Combating Crime 1998).

A more unusual and potentially contentious area of bilateral co-operation involves law-making and legal systems, following the 2011 Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of South Africa, Represented by its Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, and the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation.

South Africa and Russia have also entered into a number of agreements relating to diplomatic and consular matters. Probably the Mandela government's first accord with Moscow was the Protocol on Consultations between the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of South Africa and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, signed in September 1994. The next year saw the conclusion of the Protocol on Consular Procedure between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Russian Federation. The Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation regarding the Waiver of Visa Requirements for Holders of Diplomatic or Service/Official Passports followed in 2010.

Several standing structures for bilateral cooperation, now part of

the architecture of the Russo-South Africa SP, have been created. The most notable are the Joint Intergovernmental Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation (Agreement between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Intergovernmental Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation 1999), the Joint Commission on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (Protocol between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Establishment of a Joint South African-Russian Commission on Scientific and Technological Cooperation 1995), and the Joint Inter-governmental Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation (Arkhangelskaya and Shubin 2013: 2; Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of South Africa, undated). A 2005 Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation between South Africa's Department of Trade and Industry and the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs provides for the creation of a "strategic joint working group" to promote business relations between enterprises from the two countries. Mention should also be made of an inter-governmental agreement reached in 2013 on the establishment of the Trade Representative Office of the Russian Federation in Johannesburg (South African Embassy in Moscow 2013).

To conclude the implementation phase of the Russo-South Africa SP, we turn to what Wilkins (2008: 366) portrays as the degree of "coupling" between parties in an SP. This is determined according to hierarchical connections and functional areas. On paper the comprehensive strategic partnership between Moscow and Pretoria provides for extensive coupling on both axes. As regards hierarchy, the partnership endeavours to involve the two countries' domestic publics (in the form of civil society organisations), state enterprises in various fields, military establishments, ministers and heads of government in the alignment. The functional areas of cooperation likewise embrace the spectrum used by Wilkins (2008: 365), from diplomatic security to cultural cooperation. Russia and South Africa are moreover capable of bringing what Wilkins (2008: 364) terms "some worthwhile capability or benefit, especially complementary resources" to their SP; the resources could range from financial means and diplomatic skills to scientific expertise in various fields.

Turning to the implementation of South Africa's SPs with its other BRICS partners, reference can be made to the areas of cooperation agreed to. An elaborate blueprint for official collaboration is contained in

the Action Plan annexed to the 2006 Declaration establishing the SP between South Africa and Brazil. At the bilateral level provision is made for cooperation in no fewer than 18 areas, including "political, diplomatic and strategic fields and human rights"; governance; education; public security and defence; economy, trade and tourism; transport, science and technology; and labour and social issues. Inter-regional cooperation covers items like enhancing the institutional capacity of the African Union; strengthening the Pan-African Parliament; and exploring co-operation between the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and MERCOSUL (Southern Common Market). Three broad areas for multilateral cooperation are also identified, namely political matters; economy, trade and development; and environmental, scientific and technological issues. The Beijing Declaration is at least on paper less comprehensive in its provisions for cooperation. South Africa and China agree to pursue their SP through "political relations and bilateral dialogue", and cooperation in the economic domain and various other fields such as defence, education, health, water resources, arts and culture. The Tshwane Declaration on the Indo-South Africa SP notes that the alignment already extends to cooperation in economic matters, human resources development, human settlements, health, public governance, science and technology, defence, and culture. Priority sectors for strengthening bilateral interaction include energy, infrastructure, information technology and tourism. Although there is considerable overlap in the areas of cooperation covered in all four South Africa's SPs (with Russia, China, Brazil and India, respectively), there is also some variation that acknowledges the partners' particular needs and strengths.

As regards the formal structures for cooperation established under the partnership agreements, it will suffice to mention the India-South Africa Defence Committee (designed to promote closer co-operation in the defence sector), the Bi-National Commission between China and South Africa, and the Joint Commission that South Africa and Brazil have created to monitor the implementation of their Action Plan of 2010. It appears that these three partnerships consist of considerably fewer formal structures than the Russo-South Africa SP.

3.3 Third stage: Evaluation

Evaluation, the final phase, is about judging the effectiveness of an SP. Wilkins (2008: 366-367) proposes three evaluation criteria. First, the

closer the alignment of common interests and shared values, the more cohesive the partnership will be and the stronger the incentives to cooperate for mutual benefit. The second criterion is progress in goal achievement, which could be measured for instance, by economic interaction (like trade and investment flows), the extent of political dialogue, scientific and technological cooperation, and the compatibility of agendas in multilateral forums. Mutual perceptions, thirdly, highlight issues that may strengthen or weaken the integrity of the SP. The factors include historical legacies, ideological leanings, cultural affinities and mutual trust. In combination the three criteria could be indicative of the durability of a partnership. Some SPs may dissolve or continue more in form than substance, becoming what Wilkins (2008: 367) calls "a hollow or false partnership". Alternatively, a partnership could expand by taking in new partners or evolve into a closer relationship culminating in an alliance (Wilkins 2008: 367).

To evaluate the comprehensive SP between Russia and South Africa, even at this relatively early stage, will require a far more detailed inquiry going well beyond the formal features on which the present article focuses. One can nonetheless point to factors that are likely to have a bearing on the cohesiveness and integrity of the partnership, as conceived by Wilkins. Take the national interests of South Africa and Russia: are these fundamentally complementary, and do the partners need each other to pursue their respective interests? The two countries are after all geographically very far apart, their spheres of interest hardly coincide beyond the BRICS grouping, and there are huge demographic, territorial, economic and military disparities between them. It can also be asked whether their normative agendas align very closely, beyond such fairly banal values like state sovereignty and equality? Do the two countries have a similar understanding of human rights and democracy at home? Or of the meaning of a rules-based international order (consider Russia's annexation of Crimea and subversion of Ukraine)?

Differences in these areas may, however, be of less consequence than the cohesion provided by the common objective of replacing (what remains of) Western hegemony with a multipolar global order in which Russia and emerging powers like South Africa, India and Brazil as well as China are effective counterweights to the US and its European allies. South Africa furthermore supports the assertiveness that Putin has brought to Russian foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the West and the

Kremlin in turn seems to back South Africa's ambition of joining the global high table as Africa's pre-eminent power. In short, the two partners have a shared anti-Western orientation, although Moscow's is presently far more pronounced than Pretoria's (Fabricius 2010; Fabricius 2013).

The integrity of the Russo-South Africa partnership presently also depends on historical legacies, ideological leanings, cultural affinities and mutual trust. The former refers to what the 1999 Declaration on Principles concerning Friendly Relations and Partnership terms "the historically important links between the peoples of South Africa and Russia in their efforts to eradicate all forms of discrimination and promote democracy". In the Joint Declaration of 2013 Zuma and Putin are more expansive and laudatory by recalling their nations' —

traditionally close and friendly ties based on mutual understanding and deep-rooted confidence in each other and by the rich and fruitful experience of cooperation in different spheres accumulated over the period of struggle against apartheid as well as the years since establishment of diplomatic relations between them.

An aspect of this historical legacy is a nostalgia among members of South Africa's ruling elite for the old Soviet Union, the communist superpower that had backed the African National Congress (ANC) and its South African Communist Party (SACP) ally in the fight against *apartheid* and also supported anti-colonial struggles in several other African territories. Also bear in mind that there are probably more card-carrying Communist Party members in the South African government (cabinet) than in any other liberal democracy. President Putin, given his KGB credentials and avowed admiration for the Soviet Union, is revered by many South African political leaders as much for his communist past as his present anti-Western stance (Fabricius 2013; Levin 2010). (It may be instructive that over 90 South African spies have reportedly undergone training in Russia in recent years (*Sunday Times*, 31 August 2014). It is an open question whether such historical and ideological ties will retain their binding quality as the *apartheid* and Soviet eras fade into history.

The material benefits of economic and technological interaction may prove stronger and more durable than intangible factors in sustaining the SP between South Africa and Russia. The respective private sectors have established presences in the two countries and a Russia-

South Africa Business Council is active in both. Still, trade and investment flows remain modest (Filatova and Davidson 2013: 454-496). What would certainly boost bilateral economic ties and by extension the SP, is a successful Russian bid for the giant contract to build South Africa's planned nuclear reactors. It is widely speculated that Rosatom, Russia's nuclear parastatal, is Pretoria's preferred bidder (over contending companies from a handful of other countries) for the construction of six to eight nuclear power stations estimated to cost South Africa between R500 million and R1-trillion. The prospective deal — the largest nuclear building project in the world — is already highly contentious in South Africa over its affordability and allegations that Russia is being given the inside track in an untransparent bidding process (Bryer 2014; Groenewald 2014; Sparks 2015; De Lange 2015a; De Lange 2015b).

Meanwhile, notwithstanding the formal SP arrangement, Russia's official presence in South Africa is decidedly low-key "and representatives are rarely visible in soft power contexts" (Wheeler 2013). The same probably applies to South Africa's diplomatic presence in Moscow. A footprint at sub-national levels may, however, be created through paradiplomacy. Non-central authorities at the provincial/regional and city levels in Russia and South Africa (for example, St Petersburg and Cape Town) have concluded agreements for cooperation ("Joint news conference with President of South Africa Jacob Zuma" 2010; Arkhangel'skaya and Shubin 2013: 2). At the broader public level, it is fair to say, Russia receives little exposure in South Africa and *vice versa*; the two societies remain enigmas to one another. In this respect the SP between the two states is yet to take root.

Many questions can also be asked about the factors that could either sustain or scupper South Africa's SPs with Brazil, China and India. With them, as with Russia, South Africa shares a modestly revisionist international agenda featuring reform of the UN, 'anti-imperialism' and closer South-South cooperation. The Tshwane Declaration on Reaffirming the Strategic Partnership between South Africa and India also makes great play of their "deep political bond that was first forged more than a century ago". China can also claim a historical and ideological bond with South Africa's ruling elite. In the cases of India and Brazil, South Africa is dealing with strategic partners who subscribe to the same liberal democratic values. There is no such commonality with Beijing, but its global economic weight and political clout makes China an attractive strategic partner for South Africa. Material advantage may

in all these instances, as in the Russian case, prove to be the critical factor for cohesion in the various bilateral partnerships. It should be acknowledged, though, that the material benefits of bilateral cooperation are not symmetrical; South Africa may well need its partners far more than *vice versa*. What could compensate for such inequality is the five countries' joint membership of BRICS; this could be a powerful binding factor in the strategic partnerships that South Africa maintains with each of Russia, China, India and Brazil.

4. Conclusion

International relations scholarship on the theory and practice of strategic partnerships between countries (and between states and multilateral organisations) is still modest in quantity. This is even truer of the study of SPs in South Africa's foreign relations — hence the present attempt at exploring the formal features of the Russo-South Africa partnership as enshrined in a set of international instruments. The analytical tool used is Wilkins's strategic partnership model, which distinguishes three sequential stages in the development of such alignments: formation, implementation and evaluation.

As regards the formative aspects of their SP, it is instructive that South Africa and Russia share concerns over a variety of threats to internal and international security and stability. Another striking feature is their normative commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms in the two societies. At the global level, Russia and South Africa agree to an agenda that combines progressive ambitions (such as "a more just and democratic multipolar world order") with conservative notions (like sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference). Whether these are the main factors inspiring the SP is questionable; mutual economic advantage is probably the (unexpressed) driving force.

The implementation of the SP is marked by an ambitious plan for wide-ranging bilateral cooperation, from the political and diplomatic level through trade, science and technology to the military field and cultural activities. A number of formal structures have been created to oversee the agenda for cooperation. Expressed in terms of "coupling", as conceived by Wilkins, the SP between South Africa and Russia could on paper qualify for a "tight" rating: cooperation extends over several functional areas, and provision is made for a hierarchy of connections,

from the top government level through the military sector, state corporations and private enterprise down to the domestic public. Since the latter constitutes the deepest level of coupling, the SP is in practice still weak in this regard; the respective publics in Russia and South Africa are still largely unaware of and unaffected by the partnership arrangement, which remains mainly an official relationship.

Wilkins evaluates an SP in terms of three criteria: cohesiveness in terms of the alignment of partners' interests and values; progress in goal achievement; and the integrity of the partnership that depends on such factors as historical legacies, ideological orientations and mutual trust. On the first criterion, the Russo-South Africa partnership deserves a positive evaluation at this stage. The question, however, is whether the existing coincidence of interests and values will endure. The two partners' actual goal achievement to date falls outside the scope of this inquiry, but there is clearly a need for a thorough investigation on this score. As for the integrity of the SP, all three determinants mentioned are present and strengthen the alignment. Again, though, one has to ask whether these factors of cohesion will retain their potency over time.

There is clearly far more research to be done on the SP between Russia and South Africa, including an assessment of its effectiveness in terms of goal achievement and what this record may hold for the future of the association. Might today's comprehensive strategic partnership evolve into an even closer alignment, or instead become a hollow partnership existing more in form than substance? What role could the BRICS connection play in determining the fate of the Russo-South Africa partnership? The BRICS factor might be equally relevant in shaping the future of South Africa's SPs with Brazil, India and China. The superficial references to the formal features of the latter partnerships underline the need for further comparative research into South Africa's SPs with all its BRICS partners and indeed with other countries too, probing both the structural and functional aspects of these arrangements. Is South Africa, for instance, using a single basic template for all its strategic partnerships, or is there a rich country-based variety in terms of formation, implementation and evaluation?

Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, the texts of all South Africa's international instruments cited in this article were obtained from the Department of Interna-

tional Relations and Cooperation, www.dfa.gov.za/chiefstatelawadviser/treatysection.html.

2. Many of the press references in the article were retrieved from SAMedia, http://0-reference.sabinet.co.za.ujlink.uj.ac.za/sa_media.

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