

The BRICS: Analyzing the Security Dimension

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The term BRIC first appeared in 2001 as a virtual country grouping, essentially just a label for an investment banking product. Nonetheless, in 2009 the first BRIC summit was convened in Yekaterinburg and two year later the broader BRICS emerged at the summit in Sanya. How did a virtual association become a real alliance? Simply put, everything that has a name exists. In truth, however, there were more serious reasons for the formation of this new alliance, and many of them are related to the security dimension.

With the end of the Cold War, it appeared that the prerequisites were in place for bona fide equality of states and their freedom to choose their own models of development and formats of engagement in international affairs. However, such a new world order did not in fact emerge. The task of building such an order was at some point replaced by an endeavor to propagate the system of Western institutions throughout the entire world. The bipolar system was replaced by aspirations for unipolar domination, which was largely perceived as counterproductive and unjust and was accompanied by an increase in confrontation and military interventions. Simultaneously, new countries emerged as leaders of economic growth, which the crisis of 2007-2009 highlighted. The limitations of the mechanisms created at Bretton Woods became apparent. The unipolar system proved temporal and unsustainable.

It became clear that no single state is capable of ensuring effective global governance. The global system is now settling into a more natural polycentric arrangement in which states are guided by national interests (untainted by ideology) and a common understanding of collective interests.

Multipolarity is not something that is automatically beneficial, as it entails a high degree of uncertainty and elevated risks. This in turn has amplified demand for multilateral, flexible network diplomacy, for collective leadership of the leading countries of the world. Here a substantial contribution to the resolution of these issues can be made by the new centers of growth and political influence. Among such centers are Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which have declared that previously existing international mechanisms do not correspond to the realities of the 21st century. The formation of the BRICS is an expression of the will of the five countries directed at changing the world, not to the detriment of anyone else but rather for the sake of a more equitable system of global governance.

In Brasília they declared their support “for a multipolar, equitable and democratic world order, based on international law, equality, mutual respect, cooperation, coordinated action and collective decision-making of all states.” The member-countries are confident that the international community should rely on political and diplomatic solutions rather than the use of military force. There are no trigger-happy states among the BRICS.

The BRICS’s agenda has evolved to include questions concerning strategic cooperation and dialogue in the realm of international security, and such questions are considered in close conjunction financial, technological, environmental and information security issues.

All five countries are interested in maximally increasing the role of the United Nations, in improvement of its mechanisms and in multilateral diplomacy as a means for responding to global challenges and threats. In the documents coming out of BRICS summits we see a

continued emphasis on the members' readiness to consider comprehensive reform of the UN, including the Security Council. China and Russia support the aspiration of Brazil, India and South Africa to play a more significant role in the UN. These countries are considered potential permanent members of the Security Council in the case that it is expanded (which is not yet on the foreseeable horizon).

The simultaneous participation of all five BRICS countries in the Security Council in 2011 provided a valuable opportunity for joint efforts on issues of peace and security, reinforcing multilateral approaches and strengthening foreign policy coordination. All of the countries are concerned about the volatile situations seen in various regions of the world while also sharing common principles: the importance of avoiding use of force and respect for the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of every state. On many issues – in particular those related to Libya, Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan and Somali – BRICS countries acted and are acting based on common or at least very similar positions.

When the Security Council took up the issue of Libya, the BRICS countries showed their support for the African Union High-Level Panel Initiative on Libya (at the Sanya summit) proposed by South Africa, but they did not veto the no-fly zone resolution. They later came to greatly regret this when the resolution was used as cover for a full-fledged foreign intervention, resulting in a large number of casualties and destabilization of the entire region of North Africa. The BRICS countries learned a lesson from the Libyan crisis: in order to avoid further abuse of UN Security Council resolutions, going forward full clarity is a prerequisite for all such issues like the nature of proposed sanctions, conditions for imposing them, sanction targets and the conditions for lifting sanctions.

This was one of the reasons why on October 4, 2011, the representatives of Russia and China both voted to veto the resolution on Syria while Brazil, India and South Africa abstained (together with Lebanon). They are not proponents of the Assad regime, but the alternative to this regime seems much worse. BRICS countries are calling on both sides to put an end to the violence and engage in dialogue. Moreover, the BRICS are against the use of the UN Security Council by Western countries to topple disagreeable regimes and the imposition of one-sided solutions to conflict situations.

The five countries do not believe that the Iranian crisis can be resolved with the use of force, the impact of which would be extremely difficult to anticipate. No one is interested in a nuclear-armed Iran. In recognizing Iran's right to the peaceful use of atomic energy in compliance with its international obligations, they are in favor of resolving the crisis through diplomatic means in following with UN Security Council resolutions. BRICS countries believe that Afghanistan needs time, development support and cooperation, preferential access to world markets, and foreign investment. They are prepared to fulfill their obligations accepted at the International Afghanistan Conference in Bonn in December 2011 and to support efforts under the Paris Pact aimed at fighting illegal Afghan opium trade.

BRICS countries have strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and at every summit have affirmed that acts of terrorism cannot be justified. They are in favor of the speedy completion of work on and the adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism by the United Nations. The prevention of acts of terrorism is just as important as the quashing of terrorism and its sources of financing. Practical cooperation in this area is already taking place, in the RIC (Russia-India-China) format and within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

At the Sanya summit there was discussion of the reinforcement of international information security with a particular focus on cybercrime. Increasing attention is being given to the development of a universal convention on cybercrime prevention under the auspices of the United Nations. BRICS countries have national space programs and progress is being made in space exploration cooperation as well as in the development of a common global navigation system. All member-states are against the militarization of outer space and they are co-authors of draft UN resolutions on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities.

Nuclear nonproliferation and peaceful use of atomic energy are becoming ever more important for the BRICS. All of the member-states possess uranium enrichment technologies. Russian and China are nuclear-weapon states under the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons, India is a de facto nuclear power and Brazil has experience in the development of a military nuclear program and its subsequent dismantling. Thus there is a broad platform for dialogue among the BRICS on the nuclear issue. Firstly, this entails the development of atomic energy worldwide, including joint projects and technologies for enriching nuclear materials. Secondly, control over the export of sensitive technologies. Thirdly, the issue of preventing nuclear terrorism. This topic has largely been monopolized by the West, yet each of the BRICS countries is no less concerned about the threat of nuclear terrorism or nuclear anarchy. Each of the BRICS, albeit to different degrees, is interested in having a constructive arms control agenda. For now only Russia is participating in agreements with the United States on the reduction of nuclear weapons. It is in the interest of international security for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) to enter into force. Russia and Brazil have already ratified it, and China and India could also join.

The main challenge to economic security is the imperative to form new financial architecture, which seems highly unlikely without taking into consideration the opinions and without the resources of the five countries, which are putting forward a commonly agreed concept for reform of the world financial system. The BRICS support the central role of the G20 in global economic governance. In comparison with previous formats, the G20 is perceived as a broader, more representative and more effective forum. The BRICS would like to facilitate the strengthening of the G8 through the creation of the G8+ (meaning the addition of China, India, Brazil, Mexico and South America). Moreover, when participating in G8 summits, these countries are not inclined to put up with last-minute invitations to simply join for coffee.

The BRICS have achieved some success in advocating for reallocation of voting shares in the IMF and World Bank. "Control rights in the IMF should stay with the net creditors," notes Sergei Guriev, head of the New Economic School in Moscow. "The difference is that now the net creditors are largely emerging markets, in particular BRICS. Emerging markets should not just obtain votes proportional to their weight in the global economy; they should get even more votes, because if BRICS cannot control how their funds are spent, they may simply refuse to increase funding to the IMF in the future... In the worst case [scenario], they will not provide any funding at all."¹

In the context of ensuring global economic security, the BRICS are examining problems of promoting development. Growing inequality represents a great threat to sustainable and stable development worldwide, and addressing this inequality is a high priority issue for all responsible countries. The BRICS are paying significant attention to countries suffering from poverty and hunger as well as a lack of clean water and energy resources.

The future of international security to a large degree depends on relations between the BRICS and the West. In the capitals of the five countries there is a common understanding that

in the near term Western countries will retain their economic, political and military superiority. Each of the five countries is to a large degree interconnected with the United States and European Union and is not interested in a further worsening of their economic problems. They are also not interested in confrontation with the United States and/or NATO. At the same time the BRICS will nudge their Western partners toward multilateral approaches, toward compliance with international law, toward recognition of the pluralism of development models.

In Western countries attitudes toward the BRICS are, to say the least, complicated. The term BRIC or BRICS is altogether absent in many books published in the West about the modern world. A blind eye is often turned toward things they find unpleasant or things the West is powerless to change. When these terms are mentioned, then they are largely framed in the following four contexts:

- The BRICS is a reactionary group;
- The BRICS is an unwelcome counterweight to the West;
- The BRICS is unworkable, as the countries are too different (hence the frequent attempts emphasize rifts between them);
- The BRICS is made up of countries which are currently facing enormous problems.

In his book *No One's World*, Charles Kupchan notes that BRICS summits serve as “an alternative to institutions dominated by the West.”ⁱⁱ Western countries are making efforts to drive a wedge between BRICS countries, in part by labeling China and Russia as autocracies and threats to the “free world” while referring to India, Brazil and South America as major democracies and potential allies. Even without such external factors, there are in fact some contradictions between members, for example, China and India, and Russia goes to great lengths to facilitate their rapprochement.

At the same time, in the West there is an understanding of the need to engage the BRICS. Jim O'Neill suggests that “the revival of the G20 in late 2008 by President Bush was a major step in bringing the BRIC countries to the center of global policymaking... How the established powers choose to accommodate the BRICs into global policymaking will determine whether they win or lose from this irreversible change in the world order.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The BRICS share a concern about the position of the US and the West in general on a wide array of issues – the system of global governance, military interventions and specific crisis situations. Following Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria the question arises – who is next? For China, the problem of Taiwan is a particularly sensitive one, for India there is Kashmir, and for Russia – the Caucasus. The main roadblock to resolving these problems, according to the thinking in Beijing, Delhi and Moscow, is American support for Taiwan, Pakistan and Georgia.

BRICS countries have an understanding that infringement of the security of one of the member-states could negatively affect the security of the others. Given such thinking, is it possible that the BRICS could become a security alliance? This seems very unlikely. BRICS countries are situated on different continents and their security threats often do not coincide. In contrast to NATO, the BRICS do not have a clear leading country which could determine security policy and make decisions on military intervention. Each of the BRICS has an independent foreign policy and places primary importance on national sovereignty, which implies retaining a free hand in military and political matters. Nonetheless, it cannot be ruled out that a situation might arise in which the BRICS countries could jointly use their military forces to address a common threat or challenge, for example, in joint peacekeeping missions under the auspices of the United Nations or in creating their own peacekeeping forces.

The “gentle ascendancy” of the BRICS is not connected to violence, wars and hegemonic ambitions. Each of the five countries represents an entire civilization with its own unique cultural and political traditions as well as its own approaches to ensuring security. They see this diversity as an indisputable advantage. BRICS countries are not inclined to interfere in the internal affairs of each other or third countries; they accept their partners as they are today – states which have developed over the course of many centuries. The BRICS represent chance to become a new model of global interaction built outside the context of the old dividing lines of East and West, North and South; to participate in the creation of a multipolar and multicivilizational world which will be based on the force of law rather than the law of force.

ⁱ Sergei Guriev. BRICS Proposals for IMF Reforms are not Radical Enough // <http://www.eastaiaforum.org/2012/07/20/brics...>

ⁱⁱ Charles Kupchan. No One’s World. The West, the Rising Rest? And the Coming Global Turn. Oxford, 2012. P. 111.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jim O’Neill. The Growth Map. Economic Opportunity in the BRICs and Beyond. N.Y., 2011. P. 144, 156.