

Can BRICS Find Their Voice?: BRICS' Role in Peace and Security

The Logic for an Enhanced Role for BRICS in Global Peace and Security

BRICS started in the public perception as an economic group. Many analysts, therefore, felt BRICS would remain an economic bloc given the enormous disparities among these countries. Nobody thought in terms of a common political agenda.

The relative decline in the economic and political power of the West has highlighted this dimension and has hastened this process of the BRICS finding their political voice in global affairs. Commensurate with their increased economic heft in the world, BRICS is adding to its agenda more issues that are political and beginning to weigh in on matters of international geo-political importance.

BRICS is emerging as an alternative voice to Western dominated discourse on global/regional issues. The old world order does not appear to have legitimacy nor do the “old powers” have the capacity to sustain that order. While some strides have been made in reforming economic structures/international financial architecture of the world, genuine all round progress requires restructuring political structures in the world. However, the old powers are reluctant to give up or accept a reduction in their powers.

BRICS is for a fair, democratic, polycentric world order. “Coming, as we do, from Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America, the transcontinental dimension of our interaction adds to its value and significance.” (Delhi Declaration)

As the draft BTTC document says, “It is evident that forging fruitful partnerships and a stronger global governance template requires cooperation between developed and developing countries. BRICS has a central role in this regard. Nurturing conditions for cooperation is crucial to construct a different global order where power is more diffused and responsibilities are appropriately

shared. BRICS will make efforts to create a situation where developed and developing countries can work towards a common understanding and building consensus for a peaceful world.”

Since the BRICS countries are home to around half the world’s population, it is only logical that they have a say in regional and global issues. Individually also, each of the BRICS is a regional power in its own right.

In addition, Russia, India and China together constitute about half of the Asia’s territory. The three are also nuclear powers and have some of the strongest militaries in the world.

Russia and China are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). BRICS countries individually are members of important groups like the G4 (working for reform of the UN), BASIC (climate change), ASEAN, IBSA, etc. With all of them being members of the WTO and other International Institutions as well as new donors/aid givers, their economic power is felt across regions.

As their overseas interests broaden and they get more integrated into the global economy, peace and security in other regions of the world have begun to affect the BRICS more and more. For instance, China and India are major importers of oil from the Middle East. Any instability there affects their economies.

Naturally, they have a major stake in ensuring that the region is not destabilised at a time when the West, particularly the US, is moving away from the region. US economic interests in the region are reducing due to the Shale revolution and political engagement is perceived to be declining because of the announced policy of rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific – the so-called “pivot”. Similar changes are occurring in other regions as well.

These shifts are inevitably going to lead to BRICS playing a more important role in shaping the emerging peace and security agenda in the world.

The aim of BRICS is to create a better and safer world order through peaceful diplomacy and multilateralism. As the draft BTTC document says, “BRICS

member states are committed to a democratic and just polycentric world order founded on the rule of law, equality, mutual respect, cooperation, coordinated action, and collective decision-making. This vision could be achieved through supporting political and diplomatic efforts to peacefully resolve global disputes.”

BRICS themselves are just beginning to recognise their economic, political, and military influence and that they can and should weigh in on important issues.

Reflecting this, they have started issuing statements on global and regional issues in their summit declarations. The Delhi declaration was the first to go in depth about regional issues, moving away from the abstract ideas expressed earlier. The Delhi Declaration covered a range of issues from the Middle East to Afghanistan and terrorism. This was true of the EThekweni Declaration as well which took up issues like Syria, Palestine, Middle East Peace Process, Iran, Afghanistan, terrorism and the situation in Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Fortaleza Declaration reflected on the situation in various parts of Africa, including the havoc wrecked by Boko Haram, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, expressed concern about the situation in Ukraine, the Arab Israeli conflict, called for multilateral negotiations for a Code of Conduct on Outer Space Activities, expressed support for the P 5 plus one’s negotiations with Iran, among other things. It also called for efforts to fight against transnational crime. BRICS cooperate in the ECOSOC Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice for this. The BRICS countries have committed to strengthen their cooperation in the fight against piracy.

Initially the BRICS had different stances on various issues, but increasingly their positions are converging rather than diverging. For instance, in 2011 Brazil supported Resolution 1970 on Libya, which paved the way for Western involvement in the Libyan crisis, while Russia and China abstained. Except for

South Africa, which supported it, all the BRICS countries abstained on Resolution 1973 on the same issue.

Similar is the case with the Syrian crisis. While Russia and China vetoed a resolution to overthrow the Assad regime, India and South Africa abstained. But by the 2013 summit in South Africa, their positions became more congruent as is evident from the EThekweni Declaration. The declaration opposed further militarisation of Syria and said, “a Syrian-led political process leading to a transition can be achieved only through broad national dialogue that meets the legitimate aspirations of all sections of Syrian society and respect for Syrian independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty”.

Even on Ukraine, BRICS is the only major multilateral forum, which has not condemned Russia and has adopted a more nuanced position on the issue.

United Nations: United We Stand

If there is one issue that unites the BRICS, it is that they all believe in the legitimacy of the UN and the UNSC’s primacy in maintaining peace and security. Given the importance they attach to the UN in dealing with international security affairs, BRICS countries try to play a greater role in the framework of UN either through contributing more available resources or by promoting the reform of UN Security Council.¹

While Russia and China are permanent members of the Security Council, India, South Africa, and Brazil have been elected to the non-permanent seats on the Council.² For instance, in 2011, all the BRICS countries were members of the UNSC. However, the BRICS needs to work more actively to ensure that there is a reform of the United Nations, the UNSC and that countries like India and Brazil become permanent members of the Council.

¹NiuHaibin, “BRICS in Global Governance: A Progressive Force?“, *Perspective*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, New York, April 2012, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/global/09048.pdf>, p.2.

²NiuHaibin, “BRICS in Global Governance: A Progressive Force?“, *Perspective*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, New York, April 2012, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/global/09048.pdf>, p.2.

India, China, and Brazil have been three of the biggest contributors to the UN Peacekeeping Forces. The BRICS also contribute money for peacekeeping forces at a time when donations from the West are decreasing and when lack of funding is becoming a major constraint for collective action under UN auspices.³ Thus, their contributions are becoming more and more important.

BRICS countries all voted supporting UN General Assembly in 2005 on Responsibility to Protect recognising the right of the international community to intervene in a country which is in crisis. However, as is clear from the intervention in Libya, the principle has been used to intervene unilaterally in the domestic affairs of other countries. This is something, which the BRICS oppose. They support the principle, but argue that any action under this principle should be with a clear UNSC mandate. India would like BRICS to adhere to UN principles on intervention. India also believes that BRICS needs to arrive at a common position on sovereignty and interventions.

As the draft BTTC document says, “The reform of United Nations institutions, in particular the Security Council, is a critical first step to ensure a fair reflection and representation matching the changed conditions and challenges of the 21st century and is essential to restore global confidence in the functioning of the UN system. The 70th anniversary of the establishment of the UN in 2015 provides an excellent opportunity for BRICS to move into the vanguard of UN reform.”

Global Issues-The Middle East

BRICS have similar positions on almost all major issues of global concern today like Iran, Syria and the situation in the larger Middle East.

Russia and China are part of the P5+1 group which is engaged in talks with Iran and has almost succeeded in resolving the issue....we will know more in the

³NiuHaibin, “BRICS in Global Governance: A Progressive Force? “, *Perspective*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, New York, April 2012, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/global/09048.pdf>, p. 2.

coming weeks if a deal has been brokered. BRICS countries support a peaceful resolution to the Iranian nuclear issue and a permanent deal, which also upholds Iran's "inalienable" right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy in a manner consistent with its international obligation (Fortaleza summit).

Russia has a key role to play in resolving the Syrian crisis. It has already contributed to easing of tensions by initiating the process that resulted in the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons. India, Russia, and China were part of the Geneva II talks. BRICS support a political solution to the crisis, which is Syrian led and oppose external interference. BRICS' increased legitimacy and credibility is evident from the fact that the Syrian President wrote to the BRICS asking them to intervene to help bring about a resolution to the crisis.

The BRICS have repeatedly reiterated their support for peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Middle East peace process.

Afghanistan, Africa

On Afghanistan as well, they have similar views. The E-Thekwini Declaration said BRICS supports "Afghanistan's emergence as a peaceful, stable and democratic state, free of terrorism and extremism, and underscore the need for more effective regional and international cooperation for the stabilisation of Afghanistan, including by combating terrorism". The Fortaleza Declaration goes further, "the UN should play an increasingly important role in assisting Afghanistan's national reconciliation, recovery, and economic reconstruction. The declaration says BRICS supports "engagement with, and coordination by the AU and its Peace and Security Council in addressing instability in Africa". It also expressed deep concern at the deterioration of the security and the humanitarian situation in West Africa.

New Development Bank

Most scholars agree that poverty is one of the root causes of extremism and instability in the world. To address this, the BRICS decided to establish a BRICS Development Bank Now known as the New Development Bank. The

Bank aims to help poor countries alleviate poverty by extending loans and grants. This bank is not intended to supplant, but to supplement current financial institutions like the IMF, World Bank and ADB. But, having a better understanding and sense of poverty, it is unlikely that the BRICS Bank would impose the doctrinaire preconditions for disbursement of loans that are insisted upon by the Western dominated institutions.

The New Development Bank has moved ahead from mere pronouncements to becoming a reality. It has been established with its headquarters at Shanghai and KV Kamath as its president is a huge achievement. It has initial authorized capital of US\$ 100 billion. The initial subscribed capital shall be of US\$ 50 billion, equally shared among founding members. The first chair of the Board of Governors will be from Russia. The first chair of the Board of Directors will be from Brazil. This will go a long way in our efforts to have a more representative, inclusive and democratic global financial order. As the Fortaleza Declaration said, “NDB will strengthen the cooperation among our countries and will supplement the efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global development, thus contributing to our collective commitments for achieving the goal of strong, sustainable, and balanced growth.”

If the BRICS bank can contribute towards uplifting people out of poverty, it would contribute immensely to peace and security in the world. However, for this they will have to work harder to arrive at a common view on some of the issues still dividing them.

As the draft BTTC document says, we should also try and have uniform ways of dealing with crises around the world. A coordination mechanism for BRICS Foreign Ministers should be set up for this. BRICS should adopt the principle of impartiality and thorough investigation of the roots and causes of conflict in order to suggest best possible solutions, involving interests of all parties to the conflict as the BTTC document recommends.

We should try to have a common approach to the issue of demilitarization of outer space. As the draft document says, we should initiate formal and informal consultations on the issue with the United States, European Union and other nations on this issue.

BRICS should organize and train peacekeeping forces in the framework of United Nations Standby Arrangement System.

Coming to a couple of specific issues BRICS can address:

Terrorism

The BRICS undoubtedly have a common interest in fighting international terrorism in all forms. All the five countries could and should play a role in the elaboration of the universal definition of terrorism and promote adoption of the UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. China, Russia, and India have all been victims of terrorism. Therefore, BRICS has supported UNSC resolutions against terrorism.

In the Fortaleza Declaration, the BRICS said that they “reaffirm our commitment to the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy” and believe that the UN has “the UN has a central role in coordinating international action against terrorism, which must be conducted in accordance with international law”.

One way to cooperate on this would be to have meetings of intelligence officials and police officials or at least the heads of intelligence outfits. They could exchange information and help assist each other in capacity building. Counter-terrorism/ counter-insurgency units could also hold exercises together and learn from the best practices of each other. They could set up a unit on cross-border terrorism or a counter-terrorism force. They could also have joint investigation of terrorist activities.

A lower hanging fruit will probably be the exchanging lists of banned terrorist organisations and ensuring that these groups do not operate in their territories,

as well as influencing their partners outside BRICS to follow this. Extradition procedures could be simplified.

A measure similar to the EU solidarity clause could be adopted by BRICS. This would oblige members to help each other, if requested, in the case of a terrorist attack.⁴ The BRICS could also work on the creation of common security standards for air, road, rail, and maritime traffic, airport security, port security, security for container ports, general shipments, and shipments of energy and hazardous materials.⁵

On terrorist financing, we have already had two meetings of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), where participants agreed on deepening cooperation on combating money laundering and financing of terrorism. (Privacy issues)

Cyber security

BRICS needs to come to a common understanding on cyber security. This is important given the growing online populations as well as the rise of digital commerce in these countries. In fact, 38% of the global internet audience is from the BRICS countries. Given their large online populations, India, Brazil, and China are considered to be “swing states” in the discourse on cyberspace and cyber security. However, BRICS are underrepresented in the field of global internet governance and cyber governance. Moreover, most of the discourse on management of cyber-space currently emanates from the West.

In fact, the BRICS Foreign Ministers’ meeting on the side lines of the UNGA in 2013 had expressed concern about “unauthorized interception of communications and data from citizens, businesses, and members of governments, compromising national sovereignty and individual rights”.

They reiterated the need to participate and contribute “in a peaceful, secure, and open cyberspace” and emphasized the importance of “security in the use of

⁴For more details, see Jan Wouters and Sanderijn Duquet, ‘The United Nations, the European Union and Multilateral Action against Terrorism’, euvn Centre for Global Governance Studies and Institute for International Law, Working Paper No. 113, July 2013, p.7.

⁵Anthony Cordesman, quoted in ‘Multilateral Responses to Terrorism: The United Nations’, October 2004, http://archive.adl.org/terror/tu/tu_38_04_09.html#Ux2IID-VWRM.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) through universally accepted norms, standards, and practices”.

BRICS could exchange best practices in fighting cyber-crime and have regular institutionalised meetings of their emergency response teams. They could establish a working group on cyber security, inform each other of cyber-crimes, and share experiences about fighting cyber-crime.

At Fortaleza, BRICS recommitted to the negotiation of a universal legally binding instrument in cybercrime while reiterating that the UN has a central role in this matter.

It is also critical that the BRICS countries come to a common understanding on cyberspace governance and cyber security. They need to come to a middle path on the crucial issue of freedom of expression versus legitimate security interests of states. It is heartening that the NSAs have already discussed cooperation in this arena in their meetings.

Conclusion

As BRICS broadens its internal understanding of issues, it will opine on a broader range of issues. These opinions will also carry more weight if they are able to coordinate their policies. . If the five countries are able to coordinate their positions on critical issues, they will have much more chance of influencing world politics and of directing the discourse on peace and security.

BRICS has already attempted to coordinate their positions on regional and global affairs issues through meetings of their Foreign Ministers on the margins of the UN general Assembly. Their National Security Advisors have also met to discuss these issues. Probably these meetings should also take place in stand-alone formats.

That BRICS are making their opinions heard on these issues show that they see their future as closely linked to globalisation and integration with the rest of the

world.⁶ Therefore, BRICS interest in and influence on world peace and security is only going to increase in the years ahead.

⁶NiuHaibin, “BRICS in Global Governance: A Progressive Force?“, *Perspective*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, New York, April 2012, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/global/09048.pdf>, p. 1.