

Can the BRICS Cooperate in International Security?¹

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Abstract

The BRICS have made considerable strides in economic and development cooperation, yet the coalition has not been as successful in formulating and implementing an agenda of its own to address international security despite clear signs that the coalition wishes to promote cooperation in this area. Why, then, have the BRICS been slower to cooperate on security issues and what are the prospects for intensifying cooperation in this area? This article analyses BRICS cooperation agenda-setting in international security against the backdrop of the coalition's efforts to institutionalize itself as a flexible yet coherent entity and an influential collective actor in international affairs. Drawing on key BRICS documents and reports related to security meetings, I examine three types of security-related efforts that have been made since the first summit, in 2009.

These include attempts to coordinate positions on specific security issues, namely armed conflicts and related normative stances; efforts to coordinate policies; and institution-building initiatives. I find that the bulk of BRICS security discussions have focused on the first category, with some effort to coordinate policy and minimal progress in institution-building in the security arena. This finding shows that international security has not, thus far, been among the “paths of least resistance” that the grouping's diverse members have found in their efforts to deepen intra-group collaboration – a fact that can be explained by citing internal differences as well as contextual factors. However, the hurdles to a more cohesive BRICS security agenda are not insurmountable, although they may restrict the gamut of topics addressed by the coalition's cooperation efforts. In particular, there is an unexplored area in which the five states could enhance their security cooperation while drawing on their development and peace-building experiences and preferences: that of conflict prevention.

Key words: BRICS; international security; agenda-setting; global governance

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Introduction

The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) coalition has made considerable strides in economic and development cooperation, yet has not been as successful in formulating and implementing an agenda of its own to address international security, despite clear signs that the coalition wishes to promote cooperation in this

¹ The editorial board received the article in January 2017.

area. Security topics have begun to appear more frequently in key BRICS documents. For instance, in the declaration issued at the end of the Goa summit, held in 2016, the number of references to “security” (32) and to “terrorism/terrorist” (36) was comparable to the number of references to “economic” (36).² In addition, the national security advisors of the coalition’s member states have held a number of security meetings. Yet, whereas in development cooperation the BRICS group has made a splash by launching the New Development Bank (NDB), in security there has been no equivalent landmark in the coalition’s institutionalization. Why, then, have the BRICS countries been slower to cooperate on international security issues and what are the prospects for intensifying cooperation in this area?

Despite the slow pace and fragmented character of this cooperation, any BRICS action in international security – even when confined to vague statements and informal policy coordination – has tended to ring alarm bells among some circles, especially when the coalition draws heavily on the discourse of national sovereignty. For instance, in 2015, the Netherlands-based think tank Clingendael Institute released a report titled “BRICS as a security challenge in multilateral forums,” which refers to the coalition members as self-serving “sovereignty hawks” whose “strategic egotism” represents a menace to EU interests in its strategic neighbourhood.³ There is also a common perception among some western leaders that intensifying BRICS cooperation, even outside the realm of security, represents a menace to the U.S.-led liberal order. U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta referred to the BRICS countries as a threat to national and international security, urging the U.S. government to ensure that “they don’t undermine the stability of the world” [Tyler and Thomas, 2014, p. 254].

This article analyses BRICS cooperation agenda-setting in international security against the backdrop of the coalition’s efforts to institutionalize itself as a flexible yet coherent entity. Drawing on key BRICS documents and reports related to security meetings, I examine three types of security-related efforts since the first summit, in 2009. These include: attempts to coordinate positions on specific security issues, namely armed conflicts and related normative stances; efforts to coordinate policies; and institution-building initiatives. I find that the bulk of BRICS security discussions have focused on the first category, with some effort in policy coordination and minimal progress in institution-building in the security arena. This finding shows that international security has not, thus far, been among the “paths of least resistance” that the grouping’s diverse members have found in their efforts to deepen intra-group collaboration – a fact that internal differences and contextual factors help explain. However, the hurdles to a more cohesive BRICS security agenda are not insurmountable, although they may restrict the gamut of topics addressed by the coalition’s cooperation

² Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (2016) “Goa Declaration at 8th BRICS Summit.” Goa, 16 October. Available at: <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/27491/Goa+Declaration+at+8th+BRICS+Summit> (accessed 05.01.2017).

³ Clingendael Institute (2015) “The BRICS as a Security Challenge in Multilateral Forums.” September. Available at: https://www.clingendael.nl/pub/2015/the_brics_as_an_eu_security_challenge/1_the_brics_as_a_security_challenge_in_multilateral_forums/ (accessed 05.01.2017).

efforts. In particular, there is an unexplored area in which the five states could enhance their security cooperation while drawing on their development and peace-building experiences and preferences: that of conflict prevention.

The article is structured in the following manner. The first part links the concept of agenda-setting to the recent literature on rising power coalitions in the post-Cold War era, including the institutionalization of the BRICS. The second part of the article analyses documents relevant to the BRICS security cooperation agenda, as well as reports related to the meetings of BRICS national security advisors. The third and final part analyses BRICS agenda-building efforts in security in light of internal as well as external constraints. The conclusion relates the findings to the concept of agenda-setting in informal coalitions and it proposes that the BRICS concentrate their security cooperation efforts on the prevention of armed conflicts.

Agenda-Setting and Loose State Coalitions

A growing body of scholarship on international organizations has sought to shed light on how certain themes acquire or lose prominence among the wide gamut of ideas and proposals generated by international organizations and other stakeholders. In other words, which topics come to the fore, how those ideas are proposed and why they gain or fail to gain salience relative to others. The concept of *agenda-setting* has been more specifically associated with the influence of media on the salience of certain themes, and/or on the impact that the resulting agenda has on the behaviour of “agenda adopters” (consumers). In international relations, a strictly state-centric approach to agenda-setting is inadequate because pressure concerning certain topics often comes from civil society and the process is heavily shaped by those entities’ and networks’ interaction with multilateral organizations, as Carpenter [2007] has shown in the case of transnational activists shaping issues and Joachim [2007] has demonstrated in analysing the expansion of women’s rights within the United Nations (UN) agenda.

The interaction between “external actors” and multilateral organizations is far from homogenous, however. Assayag [2016] has studied, for instance, the different forms of strategies adopted by issue entrepreneurs and agenda gatekeepers. Likewise, the epistemic communities framework, originally developed to address international decision-making in technically complex issues amid high levels of uncertainty, has also noted the influence of experts in agenda-setting [Dunlop, 2016]. More broadly, these different approaches resonate with the constructivist approach to international relations and, more specifically, its focus on the influence of social relations and cognition on the framing of international norms and set-ups [see, for instance, Keck and Sikkink, 1998].

Most of this scholarship has focused on either civil society entities or activist networks as issues entrepreneurs, or on their interaction with established multilateral organizations like UN divisions or the Bretton Woods institutions. However, in the post-Cold War era, as part of a broader process, the multipolarization of the international

order, there has been a proliferation of looser coalitions of states. Rather than full-fledged organizations, these coalitions are relatively distant from the ideal Weberian type of bureaucracy, in that they lack a headquarters, organizational leadership, visual identity, dedicated career professionals and other structural characteristics associated with rational bureaucratic organizations. Instead, these multi-state coalitions obey a more flexible logic, both spatially and in terms of identity, both of which provide certain advantages insofar as they allow member states to explore cooperation opportunities without being encumbered by the bureaucratic hurdles and loss of momentum that an established organization can experience. As Cooper and Farooq [2013] have put it, these “club dynamics” connote a certain “privileging of informality in global governance.”

These coalitions vary in size and composition. The G-20, for instance, brings together both global and rising powers in a sort of “hub governance.” Its agenda adapts constantly to a highly dynamic international arena [Kirton, 2016]. Other coalitions are composed of states that either have adopted the identity of a rising power or are (often) cast into this category by international relations analysts, although not without dispute. Russia, for instance, is often considered more of a past superpower than a rising one and it is often noted that China has long surpassed the economic power of other developing countries and therefore can no longer be considered in the same category. Despite these and other variations, here we consider the term rising power to encompass developing countries that have considerable regional clout and that aspire to global power status, but that still face constraints on their capacity to influence global affairs even as they openly contest some of its key norms and institutions.

In 2006, the Foreign Ministers of four such states, Brazil, Russia, India and China, began holding regular informal diplomatic meetings at the margins of the General Debate of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). The four national administrations then came together at the First BRICS summit, held in Yekaterinburg in 2009. The coalition (and its acronym) later expanded to BRICS, with the inclusion of South Africa in 2011. Its agenda began to expand, not only to include the annual heads of state summits, but also ministerial and sub-ministerial meetings meant to explore and deepen cooperation in specific areas or even on particular topics [Stuenkel, 2015].

As a result of these characteristics, the overarching goals of the BRICS coalition are quite broad. First, in some areas the coalition strives for systemic change, in the sense of accelerating the transition from a U.S.-dominated unipolar order to a more multipolar system. Second, the coalition pushes the reform of key components of the global governance system in the direction of greater representation (especially for themselves) and effectiveness. In pursuit of these broad goals, the coalition has sometimes adopted a tone indicating that it is contesting certain aspects of the global governance system. As a result, they are sometimes viewed as working in opposition to the western liberal vision without being openly revolutionary. Laïdi, for instance, writes:

While they do not seek to form an anti-Western political coalition based on a counter-proposal or radically different vision of the world, they are concerned with maintaining their indepen-

dence of judgment and national action in a world that is increasingly economically and socially interdependent [...] They believe that state sovereignty trumps all, including, of course, the political nature of its underpinning regimes [Laïdi, 2012, p. 1].

In part because of this widespread understanding (especially in western institutions) of the BRICS as an oppositional and reformist force, the BRICS coalition has faced challenges of legitimacy. In response to these challenges and in a bid to advance its cooperation efforts, the group has worked to institutionalize itself through the establishment of dedicated institutions like the NDB. Thus, the paths of least resistance are far from being “automatic.” They are actively and constantly negotiated, with one or more member states pushing for the salience of certain topics. Unlike in established organizations, however, the coalition has tightly controlled its agenda-setting process so as to minimize the impact of external activist networks and the media.

Although the BRICS group has worked to institutionalize itself, in the sense of acquiring more stable characteristics and becoming a more recognized actor in international affairs, it has gone about this task incrementally, by setting goals and objectives on an annual basis via the declarations and action plans issued at the end of each summit. More recently, the BRICS coalition has also begun creating new institutions dedicated to certain areas of cooperation, such as development through the NDB, as either alternatives to existing organizations or as mechanisms for pressing for change (the two motivations not being mutually exclusive). Despite these initiatives, ten years after the initial talks that led to the founding of the BRICS, the grouping has chosen to remain a loose coalition based on the quest to find common areas of interest as they emerge and the context permits, rather than incorporating itself as an umbrella organization by establishing a BRICS headquarters, a BRICS presidency and a stable BRICS visual language with symbols such as a set logo, motto and organizational charter. Thus the dynamics involved in BRICS agenda-setting, whether by external actors such as activist networks or by internal ones such as institutional gatekeepers, can be assumed to differ substantially from that of an established multilateral organization.

Indeed, agenda-setting within a loose coalition like the BRICS may not conform to the patterns and dynamics observed in more established institutions like the UN entities and Bretton Woods organizations. Although BRICS is a strongly state-centric coalition, it has incorporated non-state actors in two ways. Within its initiatives and action plans, the coalition has convened meetings of private sector actors and civil society entities, albeit those sanctioned by the member states. For instance, there is a BRICS business platform and a BRICS think tank network with representative institutions from each member state. In addition to this relatively formal incorporation, there are also groups of civil society entities that participate in the broader BRICS process, often in a contestatory fashion. For example, they hold parallel BRICS meetings at the margins of the annual summits, foster or carry out research on the emerging BRICS agenda, or form networks of activists to promote certain causes within the five member states. Finally, the role of the media with respect to the BRICS agenda has become

more complex. News coverage of the coalition has been across the spectrum regarding its potential to improve upon status quo approaches to various international problems, ranging from highly sceptical to extremely optimistic.

Unlike with an established international organization, however, external actors do not have clear interlocutors or “issue gatekeepers” within the BRICS. This is especially true given that the coalition presidency changes annually, there is no headquarters with specialized offices and the BRICS “sherpas” are state representatives with no set channel for communicating with non-state actors. As a result, NGOs and other non-state actors working on BRICS issues must constantly probe and readjust, establishing new networks and seeking new sources of funding in order to influence the coalition’s agenda-setting. Some remain highly sceptical that the parallel events have succeeded in influencing the formal BRICS agenda, for instance in efforts to pressure the NDB to adopt stricter environmental and human rights standards in its loans for infrastructure development projects. In the case of loose coalitions, what Carpenter [2007] might call the sites of power and the strategies of influence are far less certain and rely on fewer precedents than within established organizations.

At the same time, the BRICS coalition has occasionally challenged certain elements of the global governance system, for instance demanding that concrete reforms to decision making at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) should occur more quickly. However, the BRICS are not just about pressing for change, but also (increasingly) finding ways to meet perceived demands, as well as for the individual member states to expand their political influence in the international arena. They consider BRICS to be a platform of convenience within a broader gamut of options, enabling “forum-shopping.”

The coalition attempts to find “paths of least resistance” for cooperation: pathways that provide the least resistance to forward motion by a given object or entity, among a set of alternative paths) They use meetings to explore common ground and find areas in which to work together and in doing so they are influenced in their agenda-setting by the constraints posed by diverging or clashing interests on certain matters. Although all multilateral initiatives involve members with somewhat diverging interests, negotiations and discussions are geared towards finding common ground so as to establish priorities and launch concrete action.

In the next section, I analyse BRICS documents, especially those issued at the head of state summits (declarations and action plans), for indications on how the coalition’s security agenda has developed. The texts are analysed with respect to three types of security-related efforts since the first summit, in 2009: attempts to coordinate positions on specific security issues, namely armed conflicts and related normative stances; efforts to coordinate policies; and institution-building initiatives.

Security Cooperation in the BRICS Declarations

2009–2012: Security Creeps into the BRIC(S) Agenda

In the first phase of the BRIC initiative, security clearly occupied a secondary status compared to economic issues, due in part to the economic turmoil that beset global markets starting in 2008. The first two BRIC summits – those held in Yekaterinburg in 2009⁴ and Brasília in 2010, both prior to the entrance of South Africa – were mostly concerned with countering the ongoing effects of the global financial crisis and ensuring that G20 resolutions would be implemented. The only references to security in those years' declarations appear within the context of food security, although the Brasilia declaration also makes a fleeting reference to the need to combat terrorism.⁵

The declaration issued at the 2011 Sanya summit, which was the first to include South Africa as a member and to use the acronym BRICS rather than BRIC, expands the coalition's security agenda and deepens some of the topics.⁶ This can be explained with reference to the perceived window of opportunity around that time, opened by Secretary General Kofi Anna's call for UN reform, including changes to the Security Council. In particular, the Sanya declaration calls for the reform of the Security Council "with a view to making it more effective, efficient and representative, so that it can deal with today's global challenges more successfully." The document also mentions specifically that "China and Russia reiterate the importance they attach to the status of India, Brazil and South Africa in international affairs and understand and support their aspiration to play a greater role in the UN," although it stops short of saying that China and Russia back the other three states' inclusion among permanent seat holders.

On the normative side, the BRICS also begin to identify some shared principles, including a common respect for "the principle that the use of force should be avoided" and underscored that "the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of each nation should be respected." This statement can be understood within the context of the deepening debate around the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm at the United Nations. As Ziegler [2016, p. 1] has noted, the BRICS were "suspicious of Western motives in advocating forcible intervention" and "justifiably sceptical that such interventions will do more good than harm."

In addition to marking the first BRICS reference to crisis-affected regions – the document singles out "turbulence in the Middle East, the North African and West African regions." The Sanya declaration also mentions specific crises scenarios, expressing deep concern regarding "the turbulence in the Middle East, the North African and West African regions." The document also marks the first BRICS attempt to coordi-

⁴ BRIC (2009) "Joint Statement of the BRIC Countries' Leaders." Yekaterinburg, 16 June. Available at: <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/090616-leaders.html> (accessed 05.01.2017).

⁵ BRIC (2010) "2nd BRIC Summit of Heads of State and Government: Joint Statement." Brasilia, 15 April. Available at: <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/100415-leaders.html> (accessed 05.01.2017).

⁶ BRICS (2011) "Sanya Declaration." Sanya, 14 April. Available at: <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/110414-leaders.html> (accessed 05.01.2017).

nate positions on a specific conflict, that of Libya. That year, the member states coincided at the UN Security Council and resolutions to intervene in Libya by invoking the concept of R2P (“Responsibility to Protect” countries through multilateral intervention) had drawn reluctance or opposition among those rising powers. At Sanya, in fact, the five heads of state jointly voiced their opposition to the use of force in Libya and urged the warring parties to reach a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Accordingly, the declaration calls for the solution to entail peace and dialogue, brokered through the UN and regional organizations and mechanisms, especially the African Union High-Level Panel Initiative on Libya.

Around that time, terrorism started to become a recurring theme in the BRICS security discussions. The Sanya document deepens references to terrorism by stating that the UN “has a central role in coordinating international activities against terrorism within the framework of the UN Charter and in accordance with principles and norms of international law,” and urges the early conclusion of negotiations in the UN General Assembly of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism and its adoption by all member states. If not quite a full-fledged policy coordination effort by the BRICS, this could be considered a mutually agreed upon priority for advocating global efforts to tackle terrorism. Finally, at Sanya the BRICS affirmed their commitment to international information security and especially to the need to combat cybercrime, topics that were fast gaining ground in global debates about so-called “new security threats.”

By the following year (2012), when the BRICS summit was held in New Delhi, the word security was included in the summit title itself: “BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Security and Prosperity.” This remains, as of this writing, the only time the word security has appeared in any BRICS summit heading. Indeed, the New Delhi meeting proved to be something of a landmark in the inclusion of security in the BRICS agenda. In the 2012 declaration,⁷ issues pertaining to international security make up nearly half the paragraphs in the document, although these sections focus on common positions on issues and conflicts rather than concrete initiatives by the BRICS. Insofar as the summit host country has considerable pull regarding the breadth of topics covered by the declaration issued that particular year, this security-heavy content can be understood in light of Indian concerns as well as its aspiration to become a more prominent player in global security affairs.

With respect to individual armed conflicts, the document is far more detailed than the previous ones, with separate paragraphs dedicated to specific conflicts. There are, for instance, passages on the Arab-Israeli conflict; the deteriorating situation in Syria; tensions over the Iranian nuclear program and the stabilization and development of Afghanistan, including with respect to terrorism and illicit drug trafficking. Finally, in the New Delhi declaration, the BRICS strengthen the links between their emerging concept of security and that of development, by addressing human security concerns

⁷ BRICS (2012) “Delhi Declaration.” New Delhi, 29 March. Available at: <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/120329-delhi-declaration.html> (accessed 05.01.2017).

that are dear to their foreign policy agendas. Accordingly, energy security and food security also appear in the document and links are drawn to two topics that occupied centre stage of international affairs discussions that year – climate change (due to the Paris agreement negotiations) and sustainable development (because of the Sustainable Development Goals debates).

The inclusion of such topics reflects the still-tentative, exploratory nature of early BRICS discussions around international security on the sidelines of the main item on the coalition agenda: economic cooperation. It is telling that, alongside forward-looking ministerial meetings in six other areas of cooperation, the concise New Delhi Action Plan – the first such document issued alongside a BRICS summit declaration, calls for a meeting of the BRICS high representatives responsible for national security, but without providing further details.⁸

2013–2014: Coordinating Positions on Armed Conflicts

The eThekewini Declaration⁹ that came out of the Durban, South Africa summit in 2013 also makes several references to global and regional security issues and again illustrates how the host country can tilt the BRICS agenda in the direction of its particular security interests. Whereas India clearly had a hand in introducing a wider gamut of security concerns to the BRICS agenda in 2012, in Durban the South African government pushed for the inclusion of an African regional development agenda, with security making intermittent appearances. In addition to reaffirming the coalition’s commitment to UN reform, the document acknowledges “the central role of the African Union (AU) and its Peace and Security Council in conflict resolution in Africa” and calls upon the UN Security Council (UNSC) to “enhance cooperation with the African Union, and its Peace and Security Council, pursuant to UNSC resolutions in this regard.” Special concerns regarding instability are voiced regarding North Africa, in particular the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea. Like the New Delhi declaration, the eThekewini document also devotes entire paragraphs to specific crises, but innovates by mentioning specific mechanisms and commitments to concrete initiatives launched elsewhere within the international community. For instance, the BRICS should express support for the Geneva Action Group in the case of Syria and remind the international community of the commitments to Afghanistan that were made at the Bonn International Conference in December 2011.

In keeping with the regional focus of the summit, the eThekewini Declaration adds three African countries to the roster of conflicts affected by the BRICS common positions agenda: Mali, the Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo. In the case of Mali in particular, the document highlights the role of the Economic

⁸ BRICS (2012) “Delhi Action Plan.” New Delhi, 29 March. Available at: <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/120329-delhi-declaration.html#actionplan> (accessed 05.01.2017).

⁹ BRICS (2013) “BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration and Industrialization.” Durban, 27 March. Available at: <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/130327-statement.html> (accessed 05.01.2017).

Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Mali's neighbouring countries (as opposed to non-African states like France) in resolving the escalating violence. Again, here the BRICS are underscoring the primacy of regional actors in addressing the outbreak of violent conflict, without detracting from the UN's role as a source of support and normative debate. Within the year's Action Plan, the meeting of BRICS National Security Advisors is listed second among 18 items; second only to the meeting of BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the margins of that year's UN General Assembly Meeting.

The final document of the 6th BRICS summit, held in Fortaleza, Brazil¹⁰, reiterated many of the positions made in earlier declarations and added themes close to those of the Brazilian international agenda, such as calling attention to political instability in Guinea-Bissau. Brazil has longed worked to support the impoverished African country through UN and CPLP (Community of Portuguese Language Countries) channels. The declaration also voices concerns regarding additional regional crises, including the abduction of the women and children of Chibok, Nigeria by the Daesh-affiliated terrorist group Boko Haram and the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan, as well as instability in Iraq. The summit took place after the annexation of Crimea by Russia, but the only mention of the situation there is a call for restraint "from all actors involved." The section on Syria is particularly salient and detailed, with the BRICS supporting the mediation role played by the UN but insisting that the peace process be led by Syrians.

Finally, the Fortaleza document expands on BRICS security thematically. The text includes a call for convening a conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. It similarly demands the prevention of an arms race in outer space, as well as efforts in combating organized crime, piracy and armed robbery at sea, international drug trafficking and cybersecurity. Thus the Fortaleza summit both broadened the security agenda – at least, in terms of a common position on ongoing conflicts – and made armed conflicts a more visible part of BRICS security discussions. Building on the normative ideas that emerged in the early BRICS declarations, the Fortaleza document also hints at an emergent BRICS approach to conflict prevention by underscoring the intertwined nature of development and security.

2015–Present: Brainstorming Joint Initiatives

The 2015 Ufa declaration¹¹ condemns unilateral interventions and emphasizes "the unique importance of the indivisible nature of security, and that no State should strengthen its security at the expense of the security of others." The document plac-

¹⁰ BRICS (2013) "BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration and Industrialization." Durban, 27 March. Available at: <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/130327-statement.html> (accessed 05.01.2017).

¹¹ BRICS (2015) "Ufa Declaration." Ufa, 9 July. Available at: [Available at: http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/150709-ufa-declaration_en.html](http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/150709-ufa-declaration_en.html) (accessed 05.01.2017).

es particular stress on cyber-security and mentions one security-specific focus group which has regular discussions: the Working Group of Experts of the BRICS States on Security in the Use of ICTs. With respect to the Syrian conflict, the Ufa declaration expresses “support for the steps of the Russian Federation aimed at promoting a political settlement” (a reference to consultations held in Moscow between Syrian parties in January and April 2015) and also expresses concern that the spillover in Iraq and Syria will result in growing terrorist activities in the region. The document reaffirms the coalition’s commitment to principles like territorial integrity, independence and national sovereignty. In addition to making the usual call for a meeting of national security advisors, the accompanying Action Plan makes the first concrete reference of any BRICS action to meetings on specific topics. These include combating illicit drug traffic; the security of outer space activities; addressing the situation in the Middle East and North Africa; information and communications technologies (ICTs); and infectious disease crises (in the aftermath of the Ebola emergency in parts of Africa).¹²

The 2016 Goa Declaration adds to the BRICS security agenda the issue of UN peacekeeping (India is among the UN’s top troop-contributing countries) and calls for the strengthening of the role, capacity and effectiveness of peacekeeping. It also expands its concerns regarding terrorism to include the issue of terrorist activity fundraising, especially via links to money laundering. Terrorism is by far the most salient issue in the Goa Declaration: there are a full 43 references to it in the text.

By this time, the BRICS summit declarations contained language that was negotiated not only at summits but also during discussions held in the meetings of the High Representatives on Security/National Security Advisors. Although these meetings do not yield specific documents, there is typically some media coverage, especially by host country outlets, on the general themes of the debates and occasionally on the bilateral meetings that are held parallel to the main event. The first of these meetings was held in May 2009 in Russia, with the aim of discussing the security repercussions of the global financial crisis,¹³ with subsequent meetings in Brasilia (April 2010) and Sochi, Russia (October 2010) that covered general security topics. At the meetings in Moscow (2015) and New Delhi (2016), however, these discussions took on a more urgent tone and covered specific topics, suggesting that Russia and India have both played a lead role in trying to advance the BRICS security agenda, especially on issues related to terrorism.¹⁴ These debates remain largely exploratory in nature, but they have covered topics as concrete as the role of Daesh (ISIS) and Boko Haram and have included initial attempts to coordinate policies in issues like cyber security, terrorism and piracy.

¹² BRICS (2015) “Ufa Action Plan.” Ufa, 9 July. Available at: <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/150709-ufa-action-plan-en.html> (accessed 05.01.2017).

¹³ The BRICS Post (2015) “Putin to Meet BRICS National Security Advisors in Moscow.” 25 May. Available at: <http://thebricspost.com/putin-to-meet-brics-national-security-advisors-in-moscow/#.WHZwP7GZPuQ> (accessed 05.01.2017).

¹⁴ Gabinete de Segurança Institucional da Presidência da República (2016). “Reunião de Assesores Nacionais de Segurança do BRICS.” Available at: <http://www.gsi.gov.br/noticias/2016/reuniao-de-assesores-nacionais-de-seguranca-do-brics> (accessed 05.01.2017).

At the 2016 New Delhi meeting, the BRICS security representatives also exchanged assessments of recent developments in the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region. Three issues emerged as possible paths of least resistance in BRICS security cooperation. When they addressed cyber security, the five countries agreed to share information and best practices; combat cyber-crimes; and improve cooperation between state intelligence and law enforcement agencies, including joint cyber security research and development and capacity-building. When the reps met to discuss terrorism, the meeting followed up on the first meeting of the BRICS Working Group on Counter Terrorism, which was held a day before in the same city. The five states also agreed to expand BRICS counter-terrorism cooperation to include measures to deny terrorists access to finance and hardware such as equipment, arms and ammunition, even as they underscored the need for a global legal framework for dealing with terrorism. Finally, the BRICS representatives agreed to pool efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism emanating from the Middle East and, more broadly, to establish a BRICS Forum to progressively consolidate cooperation and exchanges among respective agencies in security related fields.¹⁵ This was a first, tentative sign of institutionalization in BRICS security cooperation. These meetings have become more frequent and discussions cover an increasingly broad gamut of topics, with signs that mechanisms may be created in the next few years to tackle specific security challenges.

One final innovation from the Goa and Delhi meetings is the involvement of organized civil society in BRICS security issues; in October 2016, nineteen scholars, diplomats and politicians from the BRICS countries wrote an open letter to the BRICS leaders urging an end to the Syrian conflict.¹⁶ Although a small effort, this may indicate that the BRICS role in international security may in the future become more controversial, even outside of western circles and may be subjected to further scrutiny from non-state actors.

Shared Interests and Hurdles to BRICS Security Cooperation

BRICS Shared Interests in Peace and Security

The BRICS documents indicate that the coalition's security agenda has advanced, albeit unevenly and very incrementally, since the group's creation in the mid-2000s. During the first annual summits, the foremost concerns facing the member states centred on countering the effects of the financial crisis, as reflected in the weight accorded by the coalition to economic cooperation among the BRIC states as well as to brainstorming ways to mitigate the shock. Over time, with successive summits as well

¹⁵ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (2016) "Meeting of the BRICS High Representatives for National Security." 15 September. Available at: http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/27401/Meeting_of_the_BRICS_High_Representatives_Responsible_for_National_Security (accessed 05.01.2017).

¹⁶ The BRICS Post (2016) "Letter to the BRICS Leaders: Urgent Response Needed on Syria." 16 October. Available at: <http://thebricspost.com/letter-to-brics-leaders-urgent-response-needed-on-syria/#.WIDBDbGZNEI> (accessed 05.01.2017).

as regular ministerial and sub-ministerial meetings, the BRICS Declarations (and accompanying Plans of Action) came to reflect a far broader agenda, including not only concrete initiatives but also common positions on key global issues and debates, especially those related to the reform of global governance.

Thus, development and economic cooperation emerged as the first broad area in which the four countries (and, with the inclusion of South Africa, eventually five) have found paths of least resistance to cooperation. This is reflected not only in the frequency of related meetings but also, more recently, in the founding of the NDB and other initiatives, such as the 2015 creation of the Contingency Reserve International Arrangement (CRA), a framework meant to provide protection against global liquidity pressures. The coincidence of interests in expanding their respective South-South development cooperation agendas (or, at the least, the relative lack of clashing interests in this area) permitted relatively agile agenda-setting in economic and development cooperation. In development financing in particular, the coalition offers the member states a way to amplify the reach of their respective South-South cooperation while strengthening their political claims, including their critiques of Northern aid and their calls for global governance reform. This agenda-setting has been largely internal, driven by the governments of the BRICS states. However, parallel initiatives and the awareness-oriented events of NGOs, for instance through events held on the margins of BRICS summits, have also created new pressures for the BRICS to adopt certain norms in development cooperation. The NGOs, for example, draw attention to wealth distribution, environmental standards and labour practices related to infrastructure financing.¹⁷

In international security, on the other hand, the agenda-setting has been slower and has proceeded far more cautiously, and has almost exclusively been limited to state channels. During the first five years of the existence of the BRICS as a coalition, the security content of the Declaration and Plans of Action was limited to rather abstract joint positions on major conflicts, such as those in Libya and Syria, or identifying broad principles that the member states agreed upon, such as non-intervention. In the case of the Libyan intervention, the BRICS were all members of the UN Security Council in 2011, where they were able to achieve some level of coordination on their positions, all of them invoking, to some extent, the principle of respect for national sovereignty in challenging the imposition of the R2P norm. Similarly, when the Syrian war broke out in 2011, the BRICS seemed to converge in their opposition to, or reluctance to endorse, proposals for military intervention, including via the UN [Abdenur, 2016]. Since 2015, the BRICS have moved towards their first concrete joint initiatives, but these remain exploratory and highly topic-specific, such as the working group on combatting terrorism.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Lysa John (2012) “Engaging BRICS: Challenges and Opportunities for Civil Society.” Oxfam India. Available at: <https://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/default/files/Working%20paper%202012.pdf> (accessed 05.01.2017).

As reflected in the expanding sections of BRICS declarations dedicated to security issues, and in the increasing frequency of security-related BRICS meetings, the coalition clearly aspires to develop a denser security agenda. In addition, despite their heterogeneity, the five member states do share some interests in this area. The BRICS leaderships frequently promote discourses of long-term peace and stability, although they may have somewhat different conceptions of how this may be attained and what the desirable status quo would look like, especially in their own vicinities and in regions they consider to be strategic to their role in international affairs. Russia, for instance, claims that it has intervened militarily in Syria in order to help preserve stability in the region, and asserts that its role is justified as “intervention by invitation” since it was prompted by requests from the Bashir al-Assad government.¹⁸ China’s growing interests abroad have riled up tensions with some of its neighbouring states, including over territorial disputes in the Pacific, but the Chinese government views peace and stability, both regionally and globally, not only as an end in itself, but also as a necessary condition to ensure prosperity.¹⁹ India’s border hostilities, especially with nuclear rival Pakistan, are framed by Indian leaders as issues pertaining to territorial integrity, but generally presented as obstacles to broader regional stability.²⁰

Second, all of the BRICS want more autonomy with respect to international security, both within and beyond their own regions, and to be recognized as contributors to stability rather than free riders or “spoilers” of international efforts for peace. Even as they press for more global governance representation, these countries are demanding to become bigger players within established security governance systems. This has manifested in their work to expand and/or diversify their personnel contributions to UN peacekeeping, financial contributions to peacebuilding and efforts in international conflict mediation, sometimes outside of their own regions. Brazil worked with Turkey in an attempt to mediate growing tensions over the Iranian nuclear program [Lazarou, 2016] and even China, which has historically adhered to a strong discourse of non-intervention, has recently offered to mediate in Middle Eastern and African armed conflicts [Chen, 2015; Tiezzi, 2014].

Third, the BRICS states have sometimes, either individually or collectively, expressed scepticism with respect to enshrined approaches to international conflict. In particular, they have called for more effective mechanisms for dealing with armed conflict, especially given the changing nature of war (for instance, due to the growing role of non-state actors in both intra- and inter-state conflicts). Even Russia, which has

¹⁸ Tass (2015) “Lawmakers Authorize Use of Russian Military Force for Anti-IS Airstrikes in Syria.” 30 September. Available at: <http://tass.com/politics/824795> (accessed 05.01.2017).

¹⁹ See, for instance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (2015). “Speech in National University of Singapore.” 7 November. Available at: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1313709.shtml (accessed 05.01.2017).

²⁰ The Times of India (2017) “India Wants Peace at Borders, But Don’t View It as Our Weakness: Army Chief on Ceasefire Violations.” 15 January. Available at: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-wants-peace-at-borders-but-dont-view-it-as-our-weakness-army-chief-on-ceasefire-violations/article-show/56573356.cms> (accessed 05.01.2017).

traditionally adopted a more cautious stance towards UN Security Council reform, especially in the sense of maintaining security-related attributions within the scope of the Council, has repeatedly called for more conflict prevention, in part as an alternative to the normalization of R2P.²¹

Fourth, the BRICS countries aspire to become more direct participants in norms-setting in international security, although they have engaged in different ways and to different extents in global normative debates. Even as these states are sometimes accused of acting more as “norms blockers,” especially with respect to R2P, they have also proposed changes at the conceptual and operational levels. Examples include: Brazil’s proposal of Responsibility while Protecting (RwP) as a way to temper R2P; the frequent calls by South Africa for greater investment in conflict resolution through political dialogue; and the China-led proposal of the idea of “Responsible Protection” [Abdenur, 2016]. These points show that the BRICS have some general goals in common in international security, which may facilitate the development of topic-specific joint positions and initiatives in areas deemed to be paths of least resistance in the BRICS international security agenda.

Challenges to Advancing a Security Cooperation Agenda

Despite the common objectives identified above, there are internal as well as external constraints to the degree of political cohesiveness that the highly heterogeneous BRICS can attain on the security agenda.

First, despite the coalition members’ increasingly apparent interest in cooperating on international security issues, the BRICS is not a defence alliance. As a loose arrangement of rising powers, the BRICS has no joint military force: it “lacks teeth” in the sense of coordinated hard power. Furthermore, the coalition members have never publicly expressed any ambition to forge such an alliance through mutual guarantees against attacks by other states and menaces. If one of the BRICS enters an armed conflict and is attacked, the other countries are not beholden to defend it, as in formal defence alliances.

Second, the BRICS coalition is a relatively recent creation. Some of the scepticism surrounding its level of institutionalization is levelled at the coalition despite it having been around for less than a decade (using the first heads of state summit as a baseline). Although some of the bilateral ties among members, especially those with China, have deepened considerably even outside of the BRICS initiative, there remains a degree of political distance and geographic remoteness among the BRICS countries, and in some cases, even geopolitical rivalries, as in the case of China and India. Given the heterogeneity of the group, as with any multilateral initiative (outside of established

²¹ Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations (2011) “Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations H. E. Vitaly Churkin at the UN Security Council Meeting on Conflict Prevention.” 22 September. Available at: http://russiaun.ru/en/news/sc_preventive_diplomacy (accessed 05.01.2017).

organizational boundaries), the coalition's first objective is to enhance mutual understanding and confidence-building, which helps to explain the incremental and so far largely exploratory nature of the security agenda.

Third, the BRICS is a transregional entity. Unlike regional organizations, which rely on spatially defined common interests to develop a collaborative agenda, there is no spatial logic of contiguity to the BRICS – that is, the coalition is not strictly concerned with a particular territory. This poses an obstacle to security cooperation insofar as most security threats (with some exceptions, such as cyber issues) have a spatial dimension. Three of the members (Russia, China and India) are adjacent to one another, but the other two states (Brazil and South Africa) are separated from the rest by vast physical distances. Thus in the BRICS, political space is largely divorced from any geographic space, at least until a spatially defined cooperation initiative, such as China's One Belt, One Road emerges as a focal point of the BRICS development and even security agendas.

Fourth, the split between BRICS within the UN Security Council, while not necessarily an impediment to security cooperation in general, represents a considerable divergence in their status and influence within the international security community. Not all of the BRICS states have a seat at the highest table of international security discussions. P-5 members, even when they have voiced support for reform of the Council or even openly backed a particular candidate for a permanent seat, remain vague and not particularly committed to an overhaul of the body. Another split among the BRICS involved nuclear and non-nuclear states; while Russia, China and India possess nuclear weaponry, the other two countries voluntarily gave up their nuclear weapons programs in the last decade of the Cold War. Such internal differences pose hurdles to cooperation on certain key fronts because they reflect power asymmetries not only in hard power, but also in their individual capacity to influence key debates in security, even if the BRICS collectively promotes a general discourse of peace and stability.

Fifth, these countries' geo-political interests and contexts are vastly different. This is reflected, for instance, in their widely divergent relations with neighbouring countries. China has become more assertive and its rise is contributing towards new or renewed tensions and territorial disputes, as well as increasing rivalry with the U.S. over the latter's role in Asian security. On the other hand, although Brazil has a very serious internal problem, that of diffuse violence as expressed in high homicide rates, it has had 153 years of peace with its neighbouring states after the peaceful negotiation of its borders. In another example, the BRICS countries diverge on their stances and policies to combat terrorism. In three of these countries, Russia, China and India, internal separatist groups are considered by the government to be terrorist groups with international links. In contrast, while Brazil and South Africa have encountered phases of political turbulence, they do not face territory-based insurgencies or have home grown groups that are formally considered terrorist organizations by those governments. In fact, on

occasion Brazil has often been highly critical of foreign policy discourses that use the label terrorism to justify military interventions.

Finally, the recent deepening of geopolitical antagonism between Russia and the western countries, especially the U.S. and its NATO allies, since the annexation of Crimea generates dilemmas for the other BRICS countries, especially the democratic ones that may not be as keen to pick sides. On this point, the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president in late-2016 may yet provoke further geopolitical shifts and realignments that could impact the BRICS' ability to forge a cohesive agenda in international security.

Conclusion

Compared to development cooperation, which has emerged as the clearest path of least resistance in BRICS agenda-setting during the group's first decade of existence, international security has proven more elusive. On the one hand, some advances can be noted and must be understood in light of the BRICS coalition being a relatively recent creation composed of countries that are still "getting to know one another." In terms of coalition institutionalization, security has become a more common topic of discussion at BRICS meetings, including the annual head of state summits and ministerial-level meetings, such as those of the national security advisors. On the other hand, these discussions have mostly entailed efforts to coordinate general positions on specific conflicts and issues, with only incipient discussions of how to coordinate policies or implement joint action.

The comparatively fragmented nature of this coordination can be understood in light of the internal and external constraints on intra-BRICS collaboration in security, including the lack of a shared spatial interest, asymmetries in influence and status and differing geopolitical concerns. These differences make it harder for the BRICS to form a comprehensive agenda, but they don't pose obstacles to cooperation in niche security areas, or even around some central issues. For instance, although there are some divergences among the BRICS countries on how to approach terrorism, three of the members states – Russia, India and China – appear highly motivated to create a thematic agenda that goes beyond position coordination to include concrete mechanisms. Other security concerns that have featured more prominently on the BRICS agenda have clear links to development problems: food security, energy security and maritime security, including piracy. Since the BRICS development and sustainability agendas have expanded considerably, these security areas may represent issue-specific paths of least resistance. In addition, given its growing salience in global debates and its lack of well-defined spatial logic, the issue of cyber security and outer space security are also likely to gain ground on the BRICS agenda. Thus far, organized civil society in the BRICS countries globally has been more focused on the development initiatives of the coalition, especially the New Development Bank and its normative role in infrastruc-

ture financing. As a result, the BRICS security agenda will proceed through top-down state channels.

In terms of institution-building and concrete agenda-setting, there is one unexplored area in which the BRICS may find enough common ground to launch new initiatives: conflict prevention. To different extents, all of the BRICS have individually defended the idea that the international community needs to better engage in preventive measures rather than focus narrowly on remedial approaches. They have also played a role in post-conflict settings, whether through stabilization or peacebuilding. These efforts dovetail with a discussion at the UN, which has gained momentum with the 2017 inauguration of Secretary-General António Guterres, to boost the organization's role in preventing armed conflict. The idea in BRICS documents that development and security are closely intertwined may offer a starting point for developing concrete mechanisms and models for tackling structural or "root" causes of armed conflict. In addition, the BRICS could link South-South development cooperation, including investment in infrastructure, to conflict prevention. If the BRICS coalition were to launch an institution dedicated to conflict prevention and could boost their legitimacy as contributors to peace and stability, it could advance its security agenda in a timely and innovative way.

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Могут ли страны БРИКС сотрудничать в вопросах международной безопасности?¹

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БРИКС совершила значительный прогресс в экономическом взаимодействии и сотрудничестве в целях развития, в то же время объединение не было столь же успешным в разработке и реализации собственной повестки дня в сфере международной безопасности, хотя имеются явные признаки того, что БРИКС заинтересована в развитии сотрудничества в этой сфере. Почему же тогда БРИКС медлит с развитием взаимодействия в сфере безопасности, и каковы перспективы наращивания сотрудничества в этой области?

В статье рассматривается формирование БРИКС повестки дня сотрудничества в сфере безопасности, в то время как объединение старается утвердиться в качестве гибкой, но все же последовательной организации и влиятельного коллективного актора в международных отношениях. Обращаясь к ключевым документам БРИКС и итоговым отчетам встреч по вопросам безопасности, автор анализирует три направления связанной с безопасностью деятельности, начавшейся с первого саммита объединения в 2009 г.: 1) попытки координации позиций по конкретным вопросам безопасности, таким как вооруженные конфликты, и соответствующим нормативным подходам; 2) попытки координировать политику; 3) инициативы по формированию институтов. Автор приходит к выводу, что в основном дебаты по вопросам безопасности в рамках БРИКС фокусируются на первом направлении. В то же время если стороны еще предпринимают какие-то усилия по координации политики, то в вопросах формирования институтов достигнут минимальный прогресс. Показано, что международная безопасность до сих пор не относится к наиболее простым для обсуждения темам, к которым обращаются страны — члены объединения в целях углубления сотрудничества в рамках коалиции. Этот факт можно объяснить внутренними различиями стран-членов и ситуативными факторами. Препятствия для более целостной повестки дня БРИКС не являются непреодолимыми, однако они могут сужать диапазон тем, которыми занимается объединение. В частности, имеется непроработанная область, в которой пять стран могли бы расширить сотрудничество, используя свой опыт в сфере содействия международному развитию и миротворчества. Эта сфера — предотвращение конфликтов.

Ключевые слова: БРИКС; международная безопасность; определение повестки дня; глобальное управление

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