

A Study of Multilateral Cooperation for Security and Defense among the Nations of BRICS

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to evaluate the possibility of establishing a common agenda in security and defense within BRICS. The most BRICS members are overall satisfied with the international system's present functioning and therefore cherish a conservative, rather than revolutionary, vision of the global economy. On practical security matters, the BRICS rarely act as a group and therefore have minimal collective leverage within multilateral for a particularly ineffective on military and security matters. The BRICS have met in many different configurations (heads of state and government, ministers, diplomats, parliamentarians and academics), aimed at coordinating policies and strengthening their collective presence in international forums. The core argument is that the cooperation in all spheres allows attenuating the distrusts among the countries of this group and enables the formulation of alternative international security paradigm, enhancing the political-diplomatic arrangement, comparing the evolution of security and defense within BRICS, the conclusion is that the cooperation in these areas becomes a potential agenda for the future. The present paper is an attempt to study the Multilateral Cooperation for Security and Defense among the Nations of BRICS.

Keywords: BRICS; Strategic Environment, Security and Defense, Multilateral Cooperation and Agenda.

INTRODUCTION

The five nations namely Brazil Russia India China South Africa are together commonly known as a new polarity called BRICS. However, BRICS does not constitute a completely united and institutionalized group. The five countries emerged amid the rising rest of the world, in principle because of the economic prominence, as highlighted in the study economist Jim O'Neill (2001) of Goldman Sachs, which named the acronym in 2001. Despite this projection, BRICS does not hold a degree of institutionalization that allows considering it as a structured and cohesive block. It is the first group "formed from a theoretical suggestion of a corporate economist, and not from the original initiative of the states concerned" (Almeida, 2010: 132). This author also considers that BRICS are "a reality to be built in practice, which depends, firstly, on interested parties themselves as much as the changing world context today" (Almeida, 2010: 134). Only at the end of the last decade is that BRICS began to organize politically and diplomatically, with the holding of summits, ministerial meetings and other forums. If the political will of the leaders of each country is to build the reality in practice, deepening cooperation within group through the institutional path and overcoming the pragmatism to follow the same direction for just convenience, then it is necessary to look forward. In the field of international security, it is unclear what role the group will play in asymmetrical multilateral world order, if the five countries will deal together or not with major global challenges and what contributions they can present to international community. One of the ways to initiate a reflection on BRICS perspectives in security and defense issue is to analyze the evolution of these issues at its summits and ministerial meetings on national security.

That is one word to summarize the declaration of BRICS summits and four ministerial meetings on national security¹, called Meeting of BRICS National Security Advisor (BRICS NSA): repetition. A repetition at the same time seems to fulfill two purposes. The first one has an objective nature, which is to demonstrate the common concerns of the five countries and makes clear the group's position on certain international security issues. The second one, subjective, is to establish the limits of coordination of positions, either by endogenous suspicion, either by exogenous intentions. And that, in turn, reveals gaps that need to be overcome to strengthen intra-group cooperation in security and defense. The declarations resulted from the six BRICS Summits² seem, actually, more like a letter of intent than a conditioning document of the group's actions. It notes the low level of institutionalization of the group, because these declarations neither create rules, but guidelines, nor impose practices, but suggestions. Only the declarations of the last three summits, New Delhi, Durban and Fortaleza, respectively, generated action plans, which, in fact, determined the meetings that would be held until the next summit. In general, declaratory documents are marked especially by concern for the world economy in the context of crisis and the need for reform of the major international financial institutions, like International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank etc. Other issues, such as development, poverty, climate change, energy, etc., although on the agenda, appear to catalyze few efforts of five countries with the exception of agriculture

and health. Despite of the lack of systemic efforts, international security issues seem to have acquired greater importance on summits' agenda, however, without a sectoral treatment within the group.

The reform of the United Nations (UN), including its Security Council, and terrorism were the two recurring themes of international security. Regarding the first one, BRICS expressed a strong commitment to the UN. There were six ministerial meetings on national security between 2009 and 2016, but this research only found available information on four of them. Multilateral diplomacy and considered as the central actor in dealing with global challenges and threats. It is quite clear that BRICS summit declarations are conspicuous by political and diplomatic efforts for peaceful resolution of disputes and refute the use of force and intervention in internal affairs. This is the stance adopted by the group about the political and conflictive tensions that are occurring in the Middle East and North and West Africa and could be interpreted as an initiative of performance paradigm formulation of international security, closer to the UN normatively. In Sanya Declaration, 2011, BRICS called for the involvement of the parties to peaceful settlement of the crisis in Libya, with the support of UN and regional organizations. The Delhi, eThekweni and Fortaleza Declarations, which resulted of, respectively, fourth, fifth and sixth summit, focused on the Syrian crisis, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Iranian nuclear imbroglio. Consonant to the position taken in the case of Libya, BRICS defended the conduct of the political process by the Syrians themselves, clearly opposing any interventionist maneuver. Among other concerns also pointed by BRICS countries in declarations, such as drug trafficking and terrorism in Afghanistan and humanitarian violations in Mali, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria, cyber security plays an important role.

It is impossible to encompass any international relations phenomenon in accordance with only one theory. All theories are incomplete and limited, like critical scholars assert, and they served to somebody and to some purpose, according to (Cox,1996). Naturally impregnated with values and interests, every theory can be useful to explain or understand certain phenomenon, but ineffective, even completely useless, to deal with others. Therefore, it justifies adopting a conceptual framework in this article instead of a specific theory. This approach allows working with concepts through different theoretical lenses and contributes to examine the reality in a comprehensive way. Security and defense are not strait definitions. There are two substantial questions to differentiate both concepts. The first one is about their nature, one is a condition and other is an action. Security is a desirable state that enables the individuals to accomplish their own wills and activities without any threat and to achieve their well-being and happiness. Defense is an administrative, organized and operative structure based on state to make possible the direct use of force in order to assure security The second question is the existence of two orientations related to the use of force: one of them is external, primarily, but not exclusively, addressed to defense issues; the second one is internal, primarily, but again not exclusively, directed to guarantee the state monopoly of the use of force on delimited territory. In other words, the use of force is protector in domestic level, generally responsibility of the police, and is destroyer in international level, usually responsibility of the militaries.

The previous differentiation would be clear if contemporary international phenomenon is not so turbulent. Regarding its nature, security does not seem to diverge from the traditional understanding: it is an instrumental condition to emancipate individuals and collectivities and enables them to fulfill their goals. Complementary, defense is the action based on military force to assure security of individuals and collectivities. However, there is a hermetic problem: when and under which conditions is it necessary to use military force in order to assure security? The classic wars are giving away to other elements of instability such as piracy, drug trafficking, terrorism, natural disasters, among others which affect less the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states and more their citizens. Based on conceptual definitions, it is possible to get the following deduction. On the one hand, the cooperation neorealist logic prevails in BRICS so far as the result of mistrust and rivalry among five countries, which seek the mere attainment of their national interests. On the other, it co-exists a neoliberal expectation, especially in the discursive level, towards to the strengthening of cooperation for the institutional path as a process that generates learning, transparency and commitment. One of the most solid evidence of this expectation is the creation of the New BRICS Development Bank in Fortaleza Summit in 2014. One step, which is to establish a set of rules on the operation of the bank and the financing of projects in countries development, has already been given. The question is whether these rules will be implemented in practice. Anyway, it is an initiative that can spill over into other areas such as defense and security.

The institutionalization of cooperation specifically on security and defense issues would face difficulties from common concepts, given the particularities of each country, which are included in their conceptions. If it were easy, prevailing harmony, it would not be necessary. One way to facilitate it is to distinguish two levels of cooperation. The first one is the political and diplomatic level, and the approach among five countries could occur around a performance paradigm in the field of international security and construction measures of trust and security. The second level is the technical-operational, where interaction contributes to specific issues and strengthens the military apparatus and security, respecting the conceptual idiosyncrasies of each country. It is important, then, to understand the BRICS position in the international order and their efforts to cooperate in security and defense issues through summits and ministerial meetings on national security, which will be the purpose of next section.

Meetings of BRICS National Security Advisor (BRICS-NSA):

BRICS organized five sectoral meetings to debate security and defense issues. The first was held in Moscow in 2009; the second, in Brasilia in 2010; the third, in New Delhi in 2013; the fourth, in Cape Town in 2013; finally, the fifth, in Ufa in 2015. This article focuses on four of these meetings, because of the available information. It is interesting to note that the representatives of Russia and China, respectively, General Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary General of the National Security Council, and Ambassador Dai Binggo, State Councilor, were present at these four meetings. The National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of India, Ambassador Shivshankar Menon, was present at the last three meetings, and all of them, Brazil was represented by the C. M. of Secretariat for Strategic Affairs of the Presidency of Republic³. South Africa participated only in two last meetings, represented by its Minister of State Security, Siyabonga Cyprian Cwele.

The first observation about these meetings is that BRICS high representatives discussed much more general issues on international relations– international economic crisis, reform of the institutions of global governance, etc. than proper security and defense issues, obliterating the main BRICS NSA purpose. The second observation is that, unlike the meetings of ministers of Finance and of Agriculture, for instance, BRICS NSA involves senior officials responsible for national security issues and does not produce a final document, like a declaration or an action plan. Indeed, this specific meeting is an opportunity to five countries know each other and their perspectives on issues that go beyond security and defense. It is a minimal alignment for prospecting a future cooperation among them. The first set of initiatives would strengthen the United Nations system efficiency, both to protect the security interests of the great powers as to ensure the sovereignty and independence of all countries. One of the necessary conditions for this, but not enough, it would increase the representativeness of the Security Council itself. The second set of initiatives would be to increase the political cost of insistence on leaving the world's security system in order to mitigate the interventionism of the great powers. The National Security Adviser of India Ambassador Shivshankar Menon preferred to deal with the non-proliferation instead of disarmament and argued that the unique purpose of nuclear weapons today is its deterrent effect. By the way, concerning this meeting in Brasilia, there was almost no discussion on security and defense issues, while the third one in New Delhi debated much more specific topics, focused on the following agenda: a) Cyber security; b) Terrorism and piracy; and c) The situation in North Africa and West Asia which received only a few comments.

The cyber security and piracy demonstrated the first more than second to be two promising areas for strengthening BRICS cooperation on security and defense issues. Concerning cyber security, it emphasizes that, with the exception of South Africa, no group has signed the Convention of Budapest, adopted by European Council, which deals with the fight against cybercrime, especially by not considering it as result of universal understanding. In contrast, the secretary Paes de Barros, in the third meeting, proposed that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) draw up an international protocol on the definition, investigation and prevention of cybercrimes. General Patrushev, on this same occasion, as well as requesting support from the other BRICS countries to draft a resolution on cyber security that the Russian government submitted to the UN General Assembly, suggested the establishment of an action plan and an expert group to examine the issue.

CONCLUSION

It is possible to settle a common agenda on security and defense within BRICS. However, it depends on many factors, but above all, political will and vision of the future to preserve group's cohesion. So far it prevail neorealist cooperation logic within BRICS, including in the field of security and defense, where mistrust and disagreements prevent further group's institutionalization. In the politico-diplomatic level, there are no strict rules, but common positions shared by countries related to international security that does not institutionalize the practice. In the technical-operational level, there is still an attempt to formulate rules, particularly on cyber security, which seems to move faster than the previous level. It is important to define, prior and clearly, what the BRICS performance paradigm in international security in order to advance institutionally through security and confidence building measures, and then extend the cooperation to technical-operational level, exploring other issues beyond those that are on the agenda.

First of all, it is necessary to address cooperation in security and defense toward to trace a common path that is feasible for the five countries, complementing its strategic priorities, particularly focused on the immediate surroundings, and domestic needs, especially in the socioeconomic sphere. The institutionalization of cooperation on every area especially in security and defense within BRICS reduces uncertainties, alters the transaction costs, provides information and stabilizes expectations among the five countries in the group. These sensitive issues ultimately are directly linked to the survival of states. It is difficult to imagine the proposition of a new paradigm of global relations or even the implementation of an ambitious reform of global governance, as suggested by BRICS leaders, without group's cooperation on security and defense. At the same time, such cooperation could strengthen the group internally and reposition it assertively in the international order, perhaps revised.

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