

BRICS: PEACE AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

Buntu Siwisa

I. Introduction

In political-geographical terms, BRICS is an anomaly. To many, it is a jigsaw puzzle meant only to fit in together in a forced way. That is how it seems from afar. However, more than anything, it is meant to emphasize the extent of the interconnectedness of the marginalised global South in the grand scheme of the system of international relations. It signifies the extent of the interconnectedness of the challenges, threats, and opportunities among the global South and the new emerging powers. And more than anything, it points to the inclusion of South Africa and the African continent into this web of interconnectedness.

The African continent is fast changing along with a fast changing world. A new set of political, economic and social variables are displacing some of the “old problems”, while the latter sit cheek by jowl with the “new problems” or challenges.¹ Some of the ‘old problems’ in the political and security arenas are armed conflicts, underpinned by the availability of small arms. As a consequence of the perpetuation of old challenges, new political and security challenges are given fertile grounds to mushroom. Particularly, these manifest themselves in transnational criminal activities, in the forms of narco-

¹ Anning, Kwesi (2007) **Africa: Confronting Complex Threats**, (Coping with Crisis: Working Paper Series), (International Peace Academy, New York).

trafficking, arms dealing, human trafficking, and other activities concerning the financing of terrorist activities and other politically violent activities. What is ghastly about the interaction of the old and new challenges is that they give rise to public health problems, ungovernable illegal inter-state migration patterns. As a result, this scenario lends itself to giving opportunities to individuals with terrorist affiliations to play out their mandates. Old political problems cast in the form of weak state and regional institutions, incapable of averting these patterns of transnational crimes and potential terrorist activities, further gives thrust to these new challenges to stand tall. As Kwesi Anning put it, “Transnational organized criminal (TNC) groups are emerging that exploit the openings and spaces created by such insecurities to engage in activities detrimental both to human and international security.”²

Of these, the Southern and East African regions are belaboured the most, more especially by human trafficking, linked with potential terrorist activities. In these regions, illegal immigrants are sourced mainly from Pakistan, Bangladesh and India mostly. With colonial links with East and Southern Africa, they are mostly transported *via* Kenya and Tanzania, through Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia. Their final destinations are South Africa, particularly in the KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape provinces; and Europe.

Well-connected and well-financed non-state actors play a critically important intermediating role in this enterprise. Wealthy individuals with multiple official identities and residences stretching from East Asia and Southern Africa, using registered

² Ibid (p. 1).

companies, philanthropic formations, mosques and madrassas, are central in manoeuvring this entire machinery. Most disturbing is that these non-state actors utilize their extensive patronage to access bureaucracies and other customs officials in these regions to undertake human trafficking.

At this stage, these forms of transnational crimes in Eastern and Southern Africa have not yet posed an overtly active political crisis. They are currently mainly dormant. However, they are potential hotbeds for terrorist activities.

In the Great Lakes and Central African regions, security threats are posed by four interlinked factors:³

- (i) Sub-regional economic networks that directly and indirectly fuel insecurity through the exploitation and sale of natural resources (diamonds, timber, cocoa, cotton and coffee) and by the transportation and sale of these commodities, facilitated by inadequate state regulatory frameworks;
- (ii) Regional military networks that supply weapons to combatants and the provision of training facilities to those intent on destabilizing the regions;
- (iii) Regional political and economic networks that provide support mechanisms and facilitate economic predation; and
- (iv) Networks comprising illicit smuggling activities.

³ Ibid.

Worrying emerging trends in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa (specifically in Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan) is the rise of *Wahhabism*, that radical form of political Islamism resourced by and directed from Saudi Arabia. In states with traditionally weak institutions and highly contested regimes (e.g. Niger, Mauritania, Mali etc.), it threatens to replace these regimes and their forms governance systems.

In these regions, efforts to combat these old security challenges have to be with meaningful measures of absorbing their agents into the countries' economies. As Monty G. Marshall maintains thus:

An important corollary to the recent decline in organized and sustained armed conflicts in many areas of Africa is an overabundance of unemployed, armed fighters in a region that offers limited opportunities for reintegration of former combatants into a peacetime economy. The life, experiences, skill set, and “tool box” of ex-combatants provide powerful incentives for many to pursue post-war occupations in banditry, organized crime, mercenary activities, or “strongarm” politics.⁴

This becomes more illuminated in parts of West Africa that are characterised by state-aided narco-trafficking: how does one displace such activities with meaningful and credible economic activities at an individual and family levels?

These are the peace and security challenges facing South Africa and the African continent. The formation of BRICS comes at an opportune time, when this

⁴ Marshall, Monty G. (2005) **Conflict Trends in Africa, 1964 – 2004: A Macro-Comparative Perspective**, (Report prepared for Africa Conflict Prevention Pool (ACPP)), (p. 4).

interconnectedness displays its maturity and inevitability. However, it is important first to examine the idea behind the formation of BRICS.

II. Behind the Idea of BRICS

The idea behind the formation of the collective that is Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) is no novelty. Perhaps the sheer enormity of it all, and the promise of what it wants to resolve with the tool of its powers may render it to seem like a new phenomenon. Rather, the formation of BRICS follows in a continuum of the global South attempting, post-World War II, to organise itself and its foreign policy and developmental interests against the hegemonic interests of the global North.

The global South, realising its marginalisation of collective interests by the traditional and pro-Northern international relations institutions, have sought to conceptually reorganise the perceptions of peace and security at the international relations level. They have sought to do so by twinning peace and security with development. This ‘reproblematisation of security’⁵ has manifested itself, post-World War II, through the development of Third Worldism. At various stages, this has come in the form of international socialism; the Non-Aligned Movement, and the short-lived Seattle anti-neoliberal movement.

⁵ Duffield, M. (2005) **Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security**, Zed Books Ltd., London & New York), (pp. 22 – 44).

From then on, regionalism took a central role, with macro-regions emerging as a result of a need for economic regionalization; regional zones of peace; regional diffusion of security and conflict; and also as a consequence of the heightened capacity of regional organizations in settling disputes and enforcing peace.⁶

These forms of collectivisation have been carried out with the objective of creating a multipolar world. Samir Amin described the concept of the multipolar world as:

...a recognition that the social system in which we live is thoroughly 'global' or 'globalized,' and that any alternative to globalization based on the principles of liberal capitalism (or its more extreme neoliberal form) can itself be nothing other than 'global'. In other words, I am a champion of what has been called 'alter-globalization' in the sense of opposition to any form of globalization. That seems to me not only unrealistic but undesirable.⁷

In this continuum of the reorganization of the marginalised at the level of international relations, in pursuit of peace, security and development; how will the constellation of BRICS help to forge a multipolar world? In attempting to do so, does BRICS have a common position on how to reform the traditional pro-Northern international relations institutions (particularly the United Nations Security Council)? How can BRICS cooperate to strengthen conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacekeeping and peace missions? What are the possibilities and mechanisms for cooperation among BRICS countries to promote peace and security?

⁶ Tavares, R. (2007) **How do Peace and Security Cluster Regionally?**, (GARNET Working Paper, No. 13/07, UNU-CRIS / Gothenburg University)

⁷ Amin, S. (2006) **Beyond US Hegemony: Assessing the Prospects for a Multipolar World**, (World Book Publishing, Beirut; SIRD, Kuala Lumpur; & UKZN Press, Pietermaritzburg), (p. 1).

III. What is BRICS? What is not BRICS? What BRICS Should Be

The theme of the Fifth BRICS Summit is, “Partnership for Development, Integration and Industrialisation.” In that vein, BRICS is then a large constellation of countries making up nearly half of the world’s population, cohering on collective concerns and opportunities potentially threatened by the traditional pro-Northern international systems. The concerns and opportunities range from peace and security; the regularisation of the international market and trade regimes; the reform of international institutions; climate change negotiations, etc.

Therefore, “...BRICS form a heterogenous coalition of often competing powers that share a common fundamental political objective: to erode Western hegemonic claims by protecting the principle which these claims are deemed to most threaten, namely, the political sovereignty of states.”⁸ Moving along that line, BRICS is not an anti-Western lobby, seeking to form a fundamentally different world vision.

BRICS is not highly institutionalised, nor does it replace the regional economic community blocs, at this stage. It is the unprecedented vastness of this form of partnership, of this coming together, that has elicited assumptions of what BRICS is not: a consolidated bloc of powerful emerging countries replacing the political and economic international systems.

⁸ Laidi, Zaki (2011) **The BRICS Against the West**, (CERI Strategic Paper, No. 11), (p. 1).

It is also what BRICS is not, or what it may not seek to be, that is potentially its Achilles' heel. This potentially serves to derail its progress in redressing the order of the international systems, particularly in addressing peace and security challenges. Moving in this loose fashion, against the tide of regional economic communities serving to buttress their foreign national policies interests; and against the background of US and EU countries for the fortification of their domestic economic interests; BRICS may see itself unwittingly institutionalising a world of multipolarity without multilateralism. This is a system in which there exists multi-nodal points that, on an *ad hoc* basis, succeed in blocking Western hegemonic interests without revamping them nor their institutions. In a sense, the continuation of this working order is likely to see through a sense of continuities within discontinuities in, particularly, addressing peace and security challenges and opportunities within the availed international systems.

IV. Restructuring the UN Security Council

The core argument held by the global South on the restructuring of the core machinery of the United Nations (UN) and the allied institutions of global governance is that its mechanisms of operations are anachronistic and militate against the interests of the global South. As representations of the international world order post-World War II and the Cold War, they do not reflect, nor empathise with the peace, security and developmental interests of the global South. Concerning the UN Security Council, the main point on restructuring is on the veto powers carried by the Permanent Five (P-5) (United States of America; United Kingdom; France; Russia and China).

The essence behind the emergence and the resilience of the veto power is the strength of the unanimity of the P-5. As victors of the Second World War, and as world powers, they have been able to form a bulwark against any interests that may instigate war on a global scale, as in the last two world wars. Therefore, the P-5 "...were given their permanency, and the extraordinary power of the veto, because they were able to argue successfully against strenuous opposition, that unless these powers were given to them, there would be no new Organization."⁹ At the signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco, a UK representative noted that:

Peace must rest on the unanimity of the great powers, for without it whatever was built would be built upon shifting sands... The veto power was a means of preserving that unanimity, and far from being a menace to the small powers, it was their essential safeguard. Without that unanimity all countries, large and small, would fall victims to the establishment of gigantic rival blocs which might clash in some future Armageddon.¹⁰

The simple rejoinder to this argument is that the veto power is used by the P-5 to safeguard their own foreign policy and developmental interests. Consequently, despite may protestations from the global South aimed at restructuring representation in the UN Security Council; only three amendments have been effected in the UN Charter in almost sixty years. They all addressed seat numbers in the UN Security Council, and in the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹¹

⁹ Butler, R. (2012) **Reform of the United Nations Security Council**, (Vol. 1, Issue 1), (Penn State Journal of Law and International Affairs), (p. 28).

¹⁰ *Ibid*, (p. 29).

¹¹ Weiss, T.G. (2003) **The Illusion of UN Security Council Reform**, (The Washington Quarterly, Autumn).

Over the years in the post-Cold War era, there have been multiple proposals made on the reformation of the veto power and on the restructuring of the representation system of the UN Security Council. These are well-documented, and need no repetition here. What is important to note here is the reason behind the lack of the UN Security Council reforms: lack of unanimity. What is more important to note though is the lack of unanimity not only among the P-5, but also among the powers aspiring for reforms in the UN Security Council: Germany, Brazil, India, Japan, Egypt, South Africa and Nigeria.

The lack of unanimity among these smaller powers bears directly on BRICS' abilities to determine their future in the order of international relations. The interests of BRICS countries in the reforms of the UN Security Council and the allied institutions of global governance criss-cross with those of the P-5. In other words, foreign and developmental interests of some of the smaller powers aspiring for reforms in the order of international relations are embedded in those of the P-5. These interests among countries --- political, economic, social, cultural --- have been generated over decades, and have thus been implanted in and projected to systems of international relations, developing over generations from the colonial and Cold War eras. On many occasions, these interests are buttressed through arrangements made in regional economic blocs. Russia, India and China are members of one regional politico-economic regional bloc, R-I-C (Russia, India, China). This is a regional bloc most preferred by Russia to resolve her political foreign policy interests in the region. It is also a regional formation that, unwittingly, dilutes the collective interests of BRICS countries, as India may go against the interests of Brazil, or

South Africa, if they militate against the two P-5 members in the regional bloc, Russia and China.

India, Brazil and South Africa belong to IBSA, a formation more utilised for addressing mutual economic development concerns. Therefore, regional political and economic formations that BRICS countries belong to, if not properly examined against the collective interests of BRICS countries, will only serve to compromise the unanimity and collectivity of BRICS countries to reform the UN Security Council and the allied institutions of global governance.

It is also critical to examine the regional political conurbations from which BRICS countries emanate from, and how these eventually will project their foreign policy interests, which may potentially strengthen or weaken the collective resolve behind the formation of BRICS. South Africa, due to her foreign policy interests in Africa and her strong role in resolving disputes in the Southern African region, springs from the SADC region strong, and with the purpose of carrying out the interests of the Southern African and continental interests to the world. This is a stance that some BRICS countries may be wary of, particularly in resolving conflicts in certain parts of Africa that they may have no interest on.

Brazil also comes from a region wherein it plays a strong economic and political role, although it may be struggling to get some of the South American neighbours into the fold. Russia, on the other hand, comes from a region hostile to its foreign policy and

economic interests. Addressing terrorism and energy supply concerns in the region, Russia is struggling to rein in on her neighbours. India is in conflict with a number of its neighbours over terrorism, economic and regional dominance concerns. Therefore, the BRICS countries come together with different legacies, political and economic concerns that they may want to project in the systems and institutions of international relations. These interests, coalescing and at odds with fellow BRICS countries and some P-5 members, may only serve to weaken the collective interests of the BRICS formation.

In 2011, at the BRICS Leaders Meeting in southern China's resort city of Sanya, the Chinese President, in his speech titled, "Broad Themes, Shared Prosperity", poignantly impressed that, "The 21st century should be marked by peace, harmony, cooperation and scientific development."¹² This vision remains indelibly crafted so ahead of the Fifth BRICS Summit scheduled to be held in South Africa in March 2013. But the ground on which this vision is rooted moves and shakes relentlessly; and the winds around it are suspicious and cautious.

With peace and security challenges changing and reconfiguring in a fast-paced, complex and inter-connected manner; what are BRICS countries' possibilities and mechanism for cooperation in order to address these challenges? The eastern and southern African countries face human trafficking and illegal migration challenges, vehicled on potential Islamic terrorism resources, and intimately interlinked with South Asian countries and

¹² Sanya Declaration of the BRICS Leaders Meeting (<http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/7351063.html>) The People's Daily, PRC. 15ril 2011).

their socio-economic development challenges. The piracy in the Horn of Africa is also linked with consumerist challenges of the Pacific and Japan. The uprooting of state institutions in the Sahel is partly a problem generated by the proliferation of Al-Qaeda's networks and the importation of Wahabism (resources and ideology) from the Middle-East. The persistence and the strengthening of narco-states in parts of West Africa takes the world aback with its vast criss-crossing of networks spanning Africa, South and North Americas, Europe and Asia.

These challenges have forced inter-connectedness among countries and continents, tied by archaic and pro-Northern international governance institutions, with equally predominantly pro-Northern interests. Challenging these institutional interests, BRICS countries have to forge a united front. But how united can they be in the face of strong regional institutions and their traditional *modi operandi*? South Africa is wary of addressing conflict in the region through international bodies. Although China supported the aspirations of Brazil, India and South Africa to play a more significant role in the UN, she did not explicitly support these countries' interests to become permanent members of the UN Security Council. Russia is adamant on BRICS' gradualist development among other international bodies, while preferring to resolve its serious foreign policy challenges (e.g. Syria and the Middle-East) through the Russia-India-China (RIC) bloc. India is heavily reliant on importing oil from the Middle-East, and that potentially affects its foreign relations with that region.

All these concerns reflect on BRICS countries' potential to cooperate on strengthening conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacekeeping. They also relate to how best aid, trade, education and development for peacebuilding should be harnessed. These are issues that this paper intends to unwrap and address.

V. Conclusion

BRICS, at this stage, is not a formation that can be wished away, or whose longevity and sustainability can be guesstimated. Its momentum, the sheer organization of the willpower of its member-states, the enormity of the economic power of its member-states, and the economic weaknesses of the global North only point to the heightening of its stature in years to come.

The challenges of unanimity among BRICS countries are going to remain, without, however, overshadowing its resolve to reform the traditional institutions of international relations that have always favoured the global North. Foreign policy, political and economic interests of some BRICS countries outside the P-5 embedded with the latter will only weaken proportionately to the diminishing of the economic prowess of the Western European member-states of the P-5. This in turn will further strengthen the collective resolve of the BRICS in reforming the systems of international relations. At this stage, like any other formations, BRICS will only develop and mature in a gradualist manner.

Bibliography

Amin, Samir (2006) **Beyond US Hegemony: Assessing the Prospects for a Multipolar World**, (World Book Publishing, Beirut; SIRD, Kuala Lumpur & UKZN Press, Pietermaritzburg).

Anning, Kwesi (2007) **Africa: Confronting Complex Threats**, (Coping with Crisis: Working Paper Series), (International Peace Academy, New York)

Butler, Richard (2012) **Reform of the United Nations Security Council**, (Vol. 1, Issue 1), (Penn State Journal of Law and International Relations).

Duffield, Mark (2005) **Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security**, (Zed Books Ltd., London & New York).

Laidi, Zaki (2011) **The BRICS Against the West**, (CERI Strategic Paper, No. 11).

Marshall, Monty G. (2005) **Conflict Trends in Africa, 1964 – 2004: A Macro-Comparative Perspective**, (Report prepared for Africa Conflict Prevention Pool (ACPP)).

Sanya Declaration of the BRICS Leaders Meeting (<http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/7351063.html>) The People's Daily, PRC.15ril 2011.

Tavares, Rodrigo (2007) **How do Peace and Security Cluster Regionally?** (GARNET Working Paper, No. 13 / 07, UNU-CRIS / Gothenburg Univeristy).

Weiss, Thomas G. (2003) **The Illusion of UN Security Council Reform**, (The Washington Quarterly, Autumn).