

Battle at the UN Security Council on Peace Enforcement in Libya and Syria: Focusing on the Strategies of BRICS

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Abstract

This paper will discuss battles at the UN Security Council between Western states and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) on peace enforcement in Libya and Syria. In this paper, peace enforcement is almost tantamount to “humanitarian intervention” due to the purpose of the intervention, which was to protect civilians within a sovereign state, at least in the discussion at the UN Security Council. I conducted research in New York at the end of 2011 by interviewing IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa) ambassadors to the UN as well as high-ranked UN officials on this issue. The major result of my research is that although BRICS is often categorized as a group that opposes international intervention against a sovereign state, it is the IBSA countries that coordinate their votes on UNSC resolutions, while Russia and China (RC) usually aggressively reject the decisions of the UNSC on military intervention. In reality, IBSA and RC are substantially different in identifying their own commitments to humanitarian intervention against sovereign states that do not have the capacity or will to protect their own people. And compared to Russia and China, who oppose humanitarian intervention due to their domestic problems (for example, how to deal with ethnic minorities), the IBSA group has a more balanced and flexible attitude to humanitarian intervention or peace enforcement because of its identity as “new leading democratic states representing their regions.” This paper discusses (1) an analysis of voting decisions by BRICS states on the resolutions for Libya; (2) the difference between RC and IBSA on the principle of “Responsibility to Protect,” by examining their policies on Syria; and (3) Japan’s policies on humanitarian intervention,

recognizing the difference between IBSA and RC. With regard to the Japanese commitment, I will emphasize that while it is difficult for Japan to participate in peace enforcement, Japan can make a significant contribution to peace-building activities after the intervention, utilizing its experience to support improving infrastructure, creating job opportunities, and promoting national reconciliation in post-conflict states.

Introduction

The Arab Spring that started in January 2011 also began shedding light on the new challenges of peace enforcement with a humanitarian purpose. While the military intervention in Libya, with the endorsement of the UN Security Council resolution aiming to “protect civilians,” was hailed by some international scholars and government officials as the result of an emerging norm of “Responsibility to Protect,” the difficulty of adopting any UN resolution that refers to military intervention in Syria demonstrates how difficult it is to have a unified reaction to humanitarian crises resulting from military conflicts within a state.

This paper focuses on the policies of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) on military intervention for the purpose of creating peace or protecting civilians (what we often call “peace enforcement”) at the UN Security Council.¹ As BRICS countries consistently behave differently from other member states of the UN Security Council, especially from the Western countries led by the United States on the issue of military intervention in current world politics, it is crucial to examine the attitudes of BRICS and identify the motives of their voting.

The central argument of this paper is that although BRICS tend to be categorized as one group with a tendency to oppose military intervention with UN authorization, IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa) on one hand and China and Russia on the other are quite different in their attitudes to and motives for voting on humanitarian intervention. And it is the IBSA countries that coordinate the voting on crucial issues, including military intervention, as a group of “new democratic countries which represent their regions (India in South Asia, Brazil in South America, and South Africa in Africa).”² While IBSA

shares the idea that military intervention should be the last resort with a very strict purpose (for instance, to protect civilians) and should not be abused by the powerful states for the purpose of changing regimes, they still have some understanding and support to respect the aspirations of people in totalitarian regimes such as Libya and Syria. On the other hand, Russia and China are very adamant in opposing any military resolution in Syria; for Russia, Syria under the Assad regime is one of its most important allies in the Middle East, and Russia is afraid of losing its interests and ally in Syria. As for China, it intends to keep its alliance with Russia in the UN Security Council, and it is afraid of customizing the military intervention for regime changes.

This paper emphasizes that it is critical to recognize the difference between IBSA and RC (Russia and China) and identify their motives in order to understand the battle of the UN Security Council resolutions on humanitarian intervention. Thus, regarding Japanese policies on humanitarian intervention, it is important to make decisions for or against the UN Security Council resolutions with an understanding of this crucial difference between IBSA and RC. I also argue that Japan should play a major role in supporting peacebuilding activities, instead of peace enforcement (or military intervention) due to its character and long-term experience in the fields of peacebuilding.

This paper consists of three parts. First, I will analyze voting decisions by BRICS states on the resolutions for Libya. Second, I will examine the difference between RC and IBSA on the principle of “Responsibility to Protect,” by examining their policies on Syria. Third, I will argue Japan’s policies on humanitarian intervention and peacebuilding, recognizing the difference between IBSA and RC.

I. Voting Decisions by BRICS on Libya

The year 2011 was a special year in terms of examining the behaviors of BRICS at the UN Security Council on humanitarian intervention resolutions because all BRICS countries were members of the Council. The first battle on humanitarian intervention was conducted in UNSC Resolution 1973, which was adopted on 18 March 2011. Five countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and Germany—abstained while 10 countries supported the resolution, which authorized “all necessary measures” to protect civilians in Libya from pro-

Gaddafi forces.³ Thus, four countries among BRICS, except for South Africa, abstained from Resolution 1973.

In the process of adopting this resolution, BRICS countries did not have strong support for military intervention because they were afraid that the resolution could be used not only for protecting civilians but also for regime change in Libya. Thus, IBSA started consultation among them to decide their votes for Resolution 1973. The high-ranked officials at Brazil's mission to the UN frankly expressed the details of the process for consultation among IBSA and BRICS on the resolution;

Of course, we BRICS often made consultations to discuss the resolution; however, it is IBSA which most frequently coordinates voting because IBSA share the same identities as new democratic states and have strong affinity. Especially on the humanitarian intervention, we share the view that we should emphasize political solutions such as preventive diplomacy and peacemaking. We also share the policies that the military intervention should be the last resort, after failing all the measures.⁴

IBSA judged that the Libya resolution submitted by the European countries was too broad and risked allowing military engagement without limit. The Brazil mission was especially concerned that there was no mechanism in the draft of Resolution 1973 on monitoring and evaluating the impact of the military intervention in Libya. Thus, the Brazil mission decided to abstain from Resolution 1973. And the Brazil mission coordinated with South Africa and India, who also abstained. The Brazilian officials said, "After IBSA agreed on the abstention, we (IBSA) consulted with Russia and China and agreed that we all voted the abstention from the resolution 1973 with the same concern that Brazil has. Thus, we know very well how other BRICS countries vote."⁵

However, at the last moment, South Africa changed the policy and decided to vote for the resolution. South Africa's top leadership to the UN explained the reason;

IBSA always coordinates the voting with other IBSA countries, while we also discuss the issue with Russia and China. At the same time, IBSA also coordinates with other member states in the same region; in our case, we (South Africa) coordinate with Nigeria and Gabon which are members of the UN Security Council in 2011. And with regard to

Resolution 1973, we found that Nigeria and Gabon would vote for it. As the country which has the responsibility on the issues in Africa, we need to respect the relationship with other African members in the Council. Thus, although we had already agreed with IBSA on the abstention, we decided to vote for the support at the last moment, to coordinate with Nigeria and Gabon. But other IBSA countries understood our decision.⁶

The South Africa mission emphasized that it always coordinates with India and Brazil because IBSA share identities as representatives of their regions and new democratic states. But it also emphasized coordination with other members in the same region. It is the same for Brazil, which contended that it also coordinates with other members in the same region (South America).⁷

Resolution 1973 was a historical one, which authorized the military intervention to protect civilians in Libya and actually changed the Qaddafi regime. In this resolution, IBSA first started coordinating its votes and decided to use abstention, taking the middle ground between the international call for stopping the possible genocide by pro-Qaddafi forces in Libya and their own concerns about making regime changes as a result of the military intervention. Then, IBSA consulted with Russia and China and confirmed that they could vote together, but South Africa decided to support the resolution by respecting the support by Nigeria and Gabon, which are African members of the Council. This process demonstrates the mechanism of coordination and consultation of BRICS on crucial issues including the authorization of military intervention: the IBSA countries coordinate votes, then consult with China and Russia as well as other member states in the same region, and make the final decisions.

II. Analysis of the Difference Between IBSA and RC on Responsibility to Protect Syria

As the crisis in Syria deepened every day, the members of the UN Security Council then faced the decisions on UNSC resolutions for Syria. The first battle was the resolution that aimed to impose economic sanctions against the Assad government in Syria, which was voted on 4 October 2011. Russia and China vetoed the resolution, and IBSA and Lebanon abstained. The *New York Times* published an article that said, “Russia and other so-called BRICS nations –

Brazil, India, China, and South Africa – objected to the idea of sanctions.”⁸

IBSA was unified on the opposition to the resolution. The background of the opposition by IBSA was their mistrust about the use of Resolution 1973 against Qaddafi in Libya. A Brazilian high-ranked official contends, “Resolution 1973 only authorized the military intervention to protect civilians, but NATO expanded the meaning of the resolution and continued military operations until the regime collapsed. It was an abuse of the resolution. That is why we (IBSA) unanimously opposed the resolution imposing economic sanctions against Syria because we are suspicious about the motive of the resolution.”⁹

Both Brazil and South Africa contend that the reason they abstained, instead of voting against the resolution, was that IBSA knew that Russia and China would veto the resolution; thus, they judged that it was better to avoid unnecessary confrontation with the Western countries, including the United States.¹⁰ Top officials in the Indian mission to the UN also argued, “We all knew that Russia and China would veto the resolution; thus, we could not understand why the Western countries still decided to vote. It became very difficult for the UNSC members to have a unified position on Syria after this critical spirit.”¹¹

After opposing the economic sanctions against Syria, BRICS deputy foreign ministers gathered to discuss Syrian issues and published a joint statement on 24 November 2011 to counter the impression that BRICS just kept opposing any pressure against the Assad government. In this statement, BRICS deputy foreign ministers stressed that the “only acceptable way to resolve the internal crisis in Syria is through urgent peaceful negotiations with participation of all parties, as provided by the Arab League initiative, taking into account the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians.”¹² However, in reality, Russia and China adamantly kept opposing any substantial methods against the Assad government, even after the Arab League adopted its resolution requesting that President Assad step down. On the other hand, IBSA gradually changed its stance as the Assad government continued to oppress its people in a brutal way.

The critical difference was expressed in the vote for the UNSC resolution on 4 February 2012, when the UN Security Council voted to support the request by the Arab League that demanded the Assad government stop military actions and President Assad step down. Russia and China again vetoed the resolution; however, India and South Africa (Brazil is not a UNSC member state in 2012) changed its position and decided to vote in favor of the resolution.¹³ This was a

critical step by IBSA which explicitly distinguished their stances from Russia and China on the resolution concerning Syria.

This reflects the IBSA countries' stance on the concept of "Responsibility to Protect," which suggests the International Community has a responsibility to protect civilians when a state does not have the capacity or will to protect its own people. IBSA conducted a meeting of the heads of state of those three countries and published the "Tshwane Declaration" on 18 October 2011.¹⁴ In this declaration, IBSA expressed its position on Syria:

The leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. They expressed their grave concern at the current situation in Syria and condemned the persistent violence. They expressed their belief that the only solution to the current crisis is through a Syrian-led all inclusive, transparent, peaceful political process aimed at effectively addressing the legitimate aspirations and concerns of the population and at *protecting unarmed civilians*.¹⁵

This statement also emphasizes that while military intervention should be always the last resort, it also embraces "participatory democracy, respect for human rights, and the Rule of Law."¹⁶

This attitude of IBSA that is flexible on humanitarian intervention – it depends on the scale of human rights violation in targeted states – sharply contrasts with the attitude and policies of Russia and China. Because Russia is the major ally of the Assad regime, Russia is adamantly opposed to any resolution that could threaten the existence of the Assad government. And China keeps following the Russian stance, at least up to now. Chinese experts argue that there are two main reasons why China continued to follow the Russian veto of any resolution against the Assad regime.¹⁷ First, China wants to stay allied with Russia in the UN Security Council. Second, China is very afraid of normalizing regime changes as a result of human rights violations when China itself faces critical domestic problems, including oppressing some ethnic minorities in China.¹⁸ Thus, it is structurally difficult for Russia and China to support humanitarian intervention with military operation, especially when Russia has a critical national interest with the government which oppresses its own people.

It is critical for the international community – including the Japanese government – to have a clear understanding of the difference between IBSA and

RC on humanitarian intervention. Though BRICS often seems to have the same policies and attitudes, the fundamental values that IBSA and RC embrace are quite different. And this difference reflects their voting behaviors on the UNSC resolutions on humanitarian interventions.

III. Japan's Policies on Humanitarian Intervention

When we examine the Japanese policies on humanitarian intervention against states – such as Libya and Syria – that oppress their own people, there are two aspects to be considered. One is the voting in the UN Security Council when Japan has a seat on the UN Security Council; the second is the possible participation in those humanitarian interventions that have military components.

With regard to the votes in the UN Security Council, I argue that it is possible for Japan to adopt the principle of Responsibility to Protect, distinguishing it from military intervention aimed at regime changes without certain evidence and grounds, as happened in the invasion of Iraq. And it is critical for Japan to have a clear understanding of the difference between IBSA and RC on this principle and to do its best to coordinate, or at least consult, with IBSA countries to obtain agreement or unified stances, even when it is difficult to invite Russia and China to support resolutions approving humanitarian intervention. Of course, Japan should have primary consultation with the Western countries including the United States, but it is very valuable for Japan to make a bridge between the West and IBSA, which share the values of democracy, human rights, and rule of law.

In terms of actual participation in military intervention, I argue that it is difficult for Japan to participate in those military interventions because of its character as a nation, including the terms of its constitution. Japan is also not expected nor asked by most of the members in the international community to conduct military operations against foreign countries. However, Japan can play a critical role in supporting peacebuilding after military interventions that obtain authorization from the UN Security Council. As the report by the International Commission on State Sovereignty and Intervention (ICSSI), that expressed the basic view of “Responsibility to Protect,” contends, the international community has a “responsibility to rebuild” after the international

community intervenes militarily in sovereign states to protect civilians.¹⁹

Japan has already had long-term experience in participating in the critical aspects of peacebuilding, including UN peacekeeping, economic reconstruction, supporting police and justice systems, and national reconciliation and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) in post-conflict states such as Cambodia, East Timor, and Afghanistan. A UN high-ranked official who is currently working for UN DPKO in New York and used to be the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in some UN peacebuilding mission, contended,

In the past, we (UN) had a problem of lack of personnel for UN peacekeeping, but this problem has been solved because many developing states, including BRICS, started making a lot of commitment and deploying personnel to the UN peacekeeping operations. But the UN is still lacking personnel that require high-tech operations; for example, helicopter units that can convey materials by air, engineer troops that can create good infrastructure, and army that can establish roads and transmission. We deeply appreciate it if Japan can make contributions in these fields by using its high technology²⁰

Japan can contribute to peacebuilding by using this experience in providing economic assistance, deploying defense forces with high technologies, and promoting national reconciliation that creates inclusive political structures in post-conflict states, including ones whose conflicts are terminated by military intervention with humanitarian purpose. This is a critical contribution to even the humanitarian intervention because it would be in vain if the humanitarian intervention resulted in a chaotic security situation (possibly civil war); rebuilding states is as important as intervening in states.

In this particular field of peacebuilding, it is crucial for Japan to advance its cooperation with IBSA that started making a substantial commitment to UN peacebuilding missions. For instance, India currently dispatch more than 8,000 military personnel to UN peacekeeping operations (No.3 contributors to the UN peacekeepers in the world), Brazil dispatches 2,500 personnel to UN peacekeeping, especially in Haiti as a leading country contributing to the Haiti mission, and South Africa dispatches 2,100 personnel to the UN missions mainly in Africa.²¹ Moreover, those IBSA countries began positive engagement in building democratic governance, including introducing electoral system and rule

of law in post-conflict states. Scott Smith, a visiting scholar in Columbia University and former UN electoral specialist (and a special assistance to SRSG in Afghanistan), contends,

“Because IBSA are countries which recently became democratic states, they tend to be more accepted by post-conflict states which just start introducing new democratic systems. For instance, French electoral system that was created 200 years ago might be seen too old and too far in the eyes of people in conflicting states; but it is easier for them to accept Brazilian or South African democratic system which were just introduced. IBSA also might have more legitimacy in the eyes of people in conflicted states because IBSA also became independent after fighting western occupations, and experienced the transition from military dictatorship to democratic states just recently.”²²

Other UN high ranked official at the UN Headquarters who has a many year’s experience on peacemaking and peace building effort also argue,

It has been the case that the UN activities were led by the Western countries; and other states tend to “react” to the initiatives of the Western states. But now, the tide began to change, especially due to emerging democratic countries like IBSA. Those countries which has recently experienced critical stage in participating in peacebuilding – for instance, Brazil just experienced the transition from military dictatorship to democracy, South Africa experienced the national reconciliation by different ethnicities, and India conducted a drastic change from socialistic economic system to market-oriented system – have a big confidence that they can contribute to rebuilding a new state in war-torn regions. And those countries started taking a lot of initiatives in implementing programs for peacebuilding, including introducing new electoral systems, new security sectors, and promoting national reconciliation. This is a completely new tide, and the UN can basically welcome those initiatives by IBSA.²³

The Japanese government should understand this historical tide that some new democratic states including IBSA started having very positive contributions to peacebuilding efforts, and it is crucial for Japan to make constant efforts to create better cooperation with those states, utilizing Japan’s experience and expertise on supporting post-conflict states, including rebuilding Japan after the

World War II.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed the process of adopting UNSC resolutions on humanitarian interventions in two prominent cases— Libya and Syria – and examined the voting behaviors of BRICS. I emphasized that there is a difference between IBSA and RC on the fundamental values and identities as IBSA share democracy, human rights, and rule of law. I argued that it is important for Japan to understand this critical difference between IBSA and RC and cooperate with IBSA on a unified stance on humanitarian crises. I also emphasized that Japan can play a critical role in engaging in peacebuilding by cooperating with IBSA and other emerging democratic states, even though it may be difficult to participate in humanitarian (and military) intervention per se.

Notes

- 1 Katharina Coleman defines that “peace enforcement operation are forcible military interventions by one or more state into a third country with the express objective of maintaining or restoring international, regional, or local peace and security by ending a violent conflict within that country. (Coleman, Katharina. 2007. *International Organizations and Peace Enforcement: The Politics of International Legitimacy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.) Following this definition, this paper uses the peace enforcement as almost tantamount to the word of humanitarian intervention.
- 2 As I introduce later in this paper, high-ranked officials (at the ambassador level) in IBSA share the view that IBSA represents their regions with the identity of “new democratic states,” responding to my interviews at the UN Headquarters in New York in December 2011.
- 3 BBC, “Libya UN Resolution 1973: Text analyzed,” 18 March 2011.
- 4 Authors’ interview with high-ranked officials in Brazil’s mission to the UN, 1 December 2011. In this paper, the “high ranked officials in IBSA mission to the UN are ambassador or deputy ambassador level.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Authors’ interview with high-ranked officials in the South African mission to the UN, 1 December 2011.
- 7 Author’s interview with a high ranked official in the Brazil mission to the UN, 1 December 2011.
- 8 New York Times, “U.N. Resolution on Syria Blocked by Russia and China,” 4 October 2011.
- 9 Author’s interview with a high-ranked official in the Brazil mission to the UN, 1 December 2011.
- 10 Interview with both Brazilian and South African high-ranked officials at the UN, 1 December 2011.

- 11 Interview with a high-ranked official in the Indian mission to the UN, 2 December 2011.
- 12 Joint Communiqué on the Outcome of the Meeting of BRICS Deputy Foreign Ministers on the Situation in the Middle East and North Africa, 24 November 2011.
- 13 Reuters, “Russia, China veto UN draft backing Arab plan for Syria,” 4 February 2012.
- 14 India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum Fifth Summit of Heads of States and Government, Tshwane Declaration, 18 October 2011.
- 15 Ibid., item 82.
- 16 Ibid, item 1.
- 17 Interviews with several Chinese experts, on the condition of anonymity, in 2012.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Report by International Commission on State Sovereignty and Intervention (ICSSI), 2001.
- 20 Author’s interview with a high-ranked UN official, 2 December 2011.
- 21 Website of UNDPKO. <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/> The figure is as of December 2011.
- 22 Author’s interview with Scott Smith, a former UN electoral officer and the Special Assistance to the SRSG in Afghanistan (2009-2010), and a visiting scholar in the Columbia University, 30 November 2011.
- 23 Authors’ interview with a high ranked UN officials (director-level) working for Political Affairs at the UN Headquarters, 30 November 2011.