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Do the BRICS care about International Security?

Filippo Cutrera



BRICS Policy Center Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas - BRICS

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BRICS Policy Center Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas - BRICS

BRICS Policy Center

Rua Dona Mariana, 63 - Botafogo - Rio de Janeiro/RJ
Phone: +55 21 2535-0447 / ZIP CODE: 22280-020
www.bricspolicycenter.org / bpc@bricspolicycenter.org



**Instituto
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Internacionais**



BPC Team

IRI Director
Marta Fernández

BPC Director
Paulo Esteves

Academic Council
Paulo Esteves
Maria Elena Rodriguez
Luis Manuel Fernandes

Administrative Coordinator
Lia Frota e Lopes

Administrative Assitant
Luana Freitas

International Project Manager
Thalyta Ferraz

Layout and Design
Vinicius Kede

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Executive Summary

The present paper has three main objectives: first, to show that, over the first decade of existence of the group, between 2009 and 2018, the BRICS have manifested an increasing interest in expanding their cooperation beyond the traditional areas of economy and development to the field of global security; second, to present the content of their common security agenda and how it has developed throughout this period; third, to identify the main factors influencing the agenda-setting process of the group as well as the main challenges to further advancement. The research will conclude that the high levels of informality in the group's cooperation and heterogeneity in the interests of its members have enabled BRICS to formulate common positions and to establish cooperation mechanisms on a broad range of issues of international security.

Key-words

1. Security 2. Cooperation 3. Agenda-setting 4. Foreign policy 5. Conflict management 6. Informality 7. Heterogeneity

Do the BRICS care about International Security?

Filippo Cutrera

1. Introduction¹

The history of BRICS has two beginnings. The first one was in 2001, with the publication of an article by the economist J. O'Neill of Goldman Sachs, which marked the beginning of BRICS as an idea. The acronym coined by O'Neill was used to refer to a group of emerging countries experiencing a period of striving economic performances, namely Brazil, Russia, India, and China. The article urged the international community to progressively include the countries, given their increasing importance in the global economy, into the institutions of global governance. However, as it is easy to imagine, O'Neill did not expect his article to play such a major role in promoting the formation of an inter-state coalition formulating joint positions and advocating for common causes on the world stage.

The second beginning of BRIC – named BRICS only after the admission of South Africa to the group – was in 2006, when the countries' foreign affairs ministers started to hold annual meetings on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). What emerged from this series of meetings was the decision to organize a high-level event between the BRIC Leaders, hosted by Russia in the city of Yekaterinburg in 2009. This event would be known as the I BRIC Summit and marked the beginning of BRICS as a cooperation framework. The diplomatic initiative would be repeated every year along the next decade, which would see the progressive formation of a collective agenda, expressing common positions and establishing joint mechanisms of cooperation. This agenda is mostly expressed through BRICS Declarations, issued every year at the end each summit.

Looking at the contributions of scholarship on BRICS highlights two main lenses of interpretation. While a vast part of the existing literature has focused almost exclusively on the economic dimension of their cooperation, another part has emphasized their counterbalancing role against the influence of the established powers, namely the US and its allies. Similar interpretations have led to two correspondent forms of reductionism. On the one hand, reducing BRICS exclusively to its economic dimension has led to the marginalization of the growing interest manifested by these countries in expanding their cooperation to other domains, such as international peace and security. On the other hand, reducing BRICS and other emerging powers to a mechanism to counterbalance Western influence has marginalized factors that are internal to BRICS cooperation and that explain their aspiration to play a more active role in international affairs.

On the first point, given the undeniable primacy of trade and finance issues in BRICS cooperation during their first years of existence as a group, few studies have paid attention to more recent developments in the coalition's agenda, manifesting a growing interest of these countries in international security issues and in collectively dealing with them².

(1) This Policy Brief was written in March 2019, reviewed and published in January 2020.

(2) Some important exceptions are represented by Abdenur, A. (2017); De Souza Porto, L. (2015); Ferdinand, P. (2014); and Stuenkel, O. (2014).

On the second point, many studies have focused on the power relation between the US and emerging countries and have debated over the declining capacity of the former to provide stability to the international order and the consequent rise of the latter to fill the power gap in the system. Whether this interpretation is correct or not, the fact remains that it tends to maintain a Western-centered perspective on a non-Western topic. As a result, the role of emerging countries like the BRICS in the international system continues to be reduced to a dependent variable. An analytical framework considering BRICS necessarily as an instrument to re-act against external pressures, excludes other internal factors motivating BRICS to formulate common positions and to establish cooperation channels³.

In addition to this, few attempts have been made to provide a comprehensive categorization of the collective positions and initiatives that the group has taken in its decade of existence, or to systematically identify the factors influencing their security agenda-setting process. This paper attempts to fill this gap.

To this goal, the first part of the paper will prove the growing interest of BRICS in the area of international peace and security, and in strengthening their cooperation in the field. It will be described how the group has progressively discussed a broader variety of security issues and established a wider network of cooperation mechanisms, by strengthening their II cooperation pillar in both quantitative and qualitative terms. In the long term, this has resulted in the emergence of a multi-dimensional cooperation agenda, discussed on a multi-layered framework of communication channels.

The following sections will pay a closer look at the content of the agenda, first by offering a categorization of the different phases of its development, and then by outlining its fundamental characteristics during this decade-long period. Therefore, the paper will identify two fundamental variables affecting the agenda-setting process – namely, the international context and the preferences of the summit host country – and will discuss how these have influenced the content of the group’s positions. By doing so, we will look at how the BRICS agenda was ultimately the result of a series of collective reactions to the outbreak of international crises and of the interests and priorities of each member’s individual agendas. Finally, the last part will outline the main obstacles to a further development of BRICS cooperation in the field of security and will draw conclusions on the rise of its agenda.

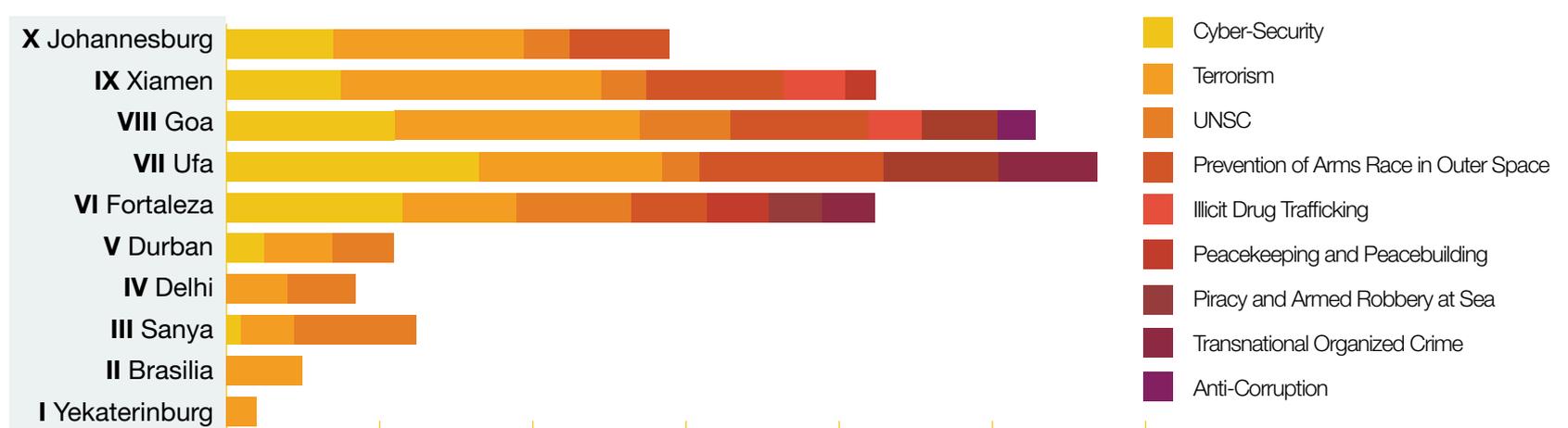
2. The evolution of BRICS security agenda

Despite the relatively little attention paid to BRICS II pillar, the countries have expressed a growing interest in expanding their cooperation to the area of peace and security.

The BRICS have progressively formulated common positions on both general topics of international security (Figure 1); and specific regional crises and armed conflicts (Figure 2); as well as they have organized an increasing number of security-related cooperation mechanisms (Figure 3) during the decade-long existence of the group.

Below you can find a comprehensive representation of the evolution of BRICS agenda on global security.

Figure 1 - Development of BRICS agenda: Thematic-specific security issues



(3) For further discussion on the topic you may read: Hurrell, A. (2006), Ikenberry, J. and Wright, T. (2008); Kahler, M. (2013); and Schweller, R. (2011).

Figure 2 - Development of BRICS agenda: Regional security issues

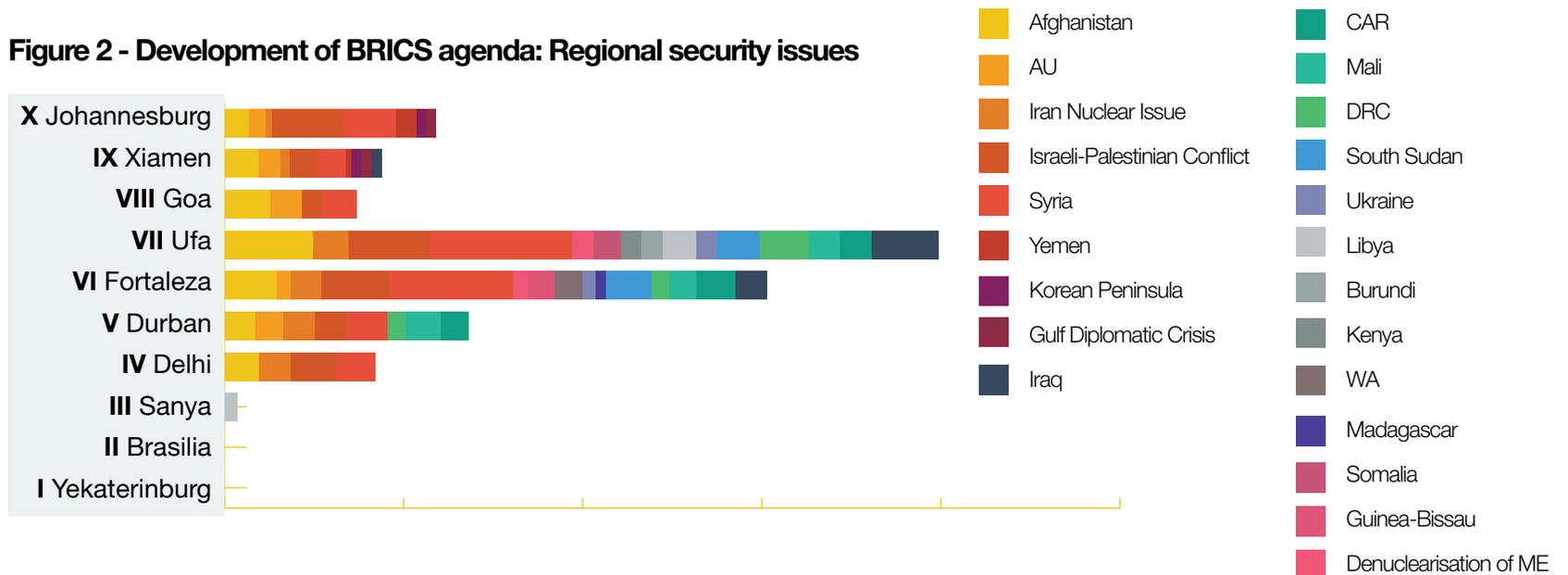


Figure 3 - Security-related meetings

I Yekaterinburg		Meeting of National Security Advisors Permanent Missions (informal consultations) Special Envoys on MENA Working Group on Counter-Terrorism Dialogue on Foreign Policy Meeting of the BRICS Heads of Anti-Drug Agencies	VIII Goa
II Brasilia			
III Sanya	Special Envoys on MENA Permanent Missions (informal consultations)		
IV Delhi	Meeting of National Security Advisors (first standalone) Permanent Missions (informal consultations)	Meeting of National Security Advisors Permanent Missions (informal consultations) Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (first standalone) Special Envoys on MENA Working Group on Counter-Terrorism Working Group on Cyber-Security Space Security Consultations Foreign Policy Planning Dialogue Working Group on Anti-Drug	IX Xiamen
V Durban	Meeting of National Security Advisors Permanent Missions (informal consultations)		
VI Fortaleza	Meeting of National Security Advisors Permanent Missions (informal consultations) Foreign Policy Planning Dialogue Meeting of Experts of Combating Illicit Trafficking Meeting of National Security Advisors		
VII Ufa	Permanent Missions (informal consultations) Special Envoys on MENA Working Group on Security in the Use of ICTs Consultations on Security of Outer Space Activities Meeting of the Heads of BRICS Delegations to FATF BRICS Dialogue on Foreign Policy Meeting of Experts of Combating Illicit Trafficking Meeting of the BRICS Heads of Anti-Drug Agencies	Meeting of National Security Advisors Permanent Missions (informal consultations) Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs Special Envoys on MENA Working Group on Security in the Use of ICTs Working Group on Counter-Terrorism Dialogue on Peacekeeping	X Johannesburg

The evolution of BRICS security agenda

It is possible to outline the development of BRICS security agenda along five phases:

1. The first phase goes from the birth of BRIC with its first official Summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 2009, to 2010 with the II BRIC Summit held in Brasilia, Brazil. This initial period was characterized by the absolute dominance of economic and development issues in BRIC Declarations, with little sign of interest in expanding the cooperation to other dimensions.
2. A second phase, beginning with the III BRICS Summit held in Sanya, China, in 2011, until the IV Summit in Delhi, India, in 2012 was characterized by the first signs of interest of the BRICS to explore potential areas of common interest in the security domain.
3. The third phase, from the V Summit taking place in Durban, South Africa, in 2013 to the VI Summit in Fortaleza, Brazil, in 2014, presented a marked interest of the group in coordinating joint positions on major armed conflicts and hotspot regions, and for providing regional outreach to their cooperation through expanded formats of the BRICS summits.
4. A fourth phase, going since the VII BRICS Summit in Ufa, Russia, in 2015, to the VIII Summit in Goa, India, shows a further strengthening of the group's security cooperation, through the progressive establishment of a framework of joint highly topic-specific brainstorming initiatives.
5. Finally, the fourth and last phase embraces the IX BRICS Summit in Xiamen, China, in 2017 and the X BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, of 2018, and shows a broad spectrum of security issues discussed on a diversified net of channels of cooperation.

2.1. Yekaterinburg - Brasilia (2009 - 10): The rise of BRICs as economic powers

The first phase goes from the birth of BRIC with their first official summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 2009⁴, to the II BRIC Summit held in Brasilia, Brazil, in 2010⁵. This initial period was characterized by the absolute dominance of trade and finance (TF) in BRIC Declarations, with little sign of interest in expanding the cooperation to other dimensions. The security dimension of the coalition – still known as BRIC, before the admission of South Africa – was almost none, as it consisted of only a few articles of highly programmatic and normative character, with essentially no actual positions or concrete initiatives on any issue.

There are two main reasons explaining the primary role played by the economic dimension in BRIC cooperation at its origins. First, the only characteristics that the BRICs were perceived to share at that time when the group was created, were high growth rates and enormous economic potential, in other words, the fact of being emerging economies. O'Neill did not intend to promote the formation of an inter-state coalition when he coined the acronym "BRIC". His only intent was to highlight the need to provide more representation in global financial institutions to these countries due to their growing economic weight (Porto, 2015).

Second, it is necessary to look at the international context in which BRICs were born. With the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2007, the attention of the international community was focused on finding measures to counter its effects and ensuring that G20 resolutions would be implemented (Abdenur, 2017). Moreover, the effectiveness of the macroeconomic policies implemented by the BRICs to counter the effects of a crisis, which the West was blamed for, revealed the importance of involving developing countries and emerging economies into international decision-making to provide stability to the global financial market (Cooper and Farooq, 2013). This helps explaining the emphasis placed by the Yekaterinburg and the Brasilia Declarations on reforming the global economic architecture with the aim of increasing the representation of developing countries.

Nevertheless, it is important not to underestimate the role of security concerns in the formation of BRICS. In a troubled international context dominated by the rising tensions between Russia and the US over Kosovo's declaration of independence and the outbreak of the Russo-Georgian crisis in 2008, several commentators saw the Yekaterinburg initiative as a diplomatic response by Russia to US intimations to suspend it from the G8 (Flemes, 2010; Porto, 2015).

Apart from this however, as it is possible to see in Figure 1, terrorism was the only issue of security concern on BRICS agenda, at its origin still focused on its first pillar, namely economy.

2.2 Sanya and Delhi (2011 - 2012): first signs of interest in global security

A second phase, starting in 2011 with the III BRICS Summit held in Sanya, China, until the IV Summit in Delhi, India, in 2012 saw the first signs of interest in strengthening the II pillar of cooperation.

The Sanya Summit⁶ – the first one to include the acronym "BRICS" after the admission of South Africa to the group – was a special event, as, for the first and to date only time, all five BRICS were members of the UN Security Council (SC). This partially explains the greater attention paid by the declarations to international security. Within the traditional calls for reforms aimed at increasing the representation of developing countries in the UN system and a recognition by China and Russia of the aspirations of Brazil, India and South Africa to play a bigger role in the UN, for the first time an explicit reference was made to its SC. This needs to be understood in the wider context of the perceived window of opportunity that was opened in that period by the UN Secretary General (UNSG) Kofi Annan's calls for reforms to the organization (Abdenur, 2017).

In addition to this, a strong emphasis was given to the importance of respecting state sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity, particularly in relation to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This focus can be explained by considering two major events occurred in the international scenario of the time: the Arab Spring and NATO's intervention in Libya. In a political context of regional instability that started only few months before the Sanya Summit took place, BRICS agenda expressed an increased concern for international security (Porto, 2015). This represented the first time in which a Meeting of BRICS Special Envoys on MENA⁷ was organized (see Figure 3) and in which an armed conflict was put on the agenda of discussion, namely the Liby-

(4) BRIC (2009), "1st BRIC Summit of Heads of State and Government: Declaration"; Yekaterinburg, 16 June; available at: www.kremlin.ru/brics (accessed: 05/08/2019). "Meeting of the BRIC Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the UNGA: Press Release"; New York, 25 September; available at: www.brics.utoronto.ca/i-mfa (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(5) BRIC (2010), "2nd BRIC Summit of Heads of State and Government: Declaration"; Brasilia, 15 April; available at: www.brics.utoronto.ca/ii (accessed: 05/08/2019). "Meeting of the BRIC Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the UNGA: Press Release"; New York, 21 September; available at: www.brics.utoronto.ca/ii-mfa (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(6) BRICS (2011), "3rd BRICS Summit of Heads of State and Government: Declaration and Action Plan"; Sanya, 14 April; available at: www.gov.cn/iii-brics (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(7) BRICS (2011), "Meeting of the BRICS Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the situation in the Middle East and North Africa: Joint Statement"; Moscow, 24 November; available at: www.itamaraty.gov.br/brics-mena (accessed: 05/08/2019).

an crisis (see Figure 2). Another sign of the increasing aspiration of the group to extend the second pillar of their cooperation is the inclusion of cyber-security into the agenda. Finally, the group formulated the first BRICS Action Plan, by signaling a clear intention to further institutionalize their cooperation in the long term.

In the IV BRICS Summit, held in Delhi in 2012⁸, a clearer intention to explore issues of security concern to cooperate on was expressed already by the title of the event, “BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Security and Prosperity”, the first and only BRICS Summit including terms such as “stability” and “security” in its title (Abdenur, 2017). The attention given by the Sanya Declaration to the Libyan crisis revealed the first signs of concern of the BRICS as a group for the global security realm and of their growing interest to formulate common positions on regional crises and armed conflicts. That sign was here reinforced by the Delhi Summit, by expanding the security agenda and formulating joint positions on Afghanistan, the Iran nuclear issue, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the Syrian crisis (see Figure 2).

Another reason why the Delhi Summit is particularly relevant to the rise of a BRICS security agenda is that among half of the issues discussed were related to security. Moreover, this represented the first time in which a BRICS Declaration explicitly announced new areas of cooperation to explore in the future, such as cyber-security, and piracy and armed robbery at sea. The interest of the BRICS in exploring and expanding their cooperation to security is explicitly stated in Delhi Declaration and is proven by the occurrence of the first Meeting of the BRICS High Representatives Responsible for National Security / National Security Advisors (NSAs)⁹, as shown by Figure 3.

Although economic and development issues were still keeping a primary role in the years 2011-2012, BRICS revealed the first signs of interest in developing a security dimension within their cooperation.

2.3. Durban and Fortaleza (2013 - 2014): joint positions on armed conflicts and regional outreach

The third phase goes from the V Summit taking place in Durban, South Africa, in 2013 to the VI Summit in Fortaleza, Brazil, in 2014. The group has strengthened their cooperation, by formulating joint positions on armed conflicts and regional crises, and by providing regional expanded formats to the summits. The 2013 eThekweni Declaration¹⁰ stated the group’s commitment not only to develop BRICS into a full-fledged long-term mechanism but also to strengthen cooperation with the African continent. Moreover, the Durban Summit, titled “BRICS and Africa”, hosted the first regional outreach program with the Retreat with the African leaders.

The Durban Summit pointed out the interest of BRICS in finding new forms of cooperation, by coordinating positions on armed conflicts and regional crises, particularly in Africa. After urging the need to increase communication channels between the UN and the African Union (AU), especially in view of the deteriorating situation in North Africa and the Sahel region, the section of the eThekweni Declaration dedicated to security – now fully separated into a distinct area of cooperation within the agenda – expanded considerably as compared to the previous summits, by discussing a vast number of conflict-affected and fragile countries. Together with Afghanistan, Iran, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Syria, already mentioned by previous declarations, countries like the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mali were now added to the list (see Figure 2). The African regional focus of the Summit here is evident.

The VI BRICS Summit taking place in 2014 in Fortaleza¹¹, reaffirmed the two main innovations of the previous summit, namely regional outreach and joint positions on conflict and crisis contexts. On the one side, under Brazil’s chairmanship, the BRICS organized a Joint Session with the South American Leaders and expressed support to the South American integration process and to the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

On the other side, the BRICS formulated common positions on a wide number of conflict-affected regions and fragile states, particularly in Africa, by discussing the CAR, the DRC, Madagascar, Mali, South Sudan and Boko Haram’s terrorist attacks in West Africa, as well as Afghanistan, the Iran nuclear deal, Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Ukraine (see Figure 2). It is worth highlighting that Guinea-Bissau was the first country to be mentioned

(8) BRICS (2012), “4th BRICS Summit of Heads of State and Government: Declaration and Action Plan”; New Delhi, 29 March; available at: www.itamaraty.gov.br/iv-brics (accessed: 05/08/2019). “Meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs: Press Release”; New York, 26 September; available at: www.brics.utoronto.ca/iv (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(9) Since 2012 the meeting of the BRICS NSAs, originally occurring in closed-doors sidelines meetings to the BRICS Summits without yielding any specific document, has been taking place in a standalone format every year, without however regularly releasing a joint report for every session. BRICS (2012), “Meeting of the BRICS High Representatives on National Security and National Security Advisors: Transcript of Media Briefing”; New Delhi, 10 January; available at: www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(10) BRICS (2013), “5th BRICS Summit of Heads of State and Government: Declaration and Action Plan”; Durban, eThekweni, 27 March; available at: www.mea.gov.in/press-release (accessed: 05/08/2019). “Meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the UNGA: Press Release”; New York, 26 September; available at: www.brics.utoronto.ca/v-mfa (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(11) BRICS (2014), “6th BRICS Summit of Heads of State and Government: Declaration and Action Plan”; Fortaleza, 15 July; available at: www.brics.utoronto.ca/vi (accessed: 05/08/2019). “Meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the UNGA: Press Release”; New York, 25 September; available at: www.infobrics.org/document/19 (accessed: 05/08/2019).

in the declaration, which also recalled the central role played in the peace process by regional organizations, such as the AU, ECOWAS and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP). The Declaration highlighted the need to find comprehensive solutions encompassing food security and the security sector reform, in accordance with the Guinea-Bissau's Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission. The group recalled the link between conflict prevention and resolution, as well as between peacebuilding, peacekeeping, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, by underlining the necessity to adopt a gender perspective for all these issues. Finally, the BRICS further expanded their security agenda, by discussing transnational organized crime (TOC) and prevention of arms race in outer space (PAROS), as shown by Figure 1.

Overall, the security dimension of BRICS agenda expanded considerably during this third phase of development. More than a third of the issues discussed in the Durban and the Fortaleza Declarations – reaching 70 articles only in Fortaleza – were related to global security.

2.4. Ufa and Goa (2015 - 2016): the institutional densification process

The fourth phase, going from the VII BRICS Summit in Ufa, Russia, in 2015, to the VIII Summit in Goa, India, shows a further strengthening of the group's second pillar, through the progressive establishment of a framework of joint highly topic-specific brainstorming initiatives. BRICS practical cooperation is developed through meetings of special agencies, experts and research institutes.

The Ufa Summit¹² is particularly relevant as it hosted the first sub-ministerial meetings on exclusively security-related issues. As shown by Figure 3, BRICS Working Groups and Consultations took place in the areas of security of outer space activities¹³, cyber-security, countering money laundering, illicit trafficking and financing of terrorism¹⁴, as well as on the crisis situation in the MENA region¹⁵. Moreover, on this occasion it was announced the decision to expand BRICS cooperation to cyber-security and to PAROS through the establishment of new practice-oriented mechanisms of cooperation (see Figure 3). This process of institutional densification shows the growing aspiration of the BRICS to deepen the security dimension of their cooperation.

In addition to this, after condemning unilateral interventions and economic sanctions in violation of international law, the BRICS formulated common positions on major international crises. The list of conflict-affected regions and fragile states did not simply increase its extension, by reiterating positions already formulated in previous summits on Afghanistan, Iraq or Libya, as well as putting new issues like Burundi, Kenya, and Ukraine on the agenda (see Figure 2). The joint positions also increased in specificity. The main example of this is given by Syria which represented not only the first regional issue discussed in the whole document but also the longest one. The Declaration named specific terrorist organizations, such as ISIL and Al-Nusra Front, and recalled specific points in the UNSC resolutions, particularly as regards the sources of terrorism funding.

The Goa Summit¹⁶ pursued the progressive institutionalization of BRICS cooperation in security, by hosting the second Meeting of BRICS Heads of Anti-Drug Agencies and the first BRICS Working Group on Counter-Terrorism, as shown by Figure 3. The 2016 Declaration gave particular visibility to terrorism and stated the group's commitment to strengthen their cooperation on both multilateral and bilateral level to counter this global threat. On the multilateral level, the BRICS called for compliance with relevant UNSC resolutions and expressed commitment to intensifying cooperation in international fora, notably the FAFT bodies, and to concluding the negotiations for the adoption of new international conventions, such as the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) in the UNGA. The document emphasized the interdependent nature of terrorism and urged the need to adopt comprehensive approaches, including measures aimed at countering related issues, such as corruption, illicit drug trafficking, TOC, cyber-security, and money laundering.

Finally, the Goa Declaration gave visibility to peacekeeping, listed as one of the very first issues on the security agenda (see Figure 1). The article recalled the significant contribution of BRICS countries to UN peacekeeping operations and their interest in extending their cooperation to this field.

(12) BRICS (2015), "7th BRICS Summit of Heads of State and Government: Declaration"; Ufa, 29 March; available at: www.brics.utoronto.ca/vii (accessed: 05/08/2019); "Action Plan"; Ufa, 29 March; available at: www.brics.utoronto.ca/vii-ap (accessed: 05/08/2019); "Meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the UNGA: Joint Statement"; New York, 29 September; available at: www.mea.gov.in/press-releases (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(13) BRICS (2015), "BRICS Joint Statement Regarding the Principles of Elaboration of International Instruments on Outer Space Activities"; New York, 27 July; available at: www.mid-ru-press-releases (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(14) Presidency of Russia (2015), "Meeting of the BRICS High Representatives on National Security and National Security Advisors: Transcript of Media Briefing"; Moscow, 26 May; available at: www.kremlin-ru-events (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(15) BRICS (2015), "Meeting of the BRICS Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the situation in the Middle East and North Africa: Joint Statement"; Moscow, 22 May; available at: <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/vii-mena> (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(16) BRICS (2016), "8th BRICS Summit of Heads of State and Government: Declaration"; Goa, 16 October; available at: <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/viii> (accessed: 05/08/2019). "Action Plan"; Goa, 16 October; available at: www.brics.utoronto.ca/viii-ap (accessed: 05/08/2019). "Meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the UNGA: Press Release"; New York, 20 September; available at: www.brics.utoronto.ca/viii-mfa (accessed: 05/08/2019). "Meeting of the BRICS High Representatives on National Security and National Security Advisors: Joint Statement"; 15 September; available at: www.mea.gov.in/press-releases (accessed: 05/08/2019).

2.5. Xiamen and Johannesburg (2017 - 2018): entering the second decade of BRICS cooperation

Finally, the fifth and last phase embraces the IX BRICS Summit in Xiamen, China, in 2017 and the X BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2018, and shows a broad spectrum of security issues discussed on a diversified net of channels of cooperation within a broad and coherent BRICS agenda.

The IX BRICS Summit held in Xiamen, China, in 2017¹⁷, was particularly significant as it marked the beginning of the second decade of existence of BRICS. The occurrence of the 10th anniversary of BRICS explains the highly programmatic and commemorative tone of the Declaration, by emphasizing the principles at the basis of their cooperation, such as equality, solidarity, mutually beneficial cooperation, and openness to non-BRICS countries.

For the first time, the Meeting of BRICS MFAs occurred in a standalone format¹⁸ (see Figure 3), which confirmed the group's willingness to further deepen their coordination in the political and security area. In addition to this, other security-related meetings took place, such as the Meeting of the BRICS NSAs, the Meeting of the BRICS Special Envoys on MENA, and the Foreign Policy Dialogue. Moreover, China hosted working groups and consultations on the issues of counter-terrorism, PAROS, cyber-security, and anti-drug trafficking (see Figure 3). Also, it is relevant to highlight Brazil's proposal to establish a BRICS mechanism of communication in the field of intelligence, which might herald a future expansion of the group's cooperation in that direction.

The traditional condemnation of terrorism and call for finalizing the CCIT in the UNGA were followed by declarations of commitment to promoting a comprehensive cross-dimensional approach in the fight against terrorism, including radicalization, recruitment and financing, and, to this end, to intensifying BRICS coordination within international organizations, especially the FAFT bodies. Emphasis was also given to the role of the UN in designating terrorists and terrorist groups and in providing technical assistance to member countries in preventing and combating terrorism.

In the field of cyber-security, in accordance with the respect to state sovereignty, independence and equality, non-interference in other countries' internal affairs, as well as human rights, BRICS expressed the need to establish a legally binding international instrument to combat the criminal use of ICTs under the UN auspices. The Declaration commended the contributions made by the group by finalizing the BRICS Roadmap of Practical Cooperation on Ensuring Security in the Use of ICTs and Russia's initiative on a BRICS intergovernmental agreement on the topic. In the same line, the countries expressed the need to initiate negotiations for the conclusion of an international agreement within the UN Conference on Disarmament on the issue of PAROS.

Also, the Declaration recalled China and Russia's initiative to submit a draft treaty aimed at preventing the placement of weapons in the outer space and expressed support to the work done by the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNCOPUOS) in formulating a set of guidelines to assure the long-term sustainability of outer space and the right to peaceful use of it. The traditional recognition of the BRICS countries' contributions to UN peacekeeping operations confirms an interest of the group in exploring cooperation in the field. The recurrence of similar formulations and linguistic structures in BRICS Declarations shows a significant degree of continuance between the summit and the previous ones and demonstrates the progressive consolidation of a BRICS wide coherent agenda, including on international security.

The Xiamen Declaration reiterated joint positions already declared in previous summits on regional crises and armed conflicts (see Figure 2). Support was expressed to an inclusive "Syrian-led and Syrian-owned" political process in respect of the traditional rights to sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, in pursuance of the UNSC resolution 2254 (2015). The BRICS, after recognizing the complementary nature of the Geneva Peace Talks and the Astana Peace Process, expressed support to the creation of de-escalation areas in Syria and condemned the use of chemical weapons by anyone. Support was also expressed to the sovereign rights of Iraq. As concerns the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the BRICS declared support to the creation of a viable and territorially contiguous Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, in accordance with the UN resolutions, the Madrid Principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. New positions were formulated on the Yemeni conflict, the Gulf diplomatic crisis, and the nuclear issue of the Korean peninsula.

On Afghanistan the Declaration was traditional in expressing support to an inclusive "Afghani-led, Afghani-owned" peace process, including the Moscow format of consultations and emphasizing the link between terrorism in the country and illicit drug trafficking and national reconstruction needs. However, it is important to highlight a new element introduced by Xiamen. By explicitly listing some of the terrorist organizations operating

(17) BRICS (2017), "9th BRICS Summit of Heads of State and Government: Declaration and Action Plan"; Xiamen, 4 September; available at: www.brics2017.org (accessed: 05/08/2019); "Meeting of the BRICS Special Envoys on Middle East: Joint Statement"; Visakhapatnam, 12 April; available at: www.brics.utoronto.ca/ix-mena (accessed: 05/08/2019). "Meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the UNGA: Joint Statement"; New York, 21 September; available at: www.brics.utoronto.ca/ix-mfa (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(18) BRICS (2017), "Meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs / International Relations: Joint Statement"; Beijing, 18-19 June; available at: www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa (accessed: 05/08/2019).

in the country, the BRICS recognized all these groups as terrorist. This represented the first time that China, as member of the group, recognized the Haqqani, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Jaish-e-Mohammad groups as terrorist organizations (Ramos et al., 2018).

The coherent and stable character of BRICS agenda can also be seen in the discursive structures used by the 2018 Johannesburg Declaration¹⁹. The document started by expressing the commitment of the BRICS to advancing their three-pillars-driven cooperation in the long term and to contributing to world peace and stability. In continuance with the traditional articulation of previous Declarations, the introduction opened with a series of programmatic articles. It expressed commitment to the UN, its Charter, multilateralism, rules and norms of international law, with an emphasis on the prohibition of the use of force in international affairs.

The BRICS recognized the centrality of the universal collective security system enshrined in the UN Charter to address contemporary traditional and non-traditional security challenges. The Declaration also reiterated the need of a comprehensive reform of the UN, including its SC, and the recognition by China and Russia of the ambitions of Brazil, India and South Africa to play a greater role in the UN. However, the Johannesburg document innovated by expressing not only the need to increase the representation of developing countries in the UN in general, but also explicitly specifying of the African states. The BRICS recommitted themselves to further collaboration on ensuring better resources to the UN administration and budget in order to maintain the UN Member State-driven character.

As shown by Figure 1, the list of security issues discussed also remained stable: counter-terrorism, cyber-security, PASOC and TOC. A significant innovation is peacekeeping. After recalling the meaningful contributions made by the BRICS countries to UN peacekeeping operations, for the first time a Declaration explicitly stated the group's intention to extend their cooperation to this field. In accordance with South Africa's proposal to extend BRICS cooperation to peacekeeping, the country hosted a round of consultations on the matter, called BRICS Dialogue on Peacekeeping (see Figure 3). The agenda remained quite conservative also in the list of regional issues discussed, as it is possible to see in Figure 2.

Moreover, the Johannesburg Summit followed the tradition, started with Durban and Fortaleza and continued by all summits thereafter, of outreaching BRICS cooperation to non-BRICS countries through the second Joint Session between leaders of BRICS and African countries, as already done during the first South Africa's chairmanship in Durban. Finally, as described by Figure 3, the Johannesburg Calendar included the annual Meeting of BRICS NSAs²⁰, the Meeting of BRICS Special Envoys on MENA²¹ and the second standalone Meeting of BRICS MFAs²² as well as the BRICS Working Groups on Counter-Terrorism and Security in the Use of ICTs.

The fifth and last phase of development of BRICS security cooperation saw the consolidation of a stable agenda discussed on a diversified net of coordination mechanisms.

3. The agenda-setting process of BRICS cooperation: a bi-directional way

The BRICS have expressed a clear interest to strengthen their cooperation in the area of international peace and security. This is what can be seen from the progressive expansion and consolidation of the second pillar of their cooperation during this first decade of existence. The result of this has been the progressive establishment of a security agenda on a broad range of issues discussed on a multi-layered framework of cooperation. The intensification in saliency of the security dimension in BRICS agenda can be seen as a bi-directional process.

At a first stage, the area of security has been growing in quantitative terms. The range of BRICS cooperation broadened in a horizontal direction through the progressive inclusion of security issues into its agenda. The BRICS have formulated common positions on both thematic and regional issues of global security. As Figures 1 and 2 show, during the first years immediately following the 2009 Yekaterinburg Summit, the BRICS were almost exclusively focused on their I cooperation pillar. They expressed the first modest signs of interest in extending their cooperation to the area of security after the Sanya and the Delhi Summits in 2011 and 2012, at a time marked by their co-presence on the UNSC and the outbreak of the Arab Spring.

(19) BRICS (2018), "10th BRICS Summit of Heads of State and Government: Declaration and Action Plan"; Johannesburg, 26 July; available at: www.utoronto.ca/x-brics (accessed: 05/08/2019); "Meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the UNGA: Joint Statement"; New York, 27 September; available at: www.mea.gov.in/brics/mfa (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(20) BRICS (2018), "Meeting of the BRICS High Representatives on National Security / National Security Advisors: Press Release"; eThekweni, 28-29 June; available at: www.amediaagency/brics/nsa (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(21) "Meeting of the BRICS Special Envoys on Middle East and North Africa: Joint Statement"; Pretoria, 20 June; available at: www.mid.ru/press-release/brics (accessed: 05/08/2019).

(22) BRICS (2018), "Meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs / International Relations: Joint Statement"; Pretoria, 4 June; available at: www.dirco.gov.za/brics (accessed: 05/08/2019).

In the following two years, the security dimension of BRICS agenda has been progressively expanding with the 2013 Fortaleza and the 2014 Durban Summits until reaching its highest level in Ufa in 2015. After this point, in the following two years, the security dimension of BRICS agenda has been progressively expanding with the 2013 Fortaleza and the 2014 Durban Summits until reaching its highest level in Ufa in 2015. After this point, the security focus of the summits started to decrease, particularly in the case of regional issues. However, it would be misleading to interpret this trend simply as a symptom of the waning interest of the BRICS in global security. On the contrary, as previously described, their cooperation in the field shifted to alternative channels of communication by being far more both topic and security-specific than the high-level summits of the BRICS Leaders.

As Figure 3 shows, at a later stage, under the impetus of the Russian and the Indian presidencies in 2015 and in 2016 respectively, a series of highly topic-specific meetings and working groups were established. The following BRICS Summits focused less on the area of international security partially because different and more specific cooperation channels were put in place to deal with it. The security dimension has intensified in rather qualitative terms and their cooperation has deepened in a vertical direction by establishing a net of security-specific cooperation mechanisms.

From this moment, BRICS security agenda has been developing through a two-level framework. On a first level, the cooperation remained intergovernmental, through Summits of the BRICS Leaders – in other words, heads of state and government – as well as inter-ministerial meetings. These meetings tend to be either normative, by declaring the group's political commitments and diplomatic positions on issues of international relevance, or highly exploratory, aiming at identifying issues of common interest with enough potential to strengthen cooperation.

On a second level, the cooperation became sub- or non-ministerial, by means of BRICS Working Groups and meetings of heads of special agencies and experts. These II-level cooperation mechanisms are strongly topic-specific and practice-oriented, defining the details of the cooperation programs – and for this reason less accessible to public opinion –. While the I-level intergovernmental meetings tend to be more stable along time, by often adopting an annual format, the II-level practical meetings are less frequent, by taking place only in specific summits.

A relationship of complementarity exists between these two levels of cooperation. In the absence of any permanent institutional mechanism of cooperation, the II pillar of BRICS cooperation has followed the logic of the Consult - Coordinate - Cooperate model in an informal and incremental way. This means that, in line with a logic of pragmatism and mutual convenience, when a particular issue of common interest is found through intergovernmental meetings on the I level of cooperation, ad hoc working groups are set to discuss the technical details of the cooperation on the II level (Cooper and Farooq, 2013; Abdenur, 2017; Saran, 2017). Complementarity between wide-ranging broad-spectrum discussions, aimed at reinforcing mutual understanding among the parties, and topic-specific meetings coordinating joint initiatives of the group, has provided the BRICS with the necessary flexibility to strengthen their cooperation on a broad range of security issues.

The progressive establishment of these cooperation mechanisms, with varying degrees of stability and specificity, has determined the development of a wide net of alternative channels of communication and coordination. This process of vertical institutionalization, started with the 2015 Ufa and the 2016 Goa Summits, has continued during the 2017 Xiamen and 2018 Johannesburg Summits.

In the first decade of their existence as a group, the BRICS have demonstrated a growing interest in cooperating in the area of international peace and security. The result of this has been the rise of a broad agenda of security issues set and implemented on a diversified net of cooperation mechanisms. Under this premise, we can now give a closer look at its content.

4. The content of BRICS security agenda

Peace and security have been recurrent themes in BRICS narrative. The BRICS have often expressed their willingness to contribute to the preservation and stability of the international system and their desire to take greater responsibilities in this sense on both the regional and the global level, in the respect of the UN-centered established world order. This represents the normative core at the beginning of every BRICS Declaration.

Collectively, the BRICS have always expressed commitment to the UN, its Charter, rules and norms of international law, as well as to liberal principles such as multilateralism and the prohibition in the use of force in international relations. The group recognizes the centrality of the universal collective security system enshrined in the UN Charter to address contemporary traditional and non-traditional security challenges, while committing themselves to ensuring better resources to the UN administration and budget, in order to maintain the UN Member State-driven character.

At the same time, a reformist tone emerges in many statements released by the BRICS leaders. On several occasions, the BRICS emphasized the inappropriateness of the global governance institutions, “conceived in circumstances when the international landscape in all its aspects was characterized by very different challenges and opportunities” and the “need to make correspondent reforms to the international organizations which were established before such transformations”. The BRICS represent themselves as a coalition of emerging powers, united by a joint mission to give greater voice to developing countries in global governance institutions. In this regard, they highlighted the necessity of a comprehensive reform of the UN, including its SC, and the recognition by China and Russia “of the ambitions of Brazil, India and South Africa to play a greater role in international affairs”. To this goal, the BRICS committed themselves to increasing their cooperation in international institutions and multilateral fora, such as the UN bodies, FAFT, and ECOSOC.

Although the BRICS call for greater representation of developing countries in the established institutions of global governance, they are also demanding a greater role within them for themselves individually. In this way it is possible to explain the horizontal expansion that their cooperation agenda has been undergoing during the first half of their existence, as described by Figure 1. The BRICS aspire to be recognized as providers of stability, instead of spoilers or free-riders thereof, by contributing to peace and security within and beyond their regions against global threats such as terrorism, piracy, or cyber-attacks. This can be seen when one looks at the great visibility provided by BRICS Declarations to the international initiatives taken by the BRICS members, collectively, such as the BRICS Roadmap of Practical Cooperation on Ensuring Security in the Use of ICT, individually, like for example the international conventions on counter-terrorism hosted by India or the mediating role of Russia in the Syrian peace process, or initiatives taken only by a part of the group’s members, such as the draft treaty submitted by China and Russia to the Conference on Disarmament, aimed at preventing the placement of weapons in outer space.

Overall, the BRICS have manifested a desire to acquire more autonomy from Western countries in international security, particularly in crisis management and conflict resolution (see Figure 2). An example of this is given by the significant contributions of the BRICS members to UN peacekeeping operations. As previously mentioned, these countries rank in the top positions in the financing of missions in contributing to the UN peacekeeping missions both in terms of financial resources and troops²³. The expansion of the group’s cooperation to this field, as stated by the 2018 Declaration and confirmed by the establishment of the first BRICS Working Group on Peacekeeping in Johannesburg, comes with no surprise, as it was already anticipated on other occasions like in Goa in 2016 (Allouche and Lind, 2014).

In addition to this, the BRICS have often expressed open criticism towards principles and standards promoted by Western countries in conflict resolution. With a strong emphasis on the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in other countries’ internal affairs, the group has often expressed skepticism towards practices and principles threatening to undermine the political independence and territorial integrity of sovereign states. The main example of this is given by the strong condemnation of the 2011 NATO’s intervention in Libya, blamed for the collapse of state institutions, particularly the army and the law-enforcement bodies, and for the consequent rise of terrorist activities in the country. Although NATO or any NATO ally involved in the Libyan intervention were not explicitly mentioned in the Ufa Declaration, the strong formulation of the document stems from the shared sentiment of reluctance within the group towards Western interventionism in crisis contexts and fragile states.

Despite their formal acceptance of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle contained in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, on several occasions the BRICS have proven to be cautious in its application by the UNSC and have promoted alternative formulations, such as Brazil’s proposal of Responsibility While Protecting (RwP) and China’s Responsible Protection. These are examples of the BRICS’ efforts to assume a greater role in international affairs as norms-settlers, instead of norms-blockers as often perceived by the West, without however prejudicing state sovereignty.

To this goal, along the years the BRICS have promoted an approach to conflict management which pays more attention to the sensitivities of developing countries mindful of their colonial experiences. In a South-oriented perspective, the group has commended the role of regional and sub-regional organizations, such as the AU, the AL or ECOWAS, and has expressed support to “nationally-led, nationally-owned” initiatives in peace processes. Moreover, the BRICS have urged the need to intensify the link between these actors and the UN, by highlighting the importance of coordinating actions on the international, regional, and local levels. Overall, what emerges from BRICS vision on conflict management is a general preference for bottom-up strategies, characterized by low levels of intrusiveness of external actors and high levels of inclusion of local stakeholders.

Therefore, the BRICS have expressed support to comprehensive approaches looking at the root causes of armed conflicts, often identified in non-military issues, such as corruption, money-laundering, or development needs. An example of this is the case of Afghanistan, whose needs of humanitarian assistance, preferential access to the market and foreign investments, as highlighted on various occasions, go far beyond the military dimension of the conflict in the country. In this regard, the BRICS have often underlined the importance of the nexus between

(23) For example, as will be discussed later, the BRICS rank among the top contributors of UN peacekeepers, particularly India with almost 7,000 personnel, and, to a lesser extent, China and South Africa, with around 2,600 and 1,200 respectively (UN Peacekeeping, 2017).

security and development. In opposition to a traditional divide between “hard politics” and “low politics”, the group has adopted a cross-dimensional vision of conflict resolution, as well as of international security more generally.

The progressive expansion of the BRICS agenda to new security issues, as described by Figure 1, was also a result of this process. National security threats, like terrorism, have often been linked to non-traditional security issues, such as illicit drug-trafficking and its use as a source of financing for terrorist organizations. In this sense, the BRICS recognize the challenges that the non-conventional nature of contemporary security threats poses to traditional approaches. The hybrid and asymmetric nature of threats with increasingly global and transnational effects on international security, such as terrorism or cyber-attacks, requires the adoption of comprehensive and cross-dimensional approaches to deal with them.

In this regard, given the cross-dimensional character of BRICS security agenda and its emphasis on the security-development nexus, it is reasonable to expect further consolidation of the group’s cooperation in the field of peacekeeping and an expansion to its peacebuilding component in the future.

5. Factor I: Context dependency

The process of agenda-setting of BRICS cooperation was found to be deeply affected by two fundamental variables, one external, the other internal to the BRICS framework: the international context and the preferences of the summit host country.

As concerns the first factor, BRICS security agenda was found to be highly context-driven. After all, contextual conditions have played a major role since the origins of BRICS, as previously discussed. The 2007 global financial crisis and its repercussions on the economies of the developing countries were a determinant factor both in the formation of the group’s identity as a coalition of emerging powers committed to ensuring greater representation of the Global South in the global governance institutions, and in the preponderance of economic and development issues in the initial phase of development of their common agenda. On top of this, the rising tensions between Russia and the Western countries over the issues of Georgia and Kosovo in that period, and the consequent isolation of Moscow in multilateral fora, represented an additional propulsive factor to the organization of the I BRIC Summit in Yekaterinburg in 2009.

The BRICS agenda-setting process remained highly context-dependent also later on. For example, the 2011 Sanya Summit, representing the first time that the group endorsed a comprehensive reform of the UN explicitly mentioning its SC, cannot be fully understood without considering the co-presence of all five BRICS on the SC or the UNSG Annan’s calls for reforms. Similarly, it is not possible to explain the strong emphasis given to the respect for national sovereignty and to the principle of non-interference as well as the focus of the summit to the MENA region, without looking at two major events occurring on the global stage at that time, namely the outbreak of the Arab Spring and the NATO intervention in Libya. In this sense, it is possible to say that, at least to a certain extent, the decision of the BRICS to expand their cooperation to the formulation of joint positions on regional issues in the following years, as shown by Figure 2, came as a result of the Sanya Summit and the deteriorating security situation in North Africa and the Middle East.

In a similar vein, in the aftermath of the humanitarian crisis in Libya, the 2015 Ufa Declaration and its strong condemnation of NATO intervention can be interpreted as a result of the growing reluctance from the international community to support similar interventions in other crisis contexts, particularly as concerns Syria. Moreover, the rising tensions between Russia and the West, culminated in the US initiative to expel Moscow from the G-8 a few months before the Ufa Summit provide an additional reason behind the strong wording of the 2015 Declaration.

The Ufa event was not the only case of a BRICS summit making explicit or implicit reference to Western initiatives. For instance, the attention paid by the Durban Summit to the Iran nuclear issue and the BRICS’ concerns over “recent threats of military action and unilateral sanctions” revealed a veiled criticism of several public statements released by the US administration in this sense. A more recent example of this is given also by the 2018 Johannesburg Declaration. In the context of the BRICS’ traditional position over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the group underlined that “the status of Jerusalem is one of the final issues to be defined in the context of negotiations” and, after commending the role of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the conflict, emphasized “the need for ensuring a more adequate, sufficient, predictable and sustained funding for the Agency”. Considering the fact that the Johannesburg Summit took place only a few months after the US decisions to move its Israeli embassy to Jerusalem and to cut funds to the UNRWA, it is easy to see the critical tone of Western initiatives in the BRICS discourse.

What it is possible to highlight from all these cases is the context-driven nature of BRICS cooperation on security. To a certain extent, the different stages of development of BRICS agenda can be seen as a sequence of reactions to contextual factors, such as the outbreaks of international crises or tensions with other international actors. However, it would be misleading to reduce BRICS cooperation to a result exclusively of external pressures. Much of the content of its agenda was influenced by other variables related to the group's internal dynamics.

6. Factor II: Heterogeneity of interests

The second fundamental variable influencing the process of agenda-setting in BRICS security cooperation is represented by the preferences of the summit host country. Given the highly informal nature of the group, no institutionalized rules of procedures are provided for BRICS meetings like in the case of formal international organizations. On top of this, especially the area of international security was found to be highly informal as compared to other pillars of BRICS cooperation. However, looking at the evolution of the agenda along time reveals the major role played by the host country, as chairperson of the particular BRICS summit, in setting the agenda of discussion and the calendar of events. This resulted in a significant level of influence exerted by the summit host country and its individual interests on the outcome document of the event, in other words, on the positions of the group as a whole.

Moreover, the rotating nature of the BRICS chairpersonship gives the same opportunity to each member to set the basis of the group's agenda every five years. This is particularly relevant when one considers that BRICS is a highly heterogeneous group of states. Relevant differences exist between its members in terms of geographic location, material capabilities, international status, regional and domestic challenges. It is therefore natural to expect differences in terms of interests and priorities between their individual foreign policies. However, the heterogeneity of the BRICS has often represented a point of strength rather than an obstacle to their cooperation, as will be discussed later. The different interests and priorities have pushed BRICS cooperation to extend to new areas and to develop in new directions. In the long run, this has resulted in the progressive development of a broad and diversified common agenda on security issues.

In this context, it is possible to interpret the agenda of the group based on the particular priorities and interests of the foreign policies of its members.

6.1. Brazil: the security-development nexus and peacebuilding

The Fortaleza Declaration reveals the influence exerted by Brazil at the time of its presidency in 2014 on the group's agenda. Guinea-Bissau ranks first in the list of conflict-affected regions and fragile states mentioned in the document, which also highlights the central role played by regional organizations, such as the AU, ECOWAS and the CPLP in the peace process. The visibility given to Guinea-Bissau and to the the Community of Portuguese Language Countries – first and only time mentioned in any BRICS document – exemplifies the priority of Brazilian foreign policy to support the impoverished countries in Africa through the UN generally and the CPLP specifically (Abdenur, 2017). This is confirmed by the level of specificity accorded to the issue by the Declaration, emphasizing the need to find a comprehensive solution encompassing food security and the security sector reform, in accordance with the Guinea-Bissau's Configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

Another core element of Brazilian foreign policy is the nexus between security and development, by making it a recurrent feature of BRICS narrative. This fits well Brasilia's focus on peacebuilding and peacekeeping issues and its interest in expanding BRICS cooperation to this field. Several articles of the declaration emphasized the fundamental link between conflict prevention and resolution, as well as between peacebuilding, peacekeeping, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, while urging the need to adopt a gender perspective in all these issues.

In addition to peacekeeping and peacebuilding, on several occasions Brazil has manifested an interest in expanding the group's cooperation to the fight against transnational organized crime and illicit drug traffic – challenges that the country faces domestically –, and more recently to the field of intelligence.

Finally, the Fortaleza Declaration expressed interest in expanding the cooperation on two issues related to disarmament, namely regional denuclearization, specifically as concerns the MENA region, and prevention to arms race in the outer space. The inclusion of these two issues in BRICS agenda under Brasilia's presidency is particularly interesting in view of the fact that Brazil represents one of the few countries in the world that has ever renounced to a nuclear weapon program and that since then has become a major advocate for global denuclearization and disarmament on the international stage.

6.2. Russia: counter-terrorism and crisis management

Moscow's interest in extending the BRICS agenda to the security domain and strengthening the second cooperation pillar is a longstanding feature in the history of the group. After all, as the very first promoter of BRICS, Russia played a primary role in the definition of the agenda of the group since its origins. As the 2009 Yekaterinburg Declaration shows, terrorism was included as the very first security issue on BRICS agenda. Moscow's concern for this particular security threat is related to violent events occurred in the country and attributed to organizations defined by the Kremlin as terrorist, such as Chechen-affiliated groups. This is confirmed by the visibility given to terrorism by the 2015 Ufa Declaration, where it ranks as the very first issue discussed in the whole document. (see Figure 1).

This is even more interesting considering that the Ufa Declaration stands out as the one including the highest number of issues of international security among all others. As previously discussed, an additional reason of this lies in the particular context that the 2015 BRICS Summit took place in, due to the aggravating humanitarian situations in both Libya and Syria. However, the particular influence played by Russia in the consolidation of the security dimension of BRICS agenda cannot be underestimated. The beginning of the institutionalization of BRICS cooperation in the security domain dates back to the Ufa Summit, which stands out as well for the highest number of security-related meetings organized.

The alignment of the BRICS along Russian foreign policy priorities is even more evident when one looks at the joint positions formulated by the groups on conflict-affected regions and fragile states (see Figure 2). The main example of this is Syria, which is the first conflict mentioned and the longest issue in terms of extension in the entire Ufa Declaration. In addition to expressing support to an inclusive "Syrian-led and Syrian-owned" political process in respect of the traditional rights to sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, in pursuance of the UNSC resolution 2254 (2015), a high level of specificity is accorded to the issue. Specific terrorist organizations are named, such as ISIL and Al-Nusra Front, and specific points in the UNSC resolutions are recalled, particularly concerning the financing source of terrorism.

Moreover, while the document emphasizes the threat of terrorist groups operating in the country and the violation of human rights and international law by them, there is no mention of such violations committed by the Syrian government. Rather, the Declaration highlights the positive role played by Syrian authorities in their collaboration with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the UN. On top of this, the document condemns the use of any toxic chemical weapon by any party without mentioning any alleged perpetrator. Similarly, it underlines the need to ensure humanitarian access to the country, without blaming any party for the non-compliance with the UNSC resolutions advocating for it. On the contrary, the declaration emphasizes the negative impact that the politicization of the issue and unilateral sanctions have on the socio-economic condition of the population, by indirectly criticizing the action of the US and its allies. On several occasions, the BRICS have commended the Russian role in the resolution of the conflict, by recognizing the complementary relationship between the Geneva Peace Talks and the Astana Peace Process.

There are many other examples of the alignment of the BRICS along Russian interests in crisis management and conflict resolution. In the case of Libya for instance, it is not a case that the first explicit condemnation of the 2011 NATO intervention can be found in the Ufa Declaration. As concerns the Iran nuclear issue, on several occasions the group expressed support to an early finalization of the negotiations over the Joint Comprehensive Action Plan (JCAP) between Iran and the P5 + 1 + EU, to a comprehensive lifting of economic sanctions imposed on Iran, and to the respect for Teheran's sovereign right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy, including uranium enrichment, under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). To summarize, the BRICS favor the normalization of the relations between the international community and Iran.

6.3. India: regional stability and the hybrid nature of terrorism

New Delhi represents the other major promoter within the group advocating for the development of a security agenda. The Indian interest in strengthening the second pillar of BRICS cooperation can already be seen in the 2012 Delhi Summit, titled "BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Security and Prosperity". This represented the first case of a BRICS summit including terms such as "stability" or "security" in its title.

Similarly to Russia, counter-terrorism represents a priority also for Indian foreign policy. Considering the pressing problem in the country, it comes as no surprise that terrorism ranks as the longest issue discussed in the 2016 Goa Declaration, as shown by Figure 1. At the multilateral level, the BRICS call the international community for compliance with relevant UNSC resolutions and express commitment to intensifying their cooperation in international fora, notably the FAFT bodies, and to concluding the negotiations for the adoption of new international conventions in the UNGA, such as the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT). They also expressed support to Indian initiatives to host international conventions the field and commended New Delhi for hosting the first BRICS Working Group on Counter-Terrorism (see Figure 3).

In this context, the Goa Declaration put the emphasis on the importance of adopting comprehensive approaches, including countering violent extremism and radicalization, recruitment and movement of foreign terrorist fighters, as well as blocking financing sources like drug-trafficking and money-laundering, and countering the misuse of the ICTs. This well suits Indian longstanding focus on the hybrid and interdependent nature of terrorism and on the relation thereof with non-traditional security issues, such as corruption, illicit drug trafficking, transnational organized crime and ICTs.

The main example of this is given by Afghanistan, which represents another top priority concern for Indian national security (see Figure 2). Both the Delhi and the Goa Declarations provided high visibility to Afghanistan, highlighting the financing role of the opiates trafficking for several terrorist organizations operating in the country and abroad, including Al-Qaeda and ISIL.

Similarly to Brazil, New Delhi has also often underlined the need to adopt cross-dimensional approaches to deal with this kind of threats to global security. This has resulted in the strong attention given by the group to the fundamental nexus between security and development. In this sense it is possible to understand New Delhi's interest in extending BRICS cooperation to the area of peacekeeping, listed as one of the very first issues in the Goa security agenda.

6.4. China: the reluctant but indispensable partner

During the first decade of existence of BRICS, Beijing has not expressed any interest in strengthening the II pillar of their agenda, although someone might think the opposite by looking at the modest increase in the number of security issues discussed in the summits under the Chinese presidency, as shown by Figure 1 and 2. However, this was much the result of contextual factors rather than national motivations. As previously highlighted, the 2012 Sanya Summit, giving close attention to security issues such as the reform of the UNSC or the Libyan crisis, took place in quite a unique international context, shaken by events like the co-presence of all the BRICS countries on the UNSC and the NATO intervention in Libya.

Unlike other areas of BRICS agenda, such as trade or development, in which China play a central role, like for example in the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB), Beijing has proven to be less inclined to extend the cooperation to the field of international peace and security. The main reason of this lies in the preference of China to address issues of national security through alternative means, either multilaterally, via traditional institutions, especially the UNSC in which Beijing wields the veto power granted by its permanent membership status, or even individually, by relying on its enormous military and economic capabilities.

In this context, it is important to recall that the top positions ranked by China in the world in terms of GDP and growth rate as well as military expenditure and number of active armed forces distinguish the country from the rest of the group, as will be discussed in more detail later. Although the discrepancy is more striking between China on one side and Brazil and South Africa on the other, a significant gap also exists vis-à-vis India and Russia. In particular, although India follows China in rankings on economic growth and military expenditure, New Delhi cannot rely on the same great-power status and political influence in multilateral fora that are recognized to the P-5. On the contrary, Russia shares the same privileges granted by the UNSC permanent membership as China but cannot rely on comparable economic performances²⁴.

Nevertheless, the scarce interest that Beijing manifested in developing the second pillar of BRICS cooperation doesn't make it a less relevant stakeholder in the group. Rather, the Chinese reluctance to collectively deal with security issues, combined with its great-power status and capabilities, makes Beijing an indispensable negotiating partner for the other BRICS interested in deepening the cooperation. The relative political weight of China in the group can also be seen in the 2017 Summit. As previously mentioned, the Xiamen Declaration is particularly relevant as it is the first and to date only BRICS document naming specific terrorist organizations, namely Haqqani, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Jaish-e-Mohammad. This represented a diplomatic success for New Delhi, highly concerned with armed attacks of Afghanistan-based groups in its territory, as it was the first time that China, as member of the group, implicitly recognized these groups as terrorists.

This case exemplifies one of the main advantages that BRICS cooperation entails for its members, namely exploiting the political weight of the group as a whole, as well as of particular members like China within it, to advance their individual national agendas.

(24) In this context, it is worth mentioning that the definition of Russia as an “emerging power” remains a contested concept in the discipline. In opposition to this, several scholars proposed the definition of Russia as rather a “declining power”, based on its tzarist and soviet pasts, by in this way contesting the inclusion of Moscow in the same conceptual category of the other BRICS countries. For further discussion see: Vieira, P. and Ouriques, H. (2016); McFarlane, N. (2006).

6.5. South Africa: peacekeeping in a regional dimension

Last but not least, South Africa, albeit the youngest member of the group, played a significant role in the evolution of BRICS cooperation, as shown by the Durban and the Johannesburg Declarations.

Particularly, the 2013 summit, titled “BRICS and Africa”, had the responsibility to give a regional dimension to BRICS framework. On this occasion, the organization of the first BRICS Outreach Program didn’t have repercussions only on the first cooperation pillar, by promoting trade and development aid relations between the group and the African continent. The regional focus of the event also contributed to the development of the second pillar, by encouraging BRICS to formulate a broad range of joint positions on regional crises and armed conflicts sparking off on the continent, as shown by Figure 2. The Johannesburg Declaration also presented a similar regional perspective when, advocating for increasing the representation of developing countries in the UN generally, it gave a specific attention to the African states.

In addition, on several occasions Pretoria expressed a particular interest in extending BRICS cooperation to the field of peacekeeping. This was explicitly stated by the 2018 Declaration and confirmed by the organization of a round of consultations on the matter, titled BRICS Dialogue on Peacekeeping, hosted by South Africa, aimed at establishing the first BRICS Working Group on Peacekeeping (see Figure 3).

To summarize, the rotating nature of the BRICS presidency enables the group to expand to and to focus on different thematic and regional issues depending on the particular summit host country and its preferences. In this sense, the evolution of BRICS agenda can be seen as a multi-directional movement, promoted by the various and heterogeneous interests of its members. The internal heterogeneity of BRICS has enabled its cooperation agenda to develop and expand in multiple directions in a simultaneous and non-exclusive way. Summit after summit, the group’s agenda could grow in terms of policy-areas and issues, by following the particular foreign policy preferences and priorities of the chairperson.

In conclusion, the BRICS agenda-setting process in the area of global security was found to be strongly influenced by both exogenous and endogenous factors. The vulnerability of BRICS cooperation to contingent factors, either the international context or the specific preferences of the presidency, stems from the highly informal and heterogeneous nature of the BRICS. As will be discussed in the next section, this has affected BRICS cooperation in global security both positively and negatively.

7. Challenges and opportunities for BRICS cooperation on security

The analysis showed how the heterogeneous character of BRICS has played a fundamental role in the agenda-setting process of the group in the area of global security. Although the BRICS’ internal differences are what have most encouraged the expansion of their cooperation over the last decade, today they are what most hinders its further development. Some may argue that the strong divisions between the BRICS in terms of location, status, capabilities as well as domestic and regional contexts, undermine the cohesion of the group and therefore the prospects of cooperation in the future.

However, the informal nature of BRICS reveals the limits of traditional conceptions of international cooperation. BRICS is not a security organization or even less a defence alliance and it has no intention to become so in the foreseeable future. With no permanent institutional structures and no founding treaty, BRICS is an informal multi-state forum. Based on a flexible and practice-oriented operational style, the BRICS framework enables its members to explore areas of potential interests or at least of least resistance in a contingent and context-driven way (Abdenur, 2017). Informal club-like dynamics, partially in line with other contemporary fora like the G7 or the G20, distinguish BRICS from traditional forms of IOs and make it an example of 21st-century mechanism of international cooperation.

In this context, the present study argues that precisely the non-conventional nature of BRICS and the privileges of informality that its cooperation entails, have enabled its members to overcome their mutual differences in two fundamental ways. First, the group has taken advantage of its internal heterogeneity, both in terms of geographic location and foreign policy priorities, to expand the scope of the agenda and the outreach of the cooperation. Second, the BRICS have downplayed points of contention or conflict, by excluding from their common agenda divisive issues potentially able to hinder their cooperation, in order to focus on exploring new areas of common interest. (Cooper and Farooq, 2013)

Therefore, it is important to identify the main differences between the BRICS countries and how these have to date impacted the agenda-setting process of their cooperation in global security.

Geopolitical location

The continental distances separating the BRICS make the group a trans-regional entity. This implies that the BRICS are not concerned with one specific territory or region of the world, as most international organizations do, such as the AU, the AL or NATO. Some may argue that the absence of a regional focus could represent a limit to the effectiveness of BRICS cooperation and to the implementation of its agenda.

However, the analysis showed that the BRICS' regional differences have generally been valued by the group as a resource rather than a limit. In particular, the coalition proved to be able to take advantage of the participation of its members to different regional organizations to expand the outreach of their cooperation. The group established several initiatives in this sense, such as BRICS Outreach and BRICS Plus Cooperation, engaging with regional organizations in Africa, Asia and South America.

Moreover, as previously claimed, the a-territorial nature of BRICS has encouraged the group to focus on transregional and global issues, such as international terrorism, transnational organized crime and cyber-security, and to downplay more sensitive issues involving regional rivalry between some members of the group, particularly China and India, as will be discussed more in detail later.

Power imbalances: International status

As previously mentioned, a fundamental divide exists between the permanent members of the UNSC, namely China and Russia, and the non-members, which are Brazil, India and South Africa. This represents a point of potential tension between consolidated powers, concerned with the stability of the established international order, and emerging powers, aspiring to reform the status quo.

However, it is important to downsize the reformist character of BRICS cooperation, often overrated by a part of the scholarship, at least in the area of global security. Despite the group's narrative focused on the need to make changes to global governance institutions, in order to ensure greater representation of the developing countries and to reform the UN system, no explicit reference has ever been made to the UNSC before 2011, and, even later, no explicit reference has been made so far to an actual increase in its number of seats.

This consideration doesn't necessarily deny the political weight of the recognition by China and Russia "of the ambitions of Brazil, India and South Africa to play a greater role in international affairs". On the contrary, similar positions taken by the group highlight the benefits stemming from BRICS membership: to take advantage of the political weight of the group as a whole as well as of its individual members – such as China and Russia as UNSC permanent members – to expand the international status and influence of the others – in this case, Brazil, India and South Africa²⁵.

Nevertheless, to this day the group has offered no concrete proposals on how to reform the UNSC, by in this way corroborating one of the main claims previously formulated by this paper. The BRICS, by virtue of the highly informal nature of their cooperation, tend to downplay the most divisive issues and to exclude them from their group's agenda, in order to focus their attention on exploring less sensitive areas of common interest.

Power imbalances: Military capabilities

The difference between the BRICS in terms of power status is reflected on the distribution of power resources within the group. In terms of military capabilities, a clear divide exists between China, India and Russia on one side, ranking among the top countries with the highest military expenditures in the world, and Brazil and South Africa on the other, investing much less on defense in absolute terms (SIPRI, 2018)²⁶. However, it is worth highlighting that, from a relative point of view, Brazil and South Africa are far more militarily powerful in their respective regions than China, India and Russia in theirs. Similar considerations can be extended to other indicators of military strength, such as the number of active military personnel or equipment.

A particular case is represented by the possession of nuclear weapons. Here the situation is even more complex, as a fundamental division does not lie only between nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon but also between NPT signatory parties and non-signatories. While China and Russia are nuclear-weapon countries recognized by the NPT, the main legal instrument countering the proliferation of nuclear weapons with almost universal adherence, India is one of the few countries in the world that has never signed the treaty and that currently owns nuclear weapons. Moreover, as concerns the two BRICS members which are party to the NPT as non-nuclear

(25) South Africa is a special case as, although it supports a reform of the number of members of the UNSC, it cannot formally campaign for a permanent seat due to obligations related to its membership to the AU (Nel, 2010).

(26) The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported that in 2018 China ranked second in the list of top military spending countries in the world with 250 billion US\$, India ranked fourth with 66.5 billion US\$ and Russia sixth with 61.4 billion US\$, far more than Brazil, spending 27.8 billion US\$, and, to a larger extent, South Africa, spending only 3.6 billion US\$.

states, namely Brazil and South Africa, the former renounced to its development program of nuclear weapons after being one of the very last countries adhering to the NPT as previously mentioned, while the latter is the only country in history that spontaneously renounced to existing nuclear weapons²⁷. Currently, Brazil and South Africa are both located in nuclear-weapon-free zones and are recognized advocates in international fora for global denuclearization.

Against this background, it is no surprise that nuclear disarmament represents one of the two topics identified by Ferdinand as most challenging BRICS' vote cohesion in the UNGA (2014). In addition, it is interesting that nuclear non-proliferation was excluded from the group's agenda immediately after the Meeting of the BRIC Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Yekaterinburg at the origins of the group in 2008 (see Figure 1)²⁸. This would confirm Ferdinand's claim.

Some argue that the significant differences in terms of power status and capabilities between the BRICS potentially undermine the internal cohesion of the group and threaten to create a fracture between consolidated powers, concerned with the stability of the established international order, and emerging powers interested in reforming it. However, the existence of these differences hasn't prevented the BRICS from progressively expanding their cooperation agenda over the last decade. Rather, as previously claimed, the group proved to be able to downplay the points of potential tension between its members and to focus on areas of common interest.

Security challenges

The BRICS face different security challenges both internally and externally. On the domestic level, significant differences exist, again, between China, India and Russia, which are all countries affected to different extents by regional separatism, and Brazil and South Africa, which are rather territorially stable. These differences are reflected on the type of relations that the BRICS' central governments entail with civil society and minority groups and the level of autonomy that the former recognize to the latter.

On the international level, an even more striking contrast can be seen in the type of relations that the BRICS countries have with their respective neighbors. The revisionist and expansionist attitude adopted by China in the South China Sea or by Russia against the former soviet republics of Georgia and Ukraine as well as the hostilities between India and Pakistan, are all examples that strongly differ from the generally peaceful relations that today's Brazil and South Africa have with their neighbors.

Visions of global security

Although international peace and stability have represented recurrent themes in the group's narrative, the BRICS have different visions on what these are and how they should be attained. The major example of this is given by the issue of humanitarian intervention. Despite the group's general opposition to foreign interventions undermining the sovereignty and the domestic jurisdiction of states – particularly after the 2011 intervention in Libya, as previously discussed –, the approaches that the BRICS have often adopted strongly differ. For instance, while China and India remained strong opponents to humanitarian interventions, Brazil and South Africa have demonstrated far greater flexibility on the matter over the last decades.

As concerns Russia, its position on foreign interventions can be defined as ambiguous at best. Although Moscow has been a historical opponent to the development or the application of concepts such as humanitarian intervention or R2P, during the last years the Kremlin has resorted to this kind of language on several occasions to justify Russian renewed assertiveness over its borders, like in the above-mentioned conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine, or beyond them, like in Syria.

In this context, it is no surprise that the second source of division identified by Ferdinand as undermining the voting cohesion of the BRICS in the UNGA was precisely human rights and humanitarian interventions (2014).

Tensions with the West

Against this background, some may argue that the involvement of some of the BRICS, particularly Russia, in international crises and conflicts, and, based on that, the rising tensions with the US and its allies, threaten to undermine the unity of the group in the long run. However, although the tensions have actually been rising over the last years between Russia or, to a smaller extent, China and the West, no evident fractures have so far occurred within BRICS cooperation. Rather, the analysis of the evolution of BRICS security agenda registered that either the

(27) With the exception of the former soviet republics after the dissolution of the USSR.

(28) The only partial exception to this is represented by the support to the establishment of nuclear weapon-free zone areas in the Middle East, expressed after the outbreak of the Arab Spring in the Ufa and the Fortaleza Declarations.

group generally aligned with some of the Russian positions, like for example on the Syrian conflict or on the Iran nuclear deal, or instead simply decided to downplay other issues, such as the Russian involvement in the Ukrainian crisis, completely marginalized by both the 2014 Fortaleza and 2015 Ufa Declarations (see Figure 2).

The Ukrainian case is particularly interesting if one keeps in mind the direct involvement of one of the BRICS in the conflict as well as the level of international attention that the issue received at that time. Although Russia's annexation of Crimea occurred only a few months before the Fortaleza Summit, the Ukrainian crisis was dismissed in just a couple of lines at the end of the Declaration with no mention either of Russia or of Crimea.

Logically, it is possible to explain the marginalization of the Ukrainian crisis in two possible ways. Either this issue was so controversial that no consensus was found to formulate a common position or one of the BRICS pressured the rest of the group to dismiss the issue based on its national interests. Giving a closer look at Russian discourse would provide relevance to the latter interpretation.

"I do not know if there is a "Crimean agenda" in the first place. [...] I believe everyone understands – even those who are unable to stop talking about this – that the Crimea issue is closed. It was closed by the people of Crimea and the decisions made by the Russian Federation in response to the clearly expressed will of the Crimean people"²⁹.

As shown by this statement given by the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov, replying to a question on the support of the other BRICS to the "Crimean agenda", Moscow attempted to dismiss the Crimean crisis as a closed case and to downgrade the Ukrainian conflict to a secondary matter on the international agenda. Here lies the importance of the unsaid and unmentioned in BRICS discourse. As previously claimed, the informal and flexible nature of BRICS cooperation has enabled the group to overcome points of friction and disagreement by downplaying sensitive issues and avoiding controversies. By doing so, the BRICS have demonstrated to be able to progressively find areas of common interest and to steadily develop a collective agenda on global security.

Tensions within the group

In addition to the conflictual relations that some of the BRICS entail with some external actors, many see the tensions within the group between some of its members as a potential source of disruption of BRICS cooperation.

One of the main examples of this is given by the military standoff between China and India on the Doklam Plateau. The event occurred in 2017 only a few months before the IX BRICS Summit took place in Xiamen, China. Someone might have expected that the episode would have created some obstacles in the organization of the diplomatic event. Instead, against the expectations, the issue seemed to have no significant effect on the normal course of the BRICS summit. There is no mention of the dispute in the Declaration or in any other communiqués of the group. Moreover, several official statements released by the representatives of the countries denied that this issue had been discussed during the sideline behind-door bilateral meetings of the summit³⁰. This can be interpreted as another example of the ability of the BRICS to downplay potential points of friction within the group and to exclude from the agenda of discussion.

Nevertheless, it is relevant to mention that, after months of military standoff on the Doklam Plateau, the issue was solved a few days after the Xiamen Summit took place. This might suggest that, despite what declared by the countries' representatives, while sensitive and divisive issues are downplayed and marginalized in BRICS official multilateral agenda, these are discussed in bilateral behind-door meetings. In this case, BRICS would play a relevant role by providing an additional channel of communication between its members when crises arise.

Foreign policy priorities

Finally, a potential challenge to a further advancement of BRICS agenda might be represented by competitive institutions and mechanisms of international cooperation. In other words, some of the BRICS might choose to direct their attention to and to focus their efforts on alternative international frameworks.

An example of this is given by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched by China in 2013. Some may argue that the economic resources and political engagement that Beijing decided to invest in the BRI might remove these resources and engagement from other international initiatives like BRICS and, ultimately, compromise a further development of its cooperation agenda in the future.

(29) "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's news conference on the sidelines of the BRICS and SCO summits in Ufa"; Ufa, 9 July 2015; available at: www.mid-ru-press-conference (accessed: 5/8/2019).

(30) "Question no. 1937 BRICS Summit attended by Prime Minister"; 4 January 2018; available at: www.mea.gov.in/brics (accessed: 5/8/2019).

However, since the creation of BRICS, each of its members has always been involved in multiple international organizations or mechanisms of cooperation. This hasn't prevented either the formation of BRICS as a group or the progressive expansion of its agenda over the last decade. At any stage of its history, BRICS has never represented the foreign policy priority of any of its members and it is unlikely that this might change in the foreseeable future. Rather, the advantage of BRICS lies in its configuration as only one of the useful and practical instruments in the foreign policy toolkits of its members.

Here lies one of the main points of strength of BRICS cooperation. Its informal and context-driven nature enables its members to strengthen their relations in a simultaneous and non-exclusive way with alternative forms of cooperation.

In conclusion, these factors of potential tension for BRICS cooperation have always existed since the creation of the group in 2011. Yet, their security agenda has been expanding and deepening for more than a decade, as shown by the analysis. The present paper concludes that the highly informal and flexible nature of BRICS cooperation framework has enabled the group, depending on the circumstances, either to take advantage of the differences between its members to expand the outreach of its agenda, or to downplay those differences in order to avoid potential points of friction and to focus on exploring new areas of common interest. The long-term result of this has been the progressive development of a broad and diverse security agenda discussed on a multi-layered framework of cooperation.

8. Conclusion

The BRICS are commonly defined in the global arena as a group of emerging countries, interested in strengthening their mutual relations based on their growing weight in the global economy. This partially explains the primary attention that scholarship has given to the economic dimension of their cooperation as compared to the other policy areas within their agenda.

The present paper has attempted to fill this relative gap, by examining the second pillar of BRICS cooperation and the opportunities for the development of a common agenda in the area of global security. To this goal, the paper presented the results of a content analysis conducted on the BRICS Declarations and other joint statements released by the group during its first decade of existence between 2009 and 2018. The analysis had three main objectives: first, to demonstrate that in this time frame the BRICS have expressed a growing interest in strengthening the second pillar of their cooperation and in finding common solutions to contemporary global security threats; second, to describe the evolution of BRICS security agenda by providing a comprehensive categorization of the positions formulated and the initiatives taken by the group in this field; third, to identify the main variables affecting the agenda-setting process of BRICS cooperation as well as the main challenges and opportunities for its further development.

In this context, it was acknowledged that economic and development issues played a fundamental role in the emergence of BRICS as a group and the analysis confirmed that its first cooperation pillar has kept a preponderant position at least in the initial stage of the evolution of BRICS cooperation from 2009 to 2011. However, the analysis also revealed a growing interest of the BRICS in the second pillar of their cooperation. At first, between 2012 and 2014, this interest was manifested by the progressive increase in both the number and the relative saliency of security issues included in the group's agenda. At a later stage, between 2015 and 2016 the development of BRICS agenda saw a gradual process of institutional densification through the establishment of highly topic-specific and practice-oriented mechanisms of cooperation. Finally, in 2017 and 2018 this has resulted in the emergence of a security agenda formulated on a broad range of issues and structured on a multi-layered framework of both inter- and sub-ministerial cooperation mechanisms.

Moreover, the analysis identified two fundamental factors contributing to the achievement of this result and encouraging the expansion of BRICS security agenda, namely the highly informal nature of the group and the heterogeneous interests of its members. On one hand, flexibility and club-like dynamics have enabled the BRICS to explore potential areas of cooperation and, when these were found, to put in place ad hoc cooperation mechanisms, by in this way overcoming unnecessary institutionalization and bureaucratization.

This has made BRICS cooperation on global security highly context-driven and its agenda-setting process particularly responsive to external events. Against this background, it is possible to explain the progressive growth in the number of security issues discussed in the group's agenda, registered between 2011 and 2015, as a reaction to contextual events, such as the outbreak of regional crises like in Libya or in Syria, or the simultaneous presence of all five BRICS countries on the UNSC.

On the other side, the highly heterogeneous nature of BRICS helps to explain the processes of expansion and diversification of their common agenda. In particular, the significant differences between the BRICS, together with the rotating mechanism of the summit host country and its power over the agenda-setting, have encouraged the group's agenda to develop in multiple directions in a simultaneous and non-exclusive way.

For instance, India and Russia were found to be the countries most interested in strengthening the second pillar of BRICS cooperation within the coalition. The particular concerns of Moscow and New Delhi over the issue of terrorism and the emergency situations in conflict-affected countries like Afghanistan contribute to explaining the considerable expansion of BRICS security and the relevance of these issues in the summits under their presidencies. Similarly, the special position that the Global South and development issues traditionally occupy in the Brazilian and the South African foreign policies justify the attention given by the Fortaleza and the Durban Declarations to the security situation in Africa and to the issue of peacebuilding.

Based on this and the strong contributions of the BRICS countries to the UN peacekeeping operations, it is reasonable to expect a further expansion of BRICS security agenda to conflict management and peacekeeping in the future, especially in view of the beginning of the third cycle of BRICS presidency with the 2019 summit hosted by Brazil, followed then by Russia and India.

However, criticalities still remain in BRICS cooperation and the same factors that have enabled the expansion of their agenda over the last decade, could potentially limit a further expansion in the future. Specifically, the internal heterogeneity of the group in terms of geographic location, power status and capabilities, security challenges, as well as foreign policy priorities, pose a potential threat to the cohesion of BRICS and the possibilities to deepen their cooperation in the area of global security.

Nevertheless, these challenges have always existed since the origins of the group without so far preventing the formation and the advancement of BRICS agenda. Rather, these countries proved to be able to overcome these challenges in two fundamental ways. First, the BRICS managed to take advantage of their mutual differences, by exploiting them to expand the scope and the outreach of their cooperation. Alternatively, the BRICS succeeded in downplaying those differences which they considered as potential sources of divergence and friction within the group, in order to focus their efforts on expanding their agenda to other areas of common interest.

To summarize, the informal and non-conventional nature of BRICS makes it an example of 21st-century international cooperation mechanism and explains the ability of such a heterogeneous group of countries to come together and to create a wide-ranging and multi-layered agenda of cooperation. Although economic and development issues still keep a fundamental position within the group's agenda, the present study shows that the BRICS have manifested a growing interest in strengthening the second pillar of their cooperation and to find common solutions to global security threats. The BRICS strategy to treat their mutual differences not as an obstacle but rather as a resource of their cooperation has enabled them to develop an international framework whose levels of informality and heterogeneity make it a unique case in global affairs. Whether or not the group and its common agenda will stand the test of time will depend on what the future will hold for the second decade of BRICS cooperation.

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About the Author

Filippo Cutrera: MA in International Affairs with a major in Global Security at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID) in Geneva with a thesis on emerging powers and their role in conflict resolution and humanitarian interventions. He did an internship at the BRICS Policy Center (BPC) during an exchange program at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio). With a BA in Political Science from LUISS University in Rome, he had previous research experience at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the Defence Program of Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI). Currently, he is doing a traineeship in the area of cooperation policy and partnerships in the International Military Staff at NATO Headquarters in Brussels.



BRICS Policy Center Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas - BRICS

Rua Dona Mariana, 63 - Botafogo - Rio de Janeiro / RJ - Brazil

Phone: (+55 21) 2535-0447 / ZIP CODE: 22280-020

www.bricspolicycenter.org / bpc@bricspolicycenter.org



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