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BRICS and global crisis

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Abstract

The BRICS, originally an economic club, has gradually moved into global arena to maintaining peace and security of international community without the use of force. Since 2011, in all BRICS Summits, these countries declared their deep concern over the turbulence and crisis existing in the world and wished to achieve peace, stability, prosperity and dignity according to legitimate aspirations of their people. However, their declarations have not focused on how these states would achieve this objective. Coordinating policy at BRICS level is not easy as they are differing from each other in many ways: culturally, politically and demographically. In international sphere, these states have consistently responded independently and individually rather than jointly to every crisis as their political interests are different and clashing at various levels. Is it feasible that all the BRICS states could come forward to preserve international peace and security? Therefore, main purpose of this of study is to analyze the attitudes of BRICS states as well as their interests in cases of Syria and Ukraine.

Keywords: Syrian crisis, Ukraine crisis, challenges, geo-political interests, rivalries

Introduction

In the fast-changing world order, some countries are emerging as economic power; others are moving towards additional poles of growth. The world is still in shifting process from north to south or from east to west towards a new multi-polar political order with the developing countries becoming driver of the global governance. BRICS a group of five countries not only represent the world growing economic powers but also rising aspirations to represent their importance in global scene. The emergence of BRICS as a new pole of growth is driven not only by the size of their economies but also because of their potential to influence international relations. They have wide range of military and political resources and capacity to shape international order regionally and globally.

World has been facing numerous threats to the international peace and security whether it is a crisis in Syria, Libya, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Palestine or Ukraine or question of nuclear non-proliferation or terrorism. While facing the multitude global threats and challenges to maintain international peace and security, the BRICS countries declare their commitment to building a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity and work jointly to tackle various security threats. In various BRICS Summits declarations, they have declared their commitments that:

- They are deeply concerned with the turbulence in the Middle East, the North African and West African regions and sincerely wish that the countries affected achieve peace, stability prosperity and progress and enjoy their due standing and dignity in the world according to legitimate aspirations of the people.
- The international community should join hands to strengthen cooperation for common development based on universally recognized norms of international law and in spirit of mutual respects and collective decisions.
- They express their strong commitment to multilateral diplomacy with the United Nations playing the central role in dealing with global challenges and threats. In this respect, they reaffirm the need for a comprehensive reform of the UN including Security Council with a view to making it more effective, efficient and representative so that it can deal with today's global challenges more successfully.
- They declare that all five BRICS countries in the Security Council have valuable opportunities to work together on issues of peace and security to strengthen multilateral approaches and to facilitate future coordination on issues under UN Security Council consideration.

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- They share the principle that the use of force should be avoided and they maintain that the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of each nation should be respected. They support settlement of disputes through peaceful means based on universally recognized norms and principles of international law.

In fact, it is argued that these declarations and commitments are very sketchy and international community disagree and suspicious on how the BRICS countries response to global crisis affecting the world peace. Is it feasible that the BRICS-as proclaimed representative of the developing world, could push for the set of guidelines that determine the conditions under which external military intervention is justified? Or are they guided by the aspirations of global rule makers instead of rule takers? Judging from the various summit declarations, it seems that the only unifying characteristic between these countries is an agreement on the protection of the sovereignty of the nation state against unilateral external intervention and support settlement of disputes through peaceful means according to the international laws and norms but there is no indication that how BRICS Countries would agree and respond jointly to various crisis the world is facing now. A consensus among these countries is difficult. These countries repeatedly and routinely commit themselves to the UN, rules of international law as well as multilateral system. The United Nations as a global actor has the primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security faces the challenge from the BRICS countries. In cases of Syria, Iran or Ukraine crises, why the BRICS countries have acted in different ways and different attitude is theme of this study. We will analyses the different factors which compelled them to follow these attitudes in serving their individual interests.

Syrian Crisis

The crisis in Syria started in 2011 as a part of the Arab Spring and continuing till now. At the fifth summit, BRICS countries condemn the continued violence and deteriorating humanitarian situations in Syria and growing threat of international terrorism and extremism in the region. They supported the peaceful settlement of the Syrian crisis through a political and diplomatic dialogue between all the Syrian parties guaranteeing the rights of all section of society and respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syria on the basis of Joint Communiqué of Geneva Action Group without any pre-condition or external interference. Though, the BRICS countries committed to support UN mediation role with the primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security, but the Security Council failed to reach any consensus. China and Russia vetoed the UN Security Council Resolution proposed by France, Germany Portugal and the UK to intervene in Syria. It was the starting of a long diplomatic deadlock between Moscow and Beijing on the one side and the western powers on the other side. China and Russia vetoed two more draft resolutions later on. Throughout the Syrian crisis, there was disagreements on two key issues:

- First, how to interpret events in Syria?
- Second, how to respond to the violence?

In the early stages of the conflict, Western powers characterized the situation as brutal repression of pro-

democracy protesters by the Assad regime, whereas the BRICS— particularly Russia and China emphasized that the violence had been occurring in the context of a legitimate government response to attacks on state infrastructure by armed opposition groups (ibid). These divergent perspectives on the factual situation on the ground have undermined attempts to reach agreement on appropriate responses. While Western states and subsequently the Arab League demanded President Assad to step aside, Russia and China strongly opposed all external attempts to impose regime change.

The BRICS' positions on Syria must be assessed in two separate phases. In first phase, from April to November 2011 where all five members assumed a unified stand in opposition to proposed Western responses to the Syria. However, in the second phase, from December 2011 onwards – the India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) shifted their positions, gradually becoming more receptive to proposed civilian protection measures. Therefore, instead of continuing to act as a bloc, BRICS Countries split into two sub-groups: on one side, Russia and China remained strongly aligned in persistent opposition to any coercive measures against Syria, while on the other, the IBSA states adopted more flexible, though not always identical stances towards proposed international action. The initial united stand the BRICS countries was reflected in their response to the first Western-sponsored draft resolution which was put to a vote in the Security Council on 4 October 2011. BRICS countries condemned the violence and warned of possible sanctions if civilian casualties continued. Although the text was relatively weak but it drew strong resistance from all five BRICS countries. China and Russia vetoed the draft, while India, Brazil and South Africa decided to abstain in order to avoid confrontation with the West. Both Russia and China used their permanent status in the UN Security Council to protect Syrian government from accountability for its repression against its own citizen and continued to put their geo-political agenda ahead of international humanitarian law.

There are important factors that prompted the BRICS countries to follow this attitude:

- BRICS countries had distrust towards the intention of the American and European intentions. As in case of Libya, they voted in favor of UN Resolution which established no-fly zone and allowed to take defensive measures to protect civilian population from the attacks by Gaddafi forces. But NATO went beyond its UN Resolution and mandate caused numbers of civilian casualties instead of protecting the civilian lives.
- The United States had used the UN unfairly against Syria and imposed strict sanctions under Syria Accountability Act 2003 and continued even after the withdrawal of forces from Lebanon. The US sanctions had remained in effect because of the US demand that Syria unilaterally halt its development and deployment of missiles as well as chemical weapons while allowing Israel, Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia to develop their larger and more sophisticated chemical and biological weapons. Such double standard invariably raised the questions about western intentions. Indeed, the US was targeting the Syrian regime long before for overthrew like Iraq and Libya.

Ideologically Russia viewed the displacement of a government and political leader by civil war or revolution

contrary to the understanding of international order and thus unacceptable while the US wanted Assad ouster. This was central basis of general distrust between US and Russia and at the same time Russia was having problem in Ukraine and could not support overthrowing any established government. Although Russia has strategic interests in Syria, it has no intention to keep military presence in the Middle East forever. President Putin envisioned Russia as a global superpower wants to play key role in peace negotiations in the region but Russia cannot deliver any significant economic support to Middle Eastern countries nor does it have soft power to win over permanent allies. Respectively, it is the limit to Russian strategic interests. It was essential for Russia to maintain good relations with the Syrian government in order to maintain its naval base in Tartus and remain the top arms suppliers to Syria.

At the same time, Russia–Iran alliance to secure Syria, which has de-facto emerged, seem likely to be most stable and long lasting. Though both Russia and Iran do not fully trust each other and their strategic interests are not common but complementary to each other. Their combined military man power and financial resources are sufficient to strengthen Syria. Russian alliance with Iran would ramp up its own military purchase from Russia and Russia would accept Iran's desire to secure Syria with in Iranian sphere of influence. Most significantly, the Shiite Iran, Iraq and Syria shield may protect Russia from the Sunni support for Northern Caucasus Muslims rebels.

China stance on Syrian crisis is consistence with its long-term foreign policy driven by its role in international community as a new growing world power and challenging and threatening the western liberal model that dominated international system since the end of the cold war. China vetoed the UNSC resolution because China' communist party has high level of suspicion towards western proposal and within the executive organs of the UN. China viewed the UN as a potential tool in their hands to promote interventionists policies as they did in cases of Iraq (2003) and Libya (2009). In fact the formation of China and Russia united front to oppose the western motives is the main concern as the world has witnessed impressive rise of China in the recent decade as well as Russia's attempt to return great power status.

China needs a stable environment to achieve its development goals and to protect its interests in Syria and Middle East as whole, sustain its relationship with Iran and other Middle Eastern Countries to safeguard its interests of oil and natural resources. China wants to keep away or divert the attention of world power from its domestic affairs. China cannot legitimize any revolt or resurrection abroad as it has to deal with its domestic separatist's issues in Tibet, Xinxiang and Inner Mongolia. China would have opposed the Western Resolution even without the support of Russia if any draft resolution directly affected its own domestic situation.

As a resilient democracy, India is naturally empathetic to the popular upsurge in west Asia and stand by the people's aspirations for a participative and liberal political order but her response to the Syrian crisis has been very cautious, firm and unequivocal. The two countries share a more than fifty years of bilateral relationship and collaborating on the Middle East peace process and development agenda. During the current crisis, the Syrian government has clearly indicated that India to play a positive role in negotiating

peace- a position endorsed by Iran and Russia. The Syrian government considers India as a prominent member of BRICS and Non-aligned Movement and expected India to play a third-party role as a stabilizing power. India wary is that the volatility in Syria could have spillover effects on the neighborhood and negatively impact its own vital interests which include the safety and security of Indian expatriates in the gulf, flow of remittance, energy supplies food security, investment and projects, peaceful uses of nuclear energy, combating of maritime piracy, and the sensitivities of India's Muslim community. India's foreign policy objectives therefore concern collaborating with Syria to facilitate a democratic transition, settlement of refugee and good governance and equality.

Ukraine Crisis

Russia's occupation of Ukraine was the litmus test for BRICS countries as one of the key protagonists. Russia moves in the Ukraine was a grave threat to the world order as any moves of the US in Iraq or Libya or any other threat to peace and security of a country. BRIC countries strongly condemned but they did not oppose Russia. They unanimously supported and stood by Russia and even abstained from the UN General Assembly resolution condemning the Crimea referendum. They rejected the use of sanctions and condemn hostile actions taken by America, Canada and European Union against Russia, recommended the suspension of Russia from the G-8 and G-20 groups and banned to attend the meetings. They called for a comprehensive dialogue, the de-escalation of the conflict with a view to finding a peaceful political solution in full compliance with the UN Charter and universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms.

At the UFA summit, the BRICS countries made it clear that the leading nations in the developing world have no appetite for the Western attempts to apply heavy pressure on Moscow over its annexation of Crimean. Neither, in its official statements, they mentioned of Russia's involvement in the crisis. However, they agreed that the challenges that exist within the regions of the BRICS countries must be addressed within the fold of the United Nations in calm and level-headed manner." Roland Paris, an international affairs expert at the University of Ottawa commented that the BRICS statement was "definitely" not supporting the West's actions in the Ukraine crisis, and its vague reference to "force" was "far from a condemnation of Russia's actions."

All the members were more caution about criticizing one of their club members interfering in the Crimea. Since the beginning of Ukraine crisis, Russia's partners of BRICS took great pains to remain studiously neutral, refusing to criticize Russia's actions in any way. Though, they were personally disagreed over Russia's conduct in Ukraine. It was Russia that was violating the sanctity of another states' sovereignty but BRICS countries had backed Russia because they all have been facing secessionist movement in their own countries. China has been facing long standing secessionist movement in Tibet and Uyghur's movements to break away from Han-dominated Chinese state. India is struggling too many internal crisis- communal tensions, fluid borders and separatists' movement in Kashmir, North East, Security threats from terrorists and the Maoists insurgency. Secession from Cape Region has grown in recent years in South Africa and similarly Brazil has been

long faced a secessionist movement in its southern sub-region which is dominated by European immigrants.

China's attitude towards Ukraine Crisis and especially against Russia's occupation of the Crimean. China supported the fact that a pro-Moscow government was overthrown by pro-US-European demonstration, therefore, China preferred a pro-Russian administration in Kiev rather than pro-western and European. Another reason, China took the stand against regime change through public upheaval and civilian protest movements.

It was the common stand adopted together by BRICS Countries against the interventionist policies pursued by US and EU or NATO not only in Ukraine but in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo. Through the Shanghai Cooperation, both China and Russia had displayed solidarity against a commonly perceived threat brought about by American expansionism throughout Central Asia. As a matter of fact, the eruption of color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan agitated them. They perceived this trend not as a demand for democratization but as a reflection of western interventionism. In fact, the US interests to keep Russia busy in Ukraine, in fact, was serving China's interests which afforded it greater elbow room in Asia. The US aim was to balance China's rising profile all around Asia by shift its strategic weight towards the Pacific. The ongoing crisis might also foil the Russia effort to attract Russia toward the western orbit to balance against a rising China. Therefore, supporting Russia in Ukraine was in line with the Chinese' strategic interests. China's support on the international stage for Russian interventionism in Ukraine would mean protecting its own principles concerning the issues of Xinjiang and Tibet. In order to ease international pressure, China made statement in favour of Ukraine territorial integrity and sovereignty and blamed western countries for the fall of legitimate government and rise of societal polarization. At same time, China avoided to give any supportive statements and affirming Russia's deployment of forces.

India also followed an identical position on the problem of Crimea. Prime Minister Modi said that India's effort will be to sit together and talk, and to resolve problems in an ongoing process. In this regard, India was among the 58 countries that abstained from the vote on the resolution on Ukraine in the UN General Assembly. Russian President Vladimir Putin called the position of India "restrained and objective." India has made it clear that her position on any issue was rooted in her assessment of the issue, and was independent of Western or American thinking. India always follows a policy of non-intervention. India did not approve the action of American and European partners and opposed external actors involve in domestic political affairs of any country and disapproved the US support for democracies and democratization only to the extent that voters elect government that support Washington.

Indian foreign policy towards Russia is remained rather constant over the past sixty years and is entirely compatible with each other. India relationship with Russia has stems from different imperatives. Russia remains the largest suppliers of military equipment and arms (approximately 75% of its arms) for India and a key diplomatic natural partner. Russia, for its part, has been all time friend and supported India in the UNSC on Kashmir dispute, Bangladesh in 1971 on the merger of Sikkim with India in 1975 and its nuclear ambitions. India, on its part, has always

been stay relatively salient or tempers criticism whether in case of Soviet's intervention in Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968 and now in Crimea. In the past five years, the two countries have also come together as part of the BRICS grouping. Analysts often attribute this bonhomie to a range of economic incentives, including widening cooperation on space programs, atomic energy and military technology. Certainly, these are components of a successful relationship, but cannot and do not constitute the bedrock of political thinking.

Brazil-Russia relations have seen a significant improvement in recent years, characterized by an increasing commercial trade and cooperation in military and technology segments. Brazil shares an important alliance with Russia in space and military technologies and telecommunications. South Africa is now part of the BRICS grouping and this partnership is more about global political relations than connecting Russia with Africa. "This is, as we know, an ideology aimed at changing the world economic (and political) order," said Filatova, discussing BRICS. "Any other strategic partnership between Africa and Russia does not exist, and is impossible because of Russia's negligible economic ties with the continent."

Conclusion

Coordinating policy on global issues is not easy though the BRICS share common broad worldviews but the fundamental differences, geopolitical rivalries, and competition have been deeply undermining their cooperation in Syrian crisis. Mistrust and tensions in the bilateral relations among the BRICS consider each other as a threat and competitor as in cases of China and India in South Asia and China and Russia in Central Asia. BRICS countries are using this platform for strengthening power status. BRICS opposed the western interventions in Syrian crisis not because they have followed common policy but their interests in the concerning countries were affecting. Their shared interests are thus very limited. Therefore, these countries have been somewhat constrained by the animosities that exist among them as well as their interests. BRICS signify to become a new model for global interaction built outside the context of the old dividing lines of East and West.

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