

Emergent Powers: India, Brazil, South Africa and the Responsibility to Protect Simon Adams
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(...) Due to one of those remarkable coincidences that history occasionally throws our way, last year all three IBSA countries [India, Brazil and South Africa] were on the UN Security Council as the crises in Syria and Libya erupted. India, Brazil and South Africa all voted for resolution 1970 which framed the developing crisis in Libya in terms of R2P, imposed sanctions and referred the Qaddafi regime to the International Criminal Court for killing its own people. When Qaddafi failed to comply with resolution 1970, South Africa voted for resolution 1973 authorizing military intervention to stop mass atrocities in Libya. Although Brazil and India abstained, they made statements recognizing the need for drastic international action.

Within days South Africa displayed significant signs of buyer's remorse, distancing itself from the resulting NATO-led airstrikes. Brazil and India also became increasingly critical. (...)

In the aftermath of Libya, the Security Council were able to support invocations of R2P with regard to crises in South Sudan, Yemen and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It was impossible, however, to find consensus with regard to R2P and the Syrian government's deadly crackdown against protestors.

With a strained atmosphere at UN headquarters in New York, in August 2011 IBSA sent a high-level delegation to Damascus to plead with President al-Assad to stop the killing. It was a perilous, if well intentioned, venture. (...) If the accusation against NATO was that it had used R2P as camouflage for regime change in Libya, some within IBSA now veered dangerously close to using Libya as an excuse for defending the indefensible in Syria.

Two months later India, Brazil and South Africa all abstained from a 4 October Security Council resolution aimed at curtailing the Syrian government's killing. Brazil explained its abstention as a protest against the posturing and division amongst the five permanent Security Council members. Meanwhile, the justification from South Africa's Ambassador to the UN, Baso Sangqu, was that with regard to Syria the "trajectory, the templates for the solution were very clear, it was along similar lines to Libya." Or in other words, IBSA was not condoning Assad's crimes, but avoiding a slippery slope to military intervention. The argument would have been more convincing if any UN member state was actually calling for military intervention, but none was. (...)

Brazil, however, eventually tried to bridge the diplomatic divide at the UN by publishing a short paper on the "Responsibility while Protecting" (RWP) in November 2011. (...) RWP was not an innovation but a critical clarification with regard to the future application of R2P. It reemphasized R2P's preventive core and resuscitated meaningful dialogue at the UN. (...)

By early 2012, therefore, despite lingering concerns, the emerging consensus (enabled largely by Brazil) was that R2P's advocates needed to develop better preventive, mediated and coercive tools to operationalize R2P in the future. But what does this portend for both R2P and the future of IBSA with regard to the United Nations? (...)

All three IBSA countries want to demonstrate their capacity to serve as permanent members of a reformed and expanded UN Security Council. But their track record on R2P so far has been uneven. (...)

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