

**The Mirage of R2P's "BRICS Wall"** Patrick Quinton-Brown

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This week, the world turned its attention to the role of the so-called "emerging powers" in global governance as South Africa hosted the 2013 BRICS Summit in Durban. As the fifth annual meeting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, the summit serves as a reminder to the rest of the world that the international system is becoming increasingly multipolar. It also reminds us that some of today's dominant international norms are being rejected for new ideas favoured by these regional powers.

It is easy to assume that the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is one such norm in jeopardy. In light of the 60,000 now dead in Syria, it is not uncommon to hear that the global consensus on legitimate international intervention to prevent mass human rights abuses has "hit a wall of BRICS." The non-western emerging powers are often said to disapprove of the norm, claiming that R2P is simply a "Trojan horse" for neocolonialist ventures such as regime change.

Contrary to popular belief, however, there is no cohesive "BRICS wall" propped up against R2P. Nor is it certain that as the preeminence of the United States declines, the legitimacy of international intervention will fall with it. In reality, there is no consistent BRICS policy on intervention because the institution has been split into two internal factions over the issue: with Russia and China on the one hand, and Brazil, India, and South Africa, on the other.

Granted, no member of BRICS unabashedly supports R2P, at least as it was understood at the 2005 World Summit. However, this does not mean that they need to reject the norm outright. As Oliver Stuenkel and Xiaoyu Pu have argued, BRICS has at least three options on how to engage with R2P. While BRICS could choose to purely accept or reject the R2P principle, a middle ground also exists whereby emerging powers could attempt to forward the norm while simultaneously shaping it in new ways.

Brazil's "responsibility while protecting" proposal is a testament to this third option. (...) RWP and R2P are not mutually exclusive in the Brazilian approach because RWP intends to complement, not replace, R2P.

Thus, Brazil has emerged as a constructive member of BRICS on the R2P agenda. This matters in the global R2P debate because Brazil, as a regional leader and economic heavyweight, is seen as a credible international actor. (...)

A much stricter stance has been taken by China and Russia, the only BRICS members fortunate enough to wield veto powers at the UN Security Council. Judging from their most recent statements in the UN, Moscow and Beijing appear to have reverted back to a more traditional understanding of sovereignty as a right, rather than a responsibility. Further, the specter of regime change has become a staple in the allies' international rhetoric, which has been used to justify the Chinese and Russian triple vetoes on the Syrian crisis.

India and South Africa have taken a softer stance. This is clear in their recent voting habits, which, as Andrew Garwood-Gowers has similarly observed, have strayed from Russia and China. While they did not support the first vetoed resolution on Syria, it is often forgotten that India and South Africa

*did*

support the second vetoed resolution as well as General Assembly Resolution 66/253 A. Their policies also broke off from the Russians and Chinese when India voted in support of the third vetoed resolution on Syria and when South Africa threw its weight behind General Assembly Resolution 66/253 B. Moreover, India and South Africa have been relatively more supportive of Brazil's RWP idea than China and Russia. Last year, India went as far as arguing that R2P may be able to gain the respect of the international community if it is anchored in the concept of RWP.

In this way, what may be called the "IBSA faction" is far more amenable to R2P than its fellow BRICS members. It remains committed to the notion of reshaping, but not rejecting, the implementation of R2P. To traditional R2P supporters such as Canada, IBSA should be therefore seen as potential ally on the R2P agenda. The conception of united BRICS arising against R2P is inaccurate because IBSA is drifting away from Russia and China's relatively rigid, and unproductive, stance on R2P.

This is not particularly surprising, seeing as all members of IBSA have become increasingly visible human rights supporters on the international stage. (...)

As the only members of BRICS without a permanent seat on the Security Council, IBSA members also have a clear national interest in becoming more active global citizens. If permanent membership is on the IBSA radar, then its members need to continue to build their reputation at the UN. (...)

Where can India, Brazil, and South Africa start? For one, the world would benefit from a joint statement issued by these emerging powers before the next annual General Assembly dialogue on R2P, currently scheduled for early September. This would be useful to demonstrate the isolation of the Russian and Chinese position and further, and to repel sticky conceptions that R2P debate is a Global South vs. Global North issue. IBSA could also further develop the

meaning of RWP, which, despite widespread international attention, has not been *formally* elaborated upon since November 2011. (...)

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