



Image Credit: Office of India's Prime Minister

Keep BRICS and IBSA Separate

Some may want to merge IBSA and BRICS. India, Brazil, and South Africa should resist.

By **Oliver Stuenkel**

August 13, 2012



South Africa's successful inclusion into the BRICS grouping in 2011 was much more than a mere expansion of the emerging powers' club by one member. Rather, it marked the moment in which the BRICS assumed ownership of an idea conceived a decade earlier by the Goldman Sachs investment banker Jim O'Neill.

Today, his point of view about whether or not South Africa deserved to be part of the group no longer matters for the leaders of the BRICS who have, since the first summit in St. Petersburg in 2009, begun to develop **their very own ideas** about how to reform global structures and increase their political influence. Efforts to create a BRICS Development Bank, a BRICS Stock Exchange, greater cooperation at the G20 and the IMF, as well as to develop working groups to share best practices on topics such as health and education show that the BRICS grouping **has both expanded and deepened**.

This raises an important question about the continued usefulness of IBSA, a trilateral group founded in 2003 by India, Brazil and South Africa. Now that all IBSA members are also part of BRICS, why not simply merge IBSA into BRICS? While this idea may seem appealing and practical, it would be a mistake. Although IBSA's visibility in international affairs pales against that of the yearly BRICS Summits, the three IBSA members have identified themselves as partners because they share a set of fundamental notions about global order.

Enjoying this article? [Click here to subscribe for full access. Just \\$5 a month.](#)

As emerging countries that are not yet fully integrated in today's international structures, they all consider current structures to be unjust and in need of reform. While the degree of rejection of some institutions differs – for example, India is far more hostile towards the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) than Brazil – all three agree that they deserve more institutional responsibility, **including permanent seats** on the UN Security Council. On this front, they clearly diverge from China and Russia, both of whom are relatively established players – a position that is best symbolized by their status as veto-wielding permanent members of the UN Security Council and recognized nuclear powers in the NPT.

In addition, all three IBSA members are multiparty democracies and are thus able to freely debate how to implement difficult reforms necessary to boost growth in a messy and complex political context. These matters cannot be discussed openly at BRICS Summits. In the same way, issues related to human rights and civil society are not mentioned when the BRICS meet. During the 2011 IBSA Summit, the Brazilian President **succeeded** in including the “Responsibility While Protecting” (a concept that seeks to qualify and refine the “Responsibility to Protect” concept) into the final declaration, something which it promptly failed to do several months later at the 4th BRICS Summit due to Chinese and Russian opposition.

IBSA provides an intimate setting undisturbed by at times strained bilateral ties – after all, relations between India, Brazil and South Africa are simply too incipient to hit any meaningful roadblocks or clashes of interest. In addition, there is potential for meaningful security cooperation among IBSA members, as military exercises in the Indian Ocean (IBSAMAR), development projects, and working groups in areas such as poverty reduction all show.

Perhaps IBSA's greatest value is in bringing India, Brazil and South Africa closer together in a more general sense – allowing think tanks, civil society, academia, public sector specialists and foreign policymakers to engage and develop joint strategies to common problems. Seen from this perspective, IBSA has already been a success as it shifted its members' attention towards their fellow emerging powers.

Aware of the fact that IBSA provides a platform to debate how to deliver growth in the context of democracy China is likely to push for IBSA to be replaced by BRICS. Brazil, India and South Africa should resist such a move, even when there overlap between the debates at BRICS and IBSA Summits. China's absence is precisely what makes IBSA **an interesting platform** for debating global challenges in a different context- and also speaks frankly about challenges that cannot be addressed at BRICS Summits – including the question of how to **deal with the rise** of China.

The BRICS Forum is immensely useful, and synergies certainly exist between BRICS and IBSA. Ideas and concepts developed at IBSA Summits should be brought into discussions at BRICS Summits and vice versa. Topics such as the environment, global governance, economic development and maritime security should be dealt with at both IBSA and BRICS summits. Yet the benefits of IBSA's continued existence are too large to ignore, and policy makers in Brasília, Delhi and Pretoria should maintain it as they turn into global agenda setters.

*Oliver Stuenkel, Professor of International Relations at Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV) in São Paulo, Brazil. He authors the **Post-Western World** blog.*

You have read **2** of your **5 free articles** this month.

Subscribe to Diplomat All-Access

Enjoy **full access** to the website *and* get an automatic subscription to our magazine with a *Diplomat All-Access* subscription.

SUBSCRIBE NOW

Already a subscriber? [Login here](#)
