

### India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) in the new global order: interests, strategies and values of the emerging coalition

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# India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) in the New Global Order: Interests, Strategies and Values of the Emerging Coalition

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**Daniel Flemes**

## Abstract

A question of interest to scholars of International Politics concerns the manner in which weaker states attempt to influence stronger ones. This article offers a case study of one recent exercise in coalition-building among southern powers as a vehicle for change in international relations. It analyzes the global interests, strategies and values of India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) and the impact of the IBSA Dialogue Forum on the global order. Five major points are outlined. First, common ideas and values shape the global discourse of the emerging coalition. Second, soft balancing based on a value-driven middle power discourse is a suitable concept to explain IBSA's strategy in global institutions. Third, institutional foreign policy instruments such as agenda-setting and coalition-building are pivotal elements of IBSA's soft balancing approach. Fourth, the trilateral coalition suffers from considerable divergence of interest in global governance issues and limited potential gains of its sectoral cooperation, particularly in trade, due to a lack of complementarities of the participating economies. Finally, despite these obstacles the IBSA Forum has impacted the global order in recent years as a powerful driver for change. India, Brazil and South Africa have contributed to an incremental global power shift in their favour. The southern coalition also induced a change in the character of multilateralism and, in particular, its procedural values.

## Keywords

India, Brazil, South Africa, IBSA Dialogue Forum, soft balancing, global order, global governance and multilateralism

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## **IBSA: Origin in the Context of a Shifting World Order**

States playing a leading international role in rule-making are given special importance as far as the treatment of transnational problems is concerned. This applies to questions of world trade as well as to transnational security risks. Attempts to solve problems under these policies can be organized both at the regional and global levels. In both cases, some state actors play a more important role than others in developing cooperation and negotiation processes and have, therefore, more influence on the results. The reason can be their greater military or economic potential. In the same way, their legitimacy, diplomatic effectiveness, moral authority as well as their representative function for a region or group of states might generate advantages in international bargaining.

Recently, many studies have pointed to global power shifts in favour of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) and other rising powers (Cooper and Antkeiwicz 2008; Goldman Sachs 2007; Mahubani 2008). Hitherto existing power poles in Europe and North America are expected to lose relative military and economic power, and even the dominance of Western culture and values is contested (Cox 2007; Ikenberry 2008; Zakaria 2008). The India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum is a coalition of emerging powers intended to benefit from the global power shifts. It was launched in June 2003 in Brasilia. Three months later, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil, President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee formed the Group of Three (G-3) during the fifty-eighth UN General Assembly session and contributed crucially to the failure of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Conference in Cancun by pressing for fundamental changes in the agricultural subsidies regimes of the developed world. After several ministerial meetings, President da Silva, President Mbeki and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh held the first IBSA Summit in Brasilia in September 2006. The three governments coordinated their standpoints and voting behaviour in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) conference in Havana and the sixty-first UN General Assembly session, where South Africa was elected a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (2007–08) for the first time. Since then, IBSA has held regular ministerial meetings and heads of government summits in Pretoria (2007), New Delhi (2008) and Brasilia (2010).

A quick glance at IBSA's schedule highlights the strengthening of diplomatic ties between the three emerging southern powers over the last few years. Together, India, Brazil and South Africa lobby for reforms at the United Nations that allows for a stronger role for developing countries, which constitute the majority of the UN member-states. Nevertheless, the troika is not envisaging an alternative world order that privileges the developing world. Its initiative is instead firmly located in the existing international order, as the Brasilia Declaration<sup>1</sup> suggests: 'Respecting the rule of international law, strengthening the United Nations and the Security Council and prioritizing the exercise of diplomacy as means to maintain international peace and security'.

While the IBSA initiative may thus be seen as an effort to increase the bargaining power of developing nations, it equally focuses on concrete areas of cooperation between South Africa, India and Brazil. Trade, energy security, health and transport are the most prominent issues of IBSA's sectoral collaboration. IBSA can therefore be characterized as both a strategic alliance for the pursuit of common interests of developing countries in global institutions and a platform for bilateral, trilateral and interregional South–South cooperation. Sectoral cooperation will form a sound base for trilateral diplomacy in world affairs.

How does and will the emerging coalition's diplomacy impact the global order? Different scenarios of the future world order have been suggested: the systemic transformation can open out into a concert or cartel of powers (Kagan 2008), a 'non-polar world' (Haass 2008), 'unstable multipolarity' (Humphrey and Messner 2006), 'multi-multipolarity' (Friedberg 1994; Nolte 2008) or a 'multiregional world order' (Flemes 2008; Hurrell 2007). The point of departure is the current global order, which reflects a mixture of a concert of great powers and multiregional structures. It consists, on the one hand, of Europe as a relatively functional region and, on the other, of many great powers without functional regions, such as the United States, China, Russia and India. Brazil and South Africa are now at crossroads and can actively pursue global strategies with or without their regions. The choices and strategies of Brazilian and South African foreign policy-makers can affect the balance between the aforementioned conceptions of global order.

The positions of emerging powers from the South (on the one hand, between the centre and the periphery of the current global order and, on the other, at the nexus of international and regional politics) demand particularly complex foreign policy strategies. Strategic approaches have to consider at least three contextual factors: first, the continuing superiority of established (the United States) and emerging (China) global actors in terms of material power; second, the fact that regional and global affairs are increasingly interrelated; and finally, the fact that foreign policy strategies are mapped out against the background of an international system moving from a unipolar to a multipolar order.

On the basis of these observations, the article, first, highlights the common ideas and values shaping IBSA's global discourse; second, it addresses the foreign policy strategies pursued by IBSA; third, it reveals the common and divergent interests of the three players in global governance and sectoral cooperation; and finally, it analyzes the impact of IBSA's policies on the global order.

## **IBSA's Value-Driven Middle Power Discourse**

The overriding goal of middle powers is to create rules and institutions of global governance. Accordingly, their foreign policy objectives overlap with the 'civilian ends' (Duchêne 1973; Maull 1990) of foreign policy such as responsibility for the global environment and diffusion of equality and justice. These are 'milieu goals'

rather than 'possession goals', to use Arnold Wolfers' (1962: 73–74) distinction. Possession goals further the national interests, for instance, through power aggregation. Milieu goals aim to shape the environment in which the state operates. Milieu goals may only be a means of achieving possession goals, but they may also be goals that transcend the national interests and are shared widely. In other words, a sense of 'global responsibility' (Schoeman 2003: 351) is present in the case of a middle power. According to the behavioural definition, middle powers engage in middle-powermanship: 'the tendency to pursue multilateral solutions to international problems, the tendency to embrace compromise positions in international disputes and the tendency to embrace notions of "good international citizenship" to guide diplomacy' (Cooper et al. 1993: 19).

At first glance, the category of middle powers seems particularly promising for explaining the common behaviour patterns of the IBSA member-states which found their aspirations on a value-driven discourse committed to democracy, peace and development. In the 2006 Brasilia Summit Declaration, Singh, da Silva and Mbeki reaffirmed their commitment to promoting peace, security, human rights and sustainable social and economic development in the world. Regarding sustainable development, they underscored the importance of addressing the challenges of global warming under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol. In addition, IBSA urged the donor countries to meet their development assistance targets to fully implement the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in 2002 in Johannesburg. The IBSA states also agreed in Brasilia to coordinate their contributions to the UN Human Rights Council and stressed their common understanding regarding the universality and indivisibility of human rights. Prime Minister Singh even argued that IBSA's normative approach reflected a common identity of its member-states. He said: 'IBSA is a unique model of transnational cooperation based on common political identity. Our three countries come from three different continents but share similar world views and aspirations'.<sup>2</sup>

The functional leadership of IBSA/G-3 has been most evident in the WTO negotiations. Leading the G-21 coalition of developing countries in the Doha Round, India, Brazil and South Africa demanded the establishment of global market conditions that would allow the developing countries to benefit from their comparative advantages in agriculture, industry and services. Thus, the troika has cooperated with a view to eliminating the high non-tariff barriers to trade imposed by the developed countries. Other demands aim to reform the Bretton Woods institutions: the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) legitimacy depends on reforming the system of quotas to make it more representative of the developing world; the World Bank's President has always been a US citizen and appointed by the US government just like the IMF's Managing Director has always been an European. The legitimacy of these two institutions tends to increase if both the positions are made open to all nationals and elected by their members.

But the middle power approach can only partially explain the strategy of the IBSA states. There is some evidence that the engagement of IBSA/G-3 in middle-powermanship (Cooper et al. 1993) to defend the principles of good global citizenship and democratic multilateralism is merely a discursive flagship to pursue possession goals and national interests. From a neorealist perspective, the over-riding goal of state actors consists of power aggregation at the expense of other states (Mearsheimer 2001: 2) and ascent in the international hierarchy of states.

First, the G-3 has not always spoken on behalf of the global South. It is true that the WTO negotiations have failed because the industrialized countries have not been willing to reduce their agricultural subsidies to a sufficient extent, but the G-3 has not been representing the net food importers, most of whom are the least developed countries (LDCs), which are not interested in the reduction of the agricultural subsidies in Europe and the United States that keep prices low. The majority of the LDCs are Sub-Saharan African, South Asian and Latin American countries, which have not felt represented by their 'regional leaders'. This can be seen as a first hint that IBSA's approach is more pluralistic than universalistic in essence.

Second, while the WTO negotiations have hardly progressed in terms of content, the IBSA states have been able to improve their positions in the international trade hierarchy. At the 2004 WTO conference in Geneva, Brazil and India were invited to form the G-5 preparation group at the heart of the WTO trading system together with the European Union, the United States and Australia. At the German G-8 Summit in 2007, Brazil, India and South Africa (with China and Mexico) were invited to formalize their dialogue with the elitist club of the richest industrialized countries through the so-called *Heiligendamm* or O-5 process. While these invitations already reflected the increasing acceptance and recognition of their (prospective) major power status by the established great powers, the Pittsburgh G-20 Summit in September 2009 reaffirmed the prominent role of the IBSA countries and five other emerging economies from Asia and Latin America (China, Indonesia, South Korea, Argentina and Mexico). The summit also favoured a shift in country representation at the IMF by providing at least 5 per cent of its membership to the emerging markets. The G-20 will become the new permanent council for international economic cooperation and will essentially replace the G-8, which will continue to meet on major security issues, but will carry reduced influence.

Third, IBSA's global justice discourse is doubtful, since Brazil and India have been striving (with Germany and Japan) for permanent UN Security Council membership. India and Brazil invited South Africa to join the group, but the latter had to abide by the African Union guidelines which prevent it from fielding its candidacy on its own. The UN High-level Panel had suggested an alternative, more participatory plan for a regular system of rotating members, which would have led to a more effective redistribution of global power, but India and Brazil rejected it. In any case, the expansion of the Security Council would privilege

only a few players. In order to achieve lasting democratization of the United Nations, the General Assembly would have to be strengthened.

These examples of IBSA's foreign policy behaviour suggest that the middle power elements are mainly discursive or 'strategic', whereas power aggregation is actually the true end of the emerging coalition's foreign policy. Thus, the IBSA states' global approach would roughly consist of a discursive strategy that lays emphasis on its representative function for the developing world in general and their regions in particular, while it simultaneously aims at becoming members of the great power club. But a doubtful discourse may not be enough to change the power distribution in the IBSA states' favour and to enable them to become global decision-makers. What are the complementary strategic options that India, Brazil and South Africa can pursue in order to gain global influence, prestige and bargaining power?

### **Soft Balancing: Flexible Coalition-Building in Global Institutions**

The foreign policy options for the IBSA states are limited in view of the overwhelming hard power of the current hegemon. Although Brazil, India and South Africa enjoy increasing influence, they are still located at the periphery of the current world system and command relatively modest material resources. A crucial reason for US hegemony in international relations is its military supremacy. Washington accounts for more than half of the global defence expenditure (SIPRI 2008) and 60 per cent of the world's research and development spending (BICC 2008). In conventional military terms, the United States will remain the dominant global power for a long time. Therefore, hard balancing based on countervailing military alliances (external balancing) and arms build-up (internal balancing) is not a viable option in the medium-term. Huntington (1999: 37) uses the concept of a uni-multipolar system to describe the current structure of the international system. From a realist perspective, a multipolar system can only be achieved by the emergence of regional unipolarities that build coalitions to balance the superpower (Wohlforth 1999: 30).

As Nye (2004: 30) argues, real global unipolarity requires the hegemon's dominance in two additional playing fields: global economics and other transnational problems such as terrorism, crime, global warming and epidemics. As the current economic crisis demonstrates, transnational problems can only be resolved through the cooperation of many players. Consequently, these must be the playing fields on which emerging powers gain global influence; their success will depend largely on the soundness of their team play. India, Brazil and South Africa have already demonstrated their ability to advance particularly their economic goals within the existing order. In comparison, the gains to be expected from violently



overturning the current international order are rather limited (Ikenberry and Wright 2008). Therefore, institutional strategies seem to be important for impacting the international hierarchy of states.

Soft balancing does not directly challenge US military preponderance, but rather uses non-military tools to delay, frustrate and undermine the superpower's unilateral policies (Pape 2005: 10). Soft balancing involves institutional strategies such as the formation of limited diplomatic coalitions or ententes, such as IBSA, G-3 and G-21, to constrain the power of the United States and other established great powers. This institutional strategy is also referred to as 'buffering', and aims to extend the room for manoeuvre by weaker states vis-à-vis stronger states (Greenfield Partem 1983). It also involves strengthening economic ties between emerging powers through sector-related collaboration. This could possibly shift the balance of economic power in the medium-term. Paul (2005: 59) lists three preconditions for soft balancing behaviour:

- (1) The hegemon's power position and military behaviour are of growing concern but do not yet pose a serious challenge to the sovereignty of second-tier powers;
- (2) the dominant state is a major source of public goods in both the economic and security areas that cannot simply be replaced;
- and (3) the dominant state cannot easily retaliate either because the balancing efforts of others are not overt or because they do not directly challenge its power position with military means. While pursuing soft balancing, second-tier states could engage the hegemon and develop institutional links with it to ward off possible retaliatory actions.

'Binding' strategies aim to restrain stronger states through institutional agreements (Ikenberry 2003). Indeed, Brazil, India and South Africa maintain linkages with the United States in a variety of issue areas and to different degrees of institutionalization. In March 2006, the United States and India entered into a 'Strategic Partnership', which includes cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy and US arms supplies. Agreements on civilian nuclear cooperation with Brazil and South Africa (both signatory states of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, NPT) were concluded in the 1990s. President Bush and President da Silva signed a cooperation agreement on bio-fuels in March 2007. Moreover, the Organization of American States (OAS) connects Washington and Brasilia in several ways, and the two states were the principal negotiators in the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) process. The US-Southern African Customs Union (SACU)<sup>3</sup> negotiations for a Free Trade Area began in June 2003, in which South Africa has been a dominant player. Critics of the soft balancing approach are right in their argument that other categories such as economic interest or regional security concerns are alternative explanations for second-tier states' foreign policy behaviour (Brooks and Wohlforth 2005: 74). But these explanations do not exclude each other; they are complementary and synergistic.

Washington does not threaten the sovereignty of the emerging powers, and a soft balancing coalition maintains a low profile. After the first ministerial meeting

of the IBSA Forum, Brazilian Foreign Minister Amorim was keen to emphasize that IBSA does not want to create new geopolitical divisions: 'This is a group to spread goodwill and the message of peace—we are not against anyone' (quoted in Miller 2005: 52).

Amorim's statement can be disproved to a certain degree by looking at the soft balancing tools used by the IBSA states. Pape (2005: 36–37) points out territorial denial, entangling diplomacy and economic strengthening as soft balancing mechanisms. When the US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, sought in 2002 to use Brazilian airbases and other military institutions in the Amazon region, Brasilia not only refused to accept the request but also denied over-flying rights for military aircrafts involved in the Colombian conflict (Flesmes 2006a: 243). Brazil also took a critical stance on a bilateral treaty on the use of seven Colombian military bases by the US armed forces in September 2009. The extension of the United States military engagement in South America led to harsh disputes in the Union of South American States (Flesmes and Nolte 2010). Further, despite the Pentagon's deep strategic interests, there are no US military bases either in India or South Africa.

The most important foreign policy instruments of IBSA are what Paul (2005: 57) has called 'economic strengthening' and 'entangling diplomacy'. The former aims to shift relative economic power through trading blocs and other types of sectoral cooperation that increase the economic growth of members, while directing trade away from non-members. The latter describes the use of the rules and procedures of international institutions in order to influence the foreign policy:

Indeed sovereignty may be increasingly defined not by power to insulate one's state from external influences but by the power to participate effectively in international institutions of all kinds. [...] There is no great puzzle as to the advantages that often lead intermediate states to favor multilateralism and institutions [...]: the degree to which institutions provide political space [...] to build new coalitions in order to try and effect emerging norms in ways that are congruent with their interests and to counter-balance or deflect the preferences of the most powerful; and the extent to which institutions provide 'voice opportunities' to make known their interests and to bid for political support in the broader market place of ideas. (Hurrell 2000: 3–4)

India, Brazil and South Africa use global governance institutions and summits to build new coalitions to pursue common interests. As mentioned earlier, IBSA was launched at the 2003 G-8 meeting in Evian, and the G-3 was established during the UN General Assembly session in the same year. The strategy of using international institutions to build South–South coalitions culminated in the creation of the G-21, with its widely recognized impact on global economic governance at the WTO conference in Cancun. The Doha Round particularly demonstrates the troika's ability to determine the institutional agenda in order to influence emerging international norms in favour of their interests.

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The IBSA leaders use international organizations as platforms to challenge the legitimacy of the present international order and to change the existing dominant norms. In his capacity as Chairman of the G-77, President Mbeki said at the NAM Conference in September 2006 in Havana:

The strengthening of South-South co-operation has helped to create a stronger voice for the developing countries in multilateral forums [...] especially with regard to the on-going process of fundamental reforms of the UN as well as the Bretton Woods Institutions (quoted in *Cape Times*, 18 September 2006).

Emerging powers counterbalance the interests and preferences of established great powers within global institutions. Brazil and India are the fourth and fifth most active complainants under the WTO dispute settlement mechanism. Along with others, they have used international institutions to resist attempts by the United States to promote new norms regarding the use of force, including preemptive war, the conditionality of sovereignty or the right to use force to promote regime change (Hurrell 2006: 11). By opposing the US-led Iraq intervention in 2003 at the United Nations, the three states (and other major powers) denied legitimacy to the United States and tried to frustrate its war plans by reducing the number of countries willing to fight along with it. For instance, Brazil and South Africa successfully backed many smaller Latin American and African states despite considerable pressure from Washington.

In sum, the IBSA states play key roles in a multiplicity of global institutions. They are highly integrated in the global order and operate within global institutions in order to enhance incremental power shifts. Ultimately, this course of action is intended to transform the global order in favour of emerging powers in the medium-term. To accomplish this goal, India, Brazil and South Africa are active and innovative in developing new cooperation processes such as the G-3 and the G-21. The emerging powers pursue a strategy of 'latent multi-institutionalization' (Flemes 2009), which is reflected in its omnipresence on the global stage in flexible coalitions (G-3, G-4, O-5, G-20, G-21, G-77), all of them characterized by low degrees of institutionalization. This strategy guarantees national sovereignty, flexibility and independence to IBSA's foreign policy-makers.

## **Common and Divergent Interests in Global Governance and Sectoral Cooperation**

The IBSA states' common interest of power aggregation and their partly successful transformation into decision-makers of the new global order have been examined in the previous section. But how will they use their influence in real terms? Is IBSA an interest alliance when it comes to global governance issues or will all three states pursue unilateral and divergent interests on the basis of their commonly

gained major power status? A similar question arises with regard to the potential synergies of sectoral cooperation and complementarities of the economies of India, Brazil and South Africa.

### *Global Trade: Lack of Common Positions in the WTO Negotiations*

During the WTO negotiations, divergent positions of the three Southern powers became clear in the Doha Round. For instance, regarding the agricultural issue, Brazil defended a broad liberalization of the global agricultural business, whereas India demanded protection against agricultural imports. Agricultural commodities are responsible for one-third of Brazilian and only 13 per cent of Indian exports. At the same time, 70 per cent of employment in India is located in the agricultural sector, while the share in Brazil is only 40 per cent (Las Casas Campos 2009). The higher productivity and competitiveness of Brazil's agribusiness explains its average agricultural tariff of 10 per cent. India's tariff rate of 61 per cent for agricultural products is one of the highest in the world. The agricultural sector in South Africa contributes only 3 per cent to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and does not reflect a great share of the country's exports. South Africa's average tariff rate for agricultural imports is 40 per cent (WTO 2008a). Considering the powerful domestic interests, particularly in India, where millions of farmers depend for their livelihood on agriculture, and in Brazil, where the agribusiness federations wield large political influence, a common IBSA position with regard to the agricultural issue is hardly realistic in the medium-term.

In general, India's economy is still marked by the consequences of four decades of import-substitution industrialization and is far less liberalized than the South African economy. However, in the industrial goods segment, India (14 per cent), Brazil (13 per cent) and South Africa (16 per cent) defend similar average tariff rates (WTO 2008a), but levy higher tariffs in specific industry sectors. All three actors consider their automobile sector as sensitive and protect it with tariffs of 35 per cent (Brazil), 40 per cent (South Africa) and up to 100 per cent (India). In other industrial sectors the specific tariff rates vary remarkably (Mildner and Husar 2009).

In addition, the IBSA states pursue different negotiation strategies in the WTO. India presents its claims and is not willing to bargain. Brazil and South Africa apply more complex and flexible bargaining approaches by balancing protectionist and offensive interests in the course of the Doha Round. For instance, Brazil defends comparatively high tariffs for industrial goods and services, but promotes liberalization of the agricultural sector. India's interests in the service sector—information technology, engineering, etc.—are less defensive because it is taking advantages of the knowledge economy. With its comparative human resources and technological advantages, India wants to become the leader in the 'knowledge revolution' (Ray 2006: 100). New Delhi is not ready to make concessions with regard to the agricultural issue in exchange for a better access to the service markets

of the industrialized countries. And, even though Brazil has joined certain Indian initiatives to liberalize services, service trade is not a priority of Brazilian WTO representatives (Mildner and Husar 2009: 254). South Africa is interested in liberalizing service trade in Mode 3 (commercial presence), but closed the doors to foreign participation in the area of construction, which is part of Mode 4 (presence of natural persons) negotiations (Dupas 2006: 334).

Regarding Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), India, Brazil and South Africa have criticized the granting of intellectual property rights on biological resources and traditional knowledge without due compliance with the Convention on Biological Diversity. The IBSA countries proposed the introduction of a mandatory requirement for the disclosure of the origin of biological resources in the WTO. The interests of the three countries converge with regard to Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). India has the second largest number of HIV-positive people (2.4 million) and also the largest industry of generic drugs. Brazil has become the role model of public policies in fighting AIDS and exports its know-how to several African, Asian and Latin American countries. The situation in South Africa merits attention: it has the largest number of HIV-positive people (5.7 million) and is riddled with several problems in democratizing the public health services (Bueno 2009).

In recent years, the IBSA states have been the flagship of the G-21 lobby that succeeded in reducing the negative effects of TRIPS on patents that enforce high costs of HIV/AIDS drugs in developing countries, especially in Africa. An interpretative statement of the 2001 Doha Declaration indicates that TRIPS should not prevent states from fighting public health crises. Since then, TRIPS agreement provides for 'compulsory licensing', allowing governments to issue licences for drug production for the domestic market without the consent of the patent owner. A 2003 agreement loosened the domestic market requirement, and allows developing countries to export their locally produced generics to other countries shaken by epidemics such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. Nonetheless, this timely success story does not ensure the sustainability of IBSA's common position regarding intellectual property rights. Especially, India's economy depends on the application of innovative technologies. To promote technological learning and to generate innovation capacity, India needs flexibility in the intellectual property law. The aim of TRIPS is to toughen the intellectual property rules.

### *Global Security: Low Profile in IBSA's Agenda*

Despite the aforementioned frictions in the WTO process the IBSA initiative is confirming the previous experiences of South-South cooperation in the 1970s and 1980s, demonstrating greater willingness to collaborate on an economic agenda rather than on security issues. An explanation for this observation is that the major security concerns of most of the states are almost entirely regional and regions are an increasingly salient unit of security analysis. Particularly, India's self-reliance

in military security and the issue of strategic parity in South Asia make a common IBSA approach unlikely; at the same time, Brazil and South Africa pursue cooperative security policies in their regions (Buzan and Waever 2003; Lake and Morgan 1997; Lemke 2002).

India, Brazil and South Africa have taken a common stand on some of the global security problems and have engaged in niche diplomacy. For instance, with regard to the Middle East conflict, the excessive use of force during the Lebanese War (2006) that resulted in the death of a large number of civilians and the destruction of Lebanon's infrastructure was condemned in the Brasilia Summit Declaration. Israel was indirectly accused of violating the principles of international humanitarian law. Concerning the Israel–Palestine conflict, da Silva, Singh and Mbeki criticized the collective punishment and attacks against civilians. They pointed out the increasing deterioration of the living conditions of the Palestinian population and pledged their readiness to launch technical cooperation projects in Gaza and the West Bank. The Foreign Ministers of IBSA called for an end to the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories at their Brasilia meeting in September 2009.

Additionally, IBSA's heads of government underlined in the Joint Summit Declaration their commitment to the goals of disarmament and non-proliferation and expressed their concern over the lack of progress in the Conference on Disarmament. They emphasized that the objective of non-proliferation would be best served by systematic and progressive elimination of nuclear weapons in a non-discriminatory and verifiable manner. At the same time, the three leaders reaffirmed the right of all states to peaceful application of nuclear energy and called for a diplomatic resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue within the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

After renouncing their respective nuclear weapons programmes, Brazil and South Africa have developed a common position on the issue of non-proliferation and disarmament. South Africa was instrumental in brokering an agreement between the so-called *minimalist* and *maximalist* groupings during the NPT Review and Extension Conference in 1995. Pretoria succeeded in getting the conference to adopt an indefinite extension of the NPT and influenced two other decisions regarding the strengthening of the review process and a set of objectives and principles (non-binding) on non-proliferation and disarmament. On the contrary, India, which is not a signatory to the NPT, decided to go nuclear. This places India and the other two IBSA countries at opposite sides of the nuclear divide (Sahni 2006: 102). India and Pakistan could perhaps learn from Brazil's bilateral renunciation with Argentina that led to the Quadripartite Agreement on Nuclear Restrictions in 1990.<sup>4</sup>

The Indo-US nuclear deal of March 2006 has the potential to 'regularize' India's nuclear deterrence and open the channels for commerce in civilian nuclear technologies with India. In particular, South Africa is among the most influential members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). The NSG had to legitimize the Indo-US nuclear deal and the decisions of Brazil and South Africa were seen to be

critical to the viability of IBSA from the Indian perspective (Sahni 2006). When Indian Prime Minister Singh visited Pretoria only two weeks after the IBSA Summit in Brasilia, President Mbeki announced that South Africa would back India's bid for membership in the NSG to gain access to international technology for civilian nuclear energy programmes (*Business Day*, 3 October 2006). South Africa's support to the Indo-US deal indicates a major shift from a rule-and-principle-based to a more pragmatic non-proliferation policy.

The New Delhi Plan of Action (2004) has identified the following areas for trilateral defence and security cooperation:

- Joint peacekeeping, training and military personnel exchange;
- Promoting maritime and air safety, including combating illegal weapons and narcotics traffic and maritime transit of toxic chemicals across the Indian and Atlantic Oceans;
- Cooperation in armaments industries, research and development, trade and marketing.

The second IBSA Maritime exercise—IBSAMAR II—was held in September 2010 in South Africa, with India playing a lead role in planning and conducting it. Yet, the ambitious agenda for defence cooperation has not been put into action so far. Once actions are taken, the trilateral defence cooperation would contribute to global security.

## **Cementing the Coalition by Sectoral Cooperation**

IBSA's sectoral collaboration aims at mutually reinforcing the economic strength by synergizing their complementarities in the areas of industry, services, trade and technology. Optimistic analysts foresee the creation of an IBSA market of 1.2 billion people, (US)\$1.2 trillion of GDP and foreign trade of nearly \$400 billion in the long-term (Kumar 2006: 18). The trilateral coalition is willing to construct a strong South–South cooperation that is thought to spill over to their respective regions and to promote inter- and cross-regional economic ties. The IBSA countries have created a Trilateral Business Council to facilitate contacts and promote commerce across their regions. Business seminars were held during the IBSA summits in Brasilia, Pretoria and New Delhi. The mutual state visits of da Silva, Mbeki and Singh in recent years have always been accompanied by a large contingent of business leaders.

IBSA's sectoral cooperation seeks to exploit synergies in issue areas of mutual interest by sharing expertise and best practices of the three countries. At the several IBSA ministerial meetings since 2003, trilateral working groups were created to discuss cooperation in trade and investment, energy security, infrastructure and transportation, information society, science and technology, defence, public



administration, education, health, agriculture, tourism, social and cultural issues. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and agreements were signed in IBSA's main focus sectors: health, trade, transportation and energy security.

Trade between India, Brazil and South Africa currently accounts for \$10 billion a year (*Business Day*, 14 September 2009). The Action Plan on Trade Facilitation, signed at the First IBSA Summit, is a milestone on IBSA's path towards a trilateral free trade agreement. It sought to further increase trade flows between the three countries and their regions. Simultaneously, India-Mercosur<sup>5</sup> and Mercosur-SACU concluded preferential trade agreements. India and SACU intend to establish a tariff preference agreement. Crucial gains are expected to derive from these inter-regional agreements. However, the different levels of economic internationalization in India, Brazil and South Africa can constrain their bilateral and trilateral trade relations and limit their common interests in the WTO. Even then, at the Pretoria Summit in October 2007, the IBSA states declared that their trade would grow from \$10 billion to \$15 billion by 2010.

Due to its comparatively small and liberalized economy, South Africa has experienced trade deficit with India and Brazil. A study carried out by a South African think-tank on the potential impact of free trade arrangements with India and Brazil, found that the benefits for the South African economy would be 'relatively modest' when compared to other regional opportunities (Stern and Stevens 2000). It singled out the difficulties in negotiating tariff reductions to protected industries in India. Similarly, Dupas (2006: 334) argues that the South African and Indian economies have little complementarities. However, Pretoria still negotiates preferential trade agreements with New Delhi and Brasilia. In the long run, the preferential access to these big economies will cover technology, knowledge and energy transfers.

Despite the critical prognosis, South Africa's economic relations with India have improved over the years.<sup>6</sup> Bilateral trade reached as high as \$2.9 billion in 2007 (WTO 2008b). In regard to South African–Brazilian trade relations, it must be noted that South Africa's exports consist in most part of primary resources, whereas Brazil's exports are mostly industrial products.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the size of South Africa's economy is less than one-third that of Brazil. South Africa's total trade volume is nearly half the total trade of Brazil. Despite these differences, Brazil's trade with South Africa increased significantly to \$2.3 billion in 2007 following the devaluation of the Brazilian Real (WTO 2008b).

Many barriers such as distance, language, shipping costs and non-availability of a direct air link complicate the commercial ties between Brazil and India.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the Brazilian business community has expressed strong reservations about any serious shift in economic priorities away from its traditional markets (Alden and Vieira 2005: 1092). Nevertheless, trade between Brazil and India has tripled to \$3.1 billion during 2001–2007 and it seems to be growing rapidly (WTO 2008b). In 2004, India and Brazil signed an agreement to reduce trade barriers in agribusiness, chemical industries and automobiles. In March 2005, a bilateral



free trade agreement between Brasilia and New Delhi was concluded (WTO 2005: 148). Indian decision-makers see the strengthening of commercial ties with Brazil as a bridge to enter the US market.

Economic cooperation among India, Brazil and South Africa is hampered by the fact that they produce similar products and compete for access to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) markets. Given the distance, strengthening transport links assumes importance for exploiting the full potential of trade and investments. At the first Brasilia Summit, a Maritime Transportation Agreement was concluded to improve logistics and maritime skill bases. The Trilateral Working Group on Transportation prepared an MoU on civil aviation in order to establish regular air links between the three countries. In 2004, cooperation agreements between the national airlines were signed to simplify goods and passenger traffic. The transportation sector presents opportunities for exchanging best practices as well.<sup>9</sup>

The energy sector is another pivotal area of cooperation that was spelled out at the September 2006 Summit, where an MoU on bio-fuels was signed. About 62 per cent of the energy requirements of Brazil are met by renewable sources; of these, 10 per cent come from ethanol produced from sugarcane. In April 2002 India and Brazil signed an MoU to share technology for blending petrol and diesel with ethanol. It must be noted that India is the world's largest sugarcane producer. Solar energy and coal liquefaction are potential areas of further cooperation.<sup>10</sup>

On future cooperation in nuclear technology, the Joint Declaration issued at the Brasilia Summit in 2006 stated that:

[The three heads of state and government] agreed that international civilian nuclear cooperation, under appropriate IAEA safeguards, amongst countries committed to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation objectives could be enhanced through acceptable forward-looking approaches, consistent with the respective national and international obligations.

South Africa intends to overcome the energy shortage in its urban conglomerations by making huge investments in the construction of nuclear plants; Brazil controls the full nuclear fuel cycle since March 2006 (Flemes 2006b). The three southern powers seem determined to seek large-scale synergies in nuclear energy production.

## **Conclusion**

IBSA's success in forging sectoral collaboration is mixed. In particular, bilateral and trilateral trade flows are limited due to several constraints. The different size and degrees of global integration of the economies have led to varying amounts of trade benefits. The main obstacle has been the limited complementarities between the three economies because they produce similar products and compete

for access to the OECD markets. But trade is merely one of the many undertakings in this multidimensional initiative. India, Brazil and South Africa are not natural trading partners and the limits to commercial exchanges should be recognized. While a trilateral trade agreement has been alluded to on numerous occasions, such an ambitious undertaking is unlikely to materialize because all three countries are technically linked to regional trade blocs. A more realistic approach should concentrate on trade facilitation and improvement of transport and infrastructure links between the three states.

In effect, IBSA is unlikely to focus on mutual trade relations. Other sectors such as energy security, transportation infrastructure and health policies seem to offer more opportunities. IBSA's success in sectoral cooperation will depend on its ability to pragmatically focus on distinct areas of cooperation and avoid areas of doubtful complementarities that tend to hold up the cooperation process. In sum, the convergence of interests with regard to the multilateral reform project at the global level are much more obvious than the expected synergies of sectoral cooperation. However, if we define sectoral cooperation as a mechanism to cement the broader strategy of soft balancing in order to shift the global power distribution, the short-term profits of trade are not a major criterion for the success of IBSA.

The soft balancing approach of the emerging coalition has already left its footprint on the recent global order. Its effective participation in global institutions through 'network diplomacy' (Heine 2006) and informal 'steering committees' (Ikenberry and Wright 2008) that are easier to join than, for instance, the UN Security Council, might impact the character of multilateralism and, in particular, its procedural values in the long-term. The establishment of the G-20 as the new steering committee for global economic governance at the 2009 Pittsburgh Summit, reflected this new mode of global multilateralism. The establishment of new global clubs and groupings is reinforced by Washington's need for burden-sharing and its perceived ineffectiveness of formal multilateralism. It also confirmed the arrival of the IBSA states in the club of global decision-makers. India, Brazil and South Africa have been amongst the most powerful drivers of incremental change in world diplomacy and they benefit from the connected global power shifts. Future bargaining in global trade and climate policies will have to include the core interests of the emerging powers. Soft balancing by way of combining middle power discourse and latent multi-institutionalization has been an effective and successful strategy adopted against the background of a global order dominated by the major powers and shaped through formal and informal international groupings. Those players who engage in network diplomacy and, therefore, effectively operate within global institutions and steering committees as innovators, coalition-builders and spokesmen, while preserving their sovereignty and independence, have the potential to substantially influence the outcomes of future global politics.

IBSA has been the launching pad for its member-states' ascent in the global hierarchy of states and will remain a motor of global institutional reforms in the

future. They will strive collectively for the establishment of predictable, rule-based and transparent international trading and finance systems as well as for reform of the UN Security Council. But these goals are shared by many other governments (for example, Germany and Japan) and unlikely to materialize in the medium-term. Regarding issues in the WTO negotiations, it is likely that India, Brazil and South Africa will build *ad hoc* coalitions in specific issue areas that are marked by common interests such as patents of HIV/AIDS drugs under the TRIPS agreement.

Due to divergent national interests, different bargaining strategies and power asymmetries amongst its members, IBSA is unlikely to negotiate successfully the global governance issues on the basis of common positions. This applies to the majority of the Doha Round issues: agriculture, industrial tariffs and services. In the current constellation, the function of IBSA/G-3 is limited to agenda-setting and influencing the WTO negotiations. Global security problems such as nuclear proliferation generally play a minor role in the policies of the coalition. Particularly, India pursues its national security policy and great power ambition at the expense of multilateral agreements because its nuclear power status undermines the non-proliferation regime. In contrast, Brazil relies more on institutional strategies and soft power projection, which makes it a serious supporter of formal multilateralism and the UN reform. In addition, the significance of IBSA, particularly with regard to the foreign economic policy agenda of the three states, differs considerably between them. IBSA has a rather low profile in India and much higher economic and political value in Brazil, while its global impact is highly important for South Africa.

From the foregoing discussion, a few pointers may be indicated for the future of IBSA. First, IBSA's success will depend on its ability to focus on distinct areas of cooperation and avoid or postpone those controversial issues that tend to derail the cooperation process. Second, the member-states must consolidate their common strategy by mutually verifying their willingness for collective action. Although some authors have criticized IBSA for lack of a clear policy (Alden and Vieira 2005: 1088), a strategy of soft balancing by using institutional instruments has unfolded. Third, it is more appropriate to focus on the lack of institutionalization rather than the absence of strategy. IBSA is not a formal organization; common institutions would facilitate the effective coordination and pursuit of its interests. Further, collective institutions could form the ground for the exchange of social norms and cultural values. Better mutual knowledge and confidence-building between the three societies would amalgamate the group.

A question arises as to whether the enlargement of the trilateral coalition would generate potential synergies in sectoral collaboration and add even more weight in global governance institutions. On the one hand, the excessively large and amorphous membership and equally broad agenda of previous South-South groupings such as the G-77 prevented any constructive progress or effective outcome. On the other, the choice is that IBSA could take on board China and Russia

to form BRICSA or the traditional civilian powers such as Germany and Japan to build a G-5, while maintaining its characteristics as a small but potentially effective coalition. The IBSA states' overtures to China and Russia reflect more of the strategic recognition of the need of their support as permanent UN Security Council members than an attempt at winning their participation as such. Notwithstanding its strategic and economic attraction, incorporating China and Russia could dilute IBSA's agenda and undermine its cohesiveness. IBSA's common identity is based on values such as democracy, personal freedom and human rights. The participation of China and Russia, both not known for their democratic practices and commitment to human rights, would not only undercut collective norms and identities but also undermine the credibility and legitimacy of IBSA's global justice discourse. In comparison, widening the coalition to include Germany and Japan would strengthen IBSA's common identity based on democracy and human rights, increase its legitimacy and acceptance, and promote its commitment towards democratization of international relations. In addition, the participation of Berlin and Tokyo in a G-5 forum would reflect their solidarity with the Third World democracies in their demand for a larger role in institutions of global governance.

## Notes

1. For the text of the Declaration following the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Brazil, South Africa and India in Brasilia on 6 June 2003, see [http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/2005/ibsa\\_brasilia.htm](http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/2005/ibsa_brasilia.htm)
2. Closing remarks made by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the Second IBSA Summit in October 2007.
3. The SACU includes South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia.
4. Argentina–Brazil nuclear negotiations, which were initiated in the mid-1980s, led to a cumulative process of non-proliferation negotiations, nowadays considered as an archetype for nuclear weapon free zones. In November 1990 the two countries signed the Quadripartite Agreement together with the IAEA and ABACC (*Agencia Brasileño Argentina de Contabilidad y Control*). Now Brazil and Argentina form the centre of gravity of southern Latin America's security community (Flemes 2006a).
5. Mercosur is a trading bloc in Latin America comprising Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. It has Chile and Bolivia as its associate members.
6. South African companies have invested in India in diamond mines and jewellery production, alcoholic beverages and financial services. Indian companies have invested in automobiles, information technology, alcoholic beverages, pharmaceuticals, infrastructure, insurance and hotels.
7. Currently, three quarters of South African exports to Brazil consist of mineral products, chemicals and base metals. South Africa's imports from Brazil consist largely of machinery, vehicles, vehicle components and chemicals.
8. Brazilian enterprises invest in India's construction, infrastructure and energy sector. The Brazilian government has invited Indian companies to invest in agribusiness, information technology and automobiles.

9. India's expertise in the automation of railways can be extended to South Africa and Brazil. Similarly, India and South Africa can learn from the Brazilian experiences in the introduction of private capital to improve railway efficiency. India, with its renowned maritime training institutes, can offer modern maritime training to seafarers of South Africa and Brazil. South Africa's experiences in port management can be extended to the Indian port authorities (Kumar 2006: 19).
10. India's capabilities in the field of solar photovoltaic could be of considerable interest to Brazil and South Africa, given the climate and vastness of these countries. South Africa has a highly developed synthetic fuels industry. This industry takes advantage of the country's abundant coal resources and has developed an expertise in the technology of coal liquefaction. In view of high oil prices, this technology may be commercially viable and could be explored by Indian companies.

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