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Evolution and Comparative Analysis of National Security Structures of BRICS Countries: Issues and Future Prospects for Integration

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Abstract. The growing geopolitical importance of the BRICS group, in the midst of the international liberal order's crisis, requires a thorough analysis of the basic components of the state sovereignty of its members — their National Security Systems (NSS). The aim of this study is to determine common patterns and distinctive features in the architecture and strategic directions of the NSS of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa as founding member-states of the group, with a simultaneous focus on evaluating the prospects for their unification within the framework of creating a polycentric system of international governance. The methodology for the study is founded on a systematic and comparative study of official strategic documents, legislative documents, scientific works, and statements from political elites. The study's outcomes indicate that, in spite of fundamental distinctions in political systems, all BRICS nations demonstrate a comprehensive approach towards security, with economic, energy, and informational dimensions, corresponding with their role of so-called “emerging powers” or “rising powers”. The fundamental finding is that the full institutional unification of the BRICS NSS is impossible due to fundamental distinctions in political regimes, mutually antagonistic national interests, and differing threat perceptions, corresponding with the basic assumptions of the neorealist school. Nevertheless, the study determines promising directions for limited and situational unification in the area of non-traditional threats of a security nature, such as cybersecurity, counter-terrorism, and military-technical coordination, corresponding with the logic of neoliberal institutionalism. Prospects for such interaction within BRICS do not reside within the creation of a hard alliance framework, but rather with the formation of a “flexible geometry” and network interaction on specific, non-ideologized directions for interstate interaction, corresponding with a model of “sovereignty integration” within each BRIC member's NSS.

Keywords: national security, BRICS, comparative analysis, security strategy, integration of security systems, multipolarity, geopolitics, neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism

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Introduction

The alteration of the world politics balance of power from unipolarity towards a polycentric model, which Russian scholars, such as A.D. Voskresensky, conceptualized, has provided for the increasing activity of non-Western subjects, among which the BRICS group occupies a special place [1]. Once an “economic” form, defined by Jim O'Neill as a group of rapidly developing economies [2], it has progressively turned out to be a proper platform for political and strategic consultations. As Russian President V.V. Putin stated at the 2023 BRICS summit: “BRICS is not an alliance, not a bloc, but a powerful association of states united by the aspiration for equal, mutually beneficial partnership, respect for the sovereign choice of development paths” [3]. This is confirmed by such facts as the establishment of the Contingent Reserve Arrangement [4]. In this regard, comparative analysis of the National Security Systems of the BRICS member countries is of particular scientific and practical relevance, first of all, as regards discussions on BRICS's opportunities as an emerging military-political pole as an equivalent of customary Western alliances.

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The relevance of this study is determined by the need to bridge the gap between the growing number of works devoted to the BRICS economy and the fragmentation of comprehensive comparative studies of their security systems from a political science perspective [5; 6]. Existing publications often focus on individual countries or bilateral relations (e.g., the Russia-China strategic partnership), failing to offer a holistic comparative perspective for the entire “founding five” and not addressing the practical issue of integrating these systems within a multilateral agenda.

The subject of this article is the comparative consideration of the formation and development of the current status of the NSS of BRICS nations and, on this occasion, determine the problems and future opportunities for uniting them. To accomplish this task, the following aspects are considered:

1. Analyze the regulatory framework and strategic priorities in the field of national security of each country.
2. Study the institutional setup of the NSS and mention significant variations.
3. Conclude on the opportunities and limitations for coordinating the BRICS NSS, in what directions and what formats such interaction can be performed.

Materials and Methods

The methodological foundation for the conducted research is systems approach and synthesis of comparative analysis. The systems approach, which was developed in D. Easton’s books and applied for security by B. Buzan [7; 8], allows us to address the NSS as a whole, hierarchically organized set of interconnected elements: processes and institutions. For the BRICS model, this approach functions successfully as it allows for consideration of national NSS as distinct subsystems of a forming international polycentric structure.

The comparative political method, whose foundation was laid by A. Lijphart and G. Sartori [9], allows for comparison of such factors in BRICS, revealing convergent and divergent characteristics. On this occasion, the choice of the comparison units must be taken seriously (designs of “most similar / most different systems”). The NSS of the BRICS nations represent a “different systems” type, so this design would be doubly effective for finding unifying tendencies.

The theoretical explanation of the unification problem is conducted in the frame of rival international relations theories:

- Neorealism (K. Waltz) can explain the fundamental limits on integration as well, i.e.: the anarchy of the international system, the supremacy of national over collective interests, and structural contradictions (etc.: Indo-Chinese rivalry) [10].
- Neoliberal institutionalism (R. Keohane) offers instruments for studying chances for cooperation in such sectors with correlated gains (cybersecurity, terrorism), and reveals why the creation of institutions (the BRICS Working Group on Counter-Terrorism) can reduce transactional costs and form expectations [11].
- Constructivist approach (A. Wendt) focuses on shared understandings and identities. This approach, at the BRICS level, can be presented as an effort at forming the shared “rising powers” or “civilization-states” identity, which, though, is in conflict with the influential different identities of the BRICS member-states [12].

The primary sources of information were official documents: National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation [13], National Defense White Paper of China [14], doctrinal works of India [15], National Defense Strategy of Brazil [16], and South Africa's Defense Review [17]. Content analysis of the documents identified the objects of study as follows: identification of leading concepts such as "threats," "priorities," "institutional structure," "security concept," etc. The verification and comprehensive analysis were done with the aid of peer-reviewed scientific sources, such as works of Russian, Chinese, and Indian political scientists, and reports by highly respected analytical centers.

Results and Discussion

Comparative Study of BRICS NSS: Development Towards Comprehensive Security

Analysis of the central documents of the conceptual-doctrinal sub-system of the NSS reveals that all BRICS nations have codified their concepts of security, and their development exhibits an unambiguous tendency towards shifting from the classical, exclusively military interpretation of security to a full-scale one, encompassing a vast range of threats. This development is consistent with international practice, but for BRICS nations it has a particular aspect linked with their role of so-called "centers of emerging power".

- *Russian Federation.* The National Security Strategy of the RF defines security as overall, integrative, and it includes defense, state and public security, economic development, and technological advances. Primary threats represent a military-political type, as directly specified in the document: "the activity of states aimed at undermining the sovereignty, violating the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation and its allies, including through the use of military force" [13]. They are accompanied by new threats, for example, "the use of information and communication technologies for interference in internal affairs" [13].
- *China.* The principle of "Comprehensive National Security" unites military might, economic growth, and social stability. The White Paper stresses that "China's national security covers a wide range of fields, and it is needed to balance development and security" [14]. Priorities for China are modernization of the PLA, defense of territorial integrity (Taiwan, Xinjiang, Tibet), and sea communication lines, showing the will to turn China into a "maritime power". This policy, in the opinion of A.D. Voskresensky, materializes the doctrine of "peaceful rise", in which security is used for unobstructed economic development and the export of soft power [1]. The Chinese political scientist Wang Yiwei, in his theory of a "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind" (人类命运共同体), which is often referred to by PRC leadership, advocates a perspective on security that moves beyond classical alliances. In his opinion, "the security of a single country cannot be obtained at the cost of others, and only dialogue and international cooperation can be the correct way for securing common security" [18]. This perspective directly has an impact on China's BRICS verbosity.
- *India.* Conceptual and doctrine papers [16] demonstrate a Pakistan- and China-focused perception of military threats, but energy security and counter-terrorism are also mentioned as major priorities. The Indian Armed Forces Joint Doctrine focuses on preparedness for "hybrid wars" and defence of vital infrastructure, making it closer to Russian and Chinese models [15]. In his speech at the SCO summit, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the necessity of "collective efforts for combating terrorism, combating extremism

and combating radicalization” [19], which testifies to the preparedness of India for multilateral partnership for non-traditional threats within platforms such as BRICS.

- *Brazil.* National Defense Strategy prioritizes defense of sovereignty over valuable natural riches (the Amazon, oil fields on the Atlantic shelf), and against non-traditional threats (transnational crime). The paper literally declares so: “The protection of the huge natural wealth, especially in the Amazon and on the Atlantic shelf, is a national priority” [16]. This ecological and resource aspect of security is the unique feature of the Brazilian NSS, which fits with its status as an “ecological superpower” and leader of the Global South. The former President of Brazil Dilma Rousseff stated as early as 2014 that “BRICS challenges the current geopolitical architecture, which still reflects the post-war realities. We must jointly defend our interests and contribute to the creation of a more balanced world order” [20].
- *South Africa.* The South African stance, as it follows from the Defense Review, is the most highly concentrated on “human security” and the threats posed by poverty, inequality, crime, and local instability. The statement proceeds as follows: “Defence must contribute towards addressing the underlying drivers of instability, such as poverty, unemployment and social exclusion” [17]. This stance, is typical for the African environment, where the security of the state and that of its citizens can but coincide and where South Africa’s role as a stabilizer of the region is predetermined. In his words on the role of BRICS, President Cyril Ramaphosa pointed out that “the partnership should be used to address the challenges facing the Global South, including insecurity, inequality and lack of development” [21].

Institutional Structure: From Centralization Towards Pluralism

The institutional setup of the NSS (subsystems of force, means, spheres) reflects each nation’s political culture and state configuration, and this is the biggest barrier towards further integrating.

Russia and China represent strongly centralized, personalized models. In Russia, the central coordinating function belongs to the Security Council of the Russian Federation headed by the President, who is vested with constitutional powers for “forming and directing the Security Council” (Art. 83 of the Russian Constitution). In China, unabridged leadership is vested in the National Security Commission of the CPC Central Committee under the control of the General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, which codifies the principle of “the Party commanding the gun” [14]. This model, characterized as vertically integrated, centralizes strategic planning and operational control within a narrow circle of decision-makers, enabling rapid response but increasing the risk of over-personalization. Chinese scholar Yan Xuetong from Tsinghua University describes this model as a “strategy of holistic national security” (总体国家安全观), with the party playing an integrating function, making the system effective but hard to harmonize with liberal models [22].

India, Brazil, and South Africa, as democracies, possess multi-sided and diversified systems with separation of powers from the executive (president, prime minister), security councils (India’s National Security Council, Brazil’s Defense Council), and parliamentary committees with oversight roles. This results in a “horizontally distributed” model that functions less effectively in crisis but is more transparent (Table).

Comparative Features of BRICS States' National Security Systems

Country	Key document	Decision-making center	Key threats	Governance model
Russia	National Security Strategy [13]	Security Council (President)	NATO actions, threats to sovereignty, cyberattacks	Vertically Integrated
China	National Defense White Paper [14]	National Security Commission of the CPC Central Committee (NSC CPC CC)	Separatism, protection of sea lanes, ensuring growth	Vertically Integrated
India	Military Doctrine [15]	Prime Minister, National Security Council	Terrorism, regional rivals, border security	Horizontally Distributed
Brazil	National Defence Strategy [16]	President, Defense Council	Organized crime, protection of Amazon resources	Horizontally Distributed
South Africa	Defence Review [17]	President, Government	Poverty, inequality, crime, instability in Africa	Horizontally Distributed

Source: compiled by Leonid G. Abdrakhimov.

Issues and Prospects of BRICS NSS Integration Theoretical Explanation

The conducted analysis allows estimating the possibility of integrating the BRICS NSS since it is characterized as the acquisition of the capability for joint activity, information exchange, and coordination of actions. The conclusion is that full-scale and comprehensive integration in the short and medium terms is unlikely but that partial and situational integration on single directions is possible and promising.

Primary Issue and Restriction for Integration (Neorealist Approach):

1. **Profound Variation in Political Regimes.** The Russian and Chinese centralized NSS models, which integrate security with the stability of the political regime, are weakly compatible at the institutional and ideological levels with the distributed Indian, Brazilian, and South African systems. The strategic convergence of Moscow and Beijing is based on shared authoritarianism and confrontation with the West, which does not find full resonance in Delhi, Brasília, or Pretoria. From the neorealist perspective, such a variation in “state types” leads to a non-overcomeable barrier of trust.
2. **Conflicting National Interests.** The strategic competition between China and India, such as over borders and in the Indian Ocean, is a systemic limitation on any intense military-political interaction within BRICS. This animosity, as K. Waltz put it, is a quintessential illustration of the “security dilemma” in anarchy [10]. The mantra of multipolarity can't defeat the structural contradiction between the two giants of Asia.
3. **Divergence in Perceptions of Threats.** Security issues that are of concern for Russia (NATO) or China (separatism) do not take centre stage for Brazil or South Africa, and this results in divergent setting of priorities. Security threats for South Africa, as C. Alden and M. Schoeman observes, “are mostly internal and continental in nature, and not globally adversarial” [23]. This supports neorealist argument of paramountcy of national interest.

4. Lack of Shared Identity and Enemy. BRICS is not a value-based defense alliance with an identified enemy, as it is with NATO, and the motivation for cohesion is thus situational and pragmatic [5]. The constructivist account is in the weakness: that a shared “we-identity” at both the elite and societal levels within the BRICS countries is [12].

Prospects for Low-Level Integration (NeoLiberal-Institutionalist Approach):

1. Sphere of Non-Traditional Security Challenges. This area offers the greatest potential for convergence over divergence with its features. In the eyes of neoliberal institutionalism, it is in such “technical” realms that cooperation is at its highest likelihood, as it entails mutual gains (absolute gains) at a negligible political cost [11].

- Cybersecurity: Adopting collective stands on internet governance as an alternate model, establishing mechanisms for communication on cyberattacks. State sovereignty in the cyber space is retained by each of the BRICS nations.
- Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime: Promoting global cooperation on terrorism and crime through working groups like the BRICS Working Group on Counter-Terrorism. It is the functional working groups that become the ‘growth points’ of practical BRICS cooperation in the security sphere.
- Energy and Food Security: Coordination for stabilizing world markets, which is equal to the economic interests of all members.

2. Military-Technical Cooperation and Tactical, Operational, and Strategic Interoperability.

- Joint Exercises: Executing exercises training interaction at the tactical level (such as search and rescue operations, anti-piracy), without setting up a single strategic command. The “MIR” emergency response exercises constitute a successful example.
- Standardization of Armaments: Joint procurement and production of weapons systems (such as Russian-Indian collaborations such as BRAHMOS). The formula represents a platform for the diffusion of technologies and standards and not for any further political unification.

3. Strategic Dialogue and Crisis Management.

- Formation of fixed consultative mechanisms (security council secretaries’ and defense ministers’ meetings) for exchanging estimations and evading escalation, with special relevance on the backdrop of Indo-Chinese contradictions. This type of dialogue fosters the formation of common “rules of the game”.

Therefore, the model towards which BRICS is naturally evolving is not the “integration of systems” (NSS) by similarity with classical coalitions, but “networking” on selective, de-ideologized agendas [5; 24]. This “variable geometry”, or, applying A.D. Voskresensky’s term, “integration of sovereignty”, enables cooperation where there is coincidence of interest and upholds sovereignty where they do not coincide, with no need for radical political convergence [1]. Chinese analyst Liu Ziq from the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) defines this as “pragmatic functionalism”, whereby cooperation emerges from below, from discrete projects up to future coordination on a deeper plane, evading ideological divergences.

The findings and their interpretations from the perspective of previous studies and working hypotheses need to be provided by the authors themselves. The findings

and what they signify need to be provided in as broad a frame as feasible. The future directions for research may also be provided.

Conclusion

This book has allowed for a comprehensive comparative analysis of BRICS NSS and a study of their integration prospects within the context of opposing theoretical paradigms.

1. A shared pattern for each of the five nations is the development towards a total security model that engages the military, economic, and societal realms. This provides a shared conceptual foundation for argument but does not eliminate underlying distinctions.
2. The crucial difference that opposes deeper integration is the institutional design: from highly centralized, “vertically integrated” variants in Russia and China to multi-centered, “horizontally distributed” systems in India, Brazil, and South Africa. The difference is a symptom of a deeper separation between authoritarian and democratic political cultures.
3. The shared features provide grounds for communication; on the other hand, divergent features, and first of all, conflicting Indian and Chinese interests, represent the essence of fundamentals and constrain the degree of integration, which is explained within the neorealist school with evident success. BRICS is and continues to be a “coalition of interests”, rather than a “coalition of values”.
4. The unification opportunities, framed within the neoliberal institutionalist perspective, do not lie in creating a single military-political bloc, but rather in developing pragmatic network interaction within areas such as cybersecurity, counter-terrorism, and military-technical cooperation. The success will be dependent on the ability of BRICS member countries to delineate separate sectors of cooperation from strategic divergences and develop working institutions.

Other projects can pertain to the evaluation of the efficiency of current mechanisms of interaction within BRICS (such as the Working Group on Counter-Terrorism), and the consideration of the effect of the expansion of the association (new entry of States such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE) on the priorities and security cooperation dynamics. Empirical confirmation of the thesis on “sovereignty integration” with the support of selected case studies on cooperation is of special interest.

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Эволюция и сравнительный анализ национальных систем безопасности стран БРИКС: проблемы и перспективы интеграции

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Аннотация. Возрастающее геополитическое значение объединения БРИКС на фоне кризиса либерального международного порядка требует тщательного анализа базовых компонентов государственного суверенитета его участников — их национальных систем безопасности (СНБ). Цель — выявить общие закономерности и отличительные особенности архитектуры и стратегических ориентиров СНБ стран — основательниц объединения (Бразилии, России, Индии, Китая и ЮАР), а также оценить перспективы их унификации в рамках формирования полицентричной системы международного управления. Методология исследования базируется на системном и сравнительном анализе официальных стратегических документов, законодательных актов, научных работ и заявлений политических элит. Результаты показывают, что, несмотря на фундаментальные различия в политических системах, все страны БРИКС демонстрируют комплексный подход к вопросам безопасности, включающий экономическое, энергетическое и информационное измерения, что соответствует их роли так называемых «новых центров силы» или «восходящих держав». Ключевой вывод исследования заключается в том, что полная институциональная унификация СНБ стран БРИКС невозможна из-за принципиальных различий политических режимов, взаимно противоречивых национальных интересов и различного восприятия угроз, что соотносится с базовыми положениями неореалистской школы. Тем не менее определяются перспективные направления ограниченной и ситуативной унификации в сфере нетрадиционных угроз безопасности, таких как кибербезопасность, противодействие терроризму и военно-техническое сотрудничество, что соответствует логике неолиберального институционализма. Перспективы подобного взаимодействия в рамках БРИКС заключаются не в создании жесткой союзной структуры, а в формировании «гибкой геометрии» и сетевого взаимодействия по конкретным, неидеологизированным направлениям межгосударственного сотрудничества, что соответствует модели «интеграция суверенитетов» в национальных системах безопасности стран — участников БРИКС. **Ключевые слова:** национальная безопасность, БРИКС, сравнительный анализ, стратегия безопасности, интеграция систем безопасности, многополярность, геополитика, неореализм, неолиберальный институционализм. **Ключевые слова:** национальная безопасность, БРИКС, сравнительный анализ, стратегия безопасности, интеграция систем безопасности, многополярность, геополитика, неореализм, неолиберальный институционализм

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