

The BRIC Powers as Soft Balancers: Brazil, Russia, India and China

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Abstract:

This is a paper that both tests and challenges the neorealist theory of soft balancing advanced by Robert Pape. There are significant trends of soft balancing in the foreign and security policy behaviour of Brazil, Russia, India, and China. There are even instances of hard balancing notably in the case of Russia, but also elements of bandwagoning e.g. in the case of India. Moreover, whatever soft balancing there is, it is just as much a result of 2nd image dynamics, namely a deliberate choice of globalization and opening taken by decision-makers inside the BRICs themselves. Soft balancing is not just an outcome of changes in polarity, but reflects the power of the diverse, but mostly attractive forces of globalization.¹

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¹ I wish to thank one of my OJPS reviewers who highlights the contribution by Dr Derek McDougall to *Journal of Contemporary China*, Jan 2012 as most relevant for the topic at hand – the rise of the BRICS and its implication for the world order. Originally, my paper was written and presented at the ECPR-IPSA joint conference in Sao Paolo, February 2011; subsequently presented for my peers at the Department of Political Science and Government, University of Aarhus, and finally at the conference in Helsinki mentioned above. Hereby it is published.

Madam Federal Chancellor already mentioned this. The combined GDP measured in purchasing power parity of countries such as India and China is already greater than that of the United States. And a similar calculation with the GDP of the BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China – surpasses the cumulative GDP of the EU. And according to experts this gap will only increase in the future.

There is no reason to doubt that the economic potential of the new centres of global economic growth will inevitably be converted into political influence and will strengthen multipolarity.

Vladimir V. Putin, President of the Russian Federation, at the Wehrkunde Conference in Munich February 10, 2007.

1. Introduction: the BRIC phenomenon²

The BRIC story is partly a story about deliberate spin and hype from a private investment and banking firm, namely Goldman Sachs, and not some Ivy League political science pundit. The acronym was coined by one of the company's economists Jim O'Neill in a 2001 report carrying the title "*The World Needs Better Economic BRICs*" as shorthand for Brazil, Russia, India, and China whom he identified as emerging economic powerhouses of the world. The idea was to stimulate investment in an attempt to overcome the shock from 9/11 and also to question the legitimacy of the notoriously closed G7. Two years later O'Neill and his team of economic analysts launched a long-term prognosis predicting the BRICs' collective "overtake" of the G6 - i.e. G7 minus Canada - in terms of GDP by 2040. From then on 'BRIC' became a buzzword among businessmen and policy makers (Skak, 2010). In less than a decade the BRICs rose to preeminence as challengers to the United States in a process of hegemonic transition (Roberts 2010). The projected year of the BRIC overtake of the United States is now set to 2018 (Wilson, Kelston, Ahmed 2010). Clearly, it is the BRIC phenomenon and with it the stunning rise of China that led U.S. President Barack Obama to announce twice that "our generation's Sputnik moment is back" (Obama, 2010; 2011).

The intriguing thing is the way the BRIC concept was embraced by key decision makers in the BRIC powers as illustrated by the opening quotation from Putin's Munich speech. This means that constructivists have a point when arguing that world affairs is not just a matter of material capacity but about communicating material capacity, about arguments, catchy ideas and

² I am indebted to the empirical research made by one of my students, mr Jonas Kraft (2010).

buzzwords. It underscores that the BRIC concept plays into the power political game among decision makers worldwide and comes in handy for rising powers in their bid for a larger say at the expense of the declining powers. This is what Putin's assertive statement reveals.

My paper will examine the power political dimension of the BRIC phenomenon by looking into the policy pursued by each of the BRICs towards the United States in its capacity as sole superpower since the end of the Cold War. The point of departure is the material capacity of the BRICs to challenge the existing Western-dominated world order and the United States in particular, the point in my analysis being to examine the actual intentions of the BRICs. On the basis of this I shall challenge the very approach of power politics within political science. This boils down to the following two research questions:

- *What unites the four BRICs – Brazil, Russia, India and China – in terms of power politics? Specifically, was the British scholar Andrew Hurrell (2006:16) right when arguing that so-called soft balancing – a term to be presented later on - ...”does form a very important element of the policies of Brazil, Russia, India and China”?*
- *Does the BRIC phenomenon – i.e. their stunning economic growth and standing as the ‘fab four’ among emerging markets – vindicate the approach of power politics in the shape of neorealism? Specifically, do the BRICs behave according to the thesis of ‘soft balancing’?*

2. Method: reconstructing the strategic culture of the BRICs one by one

I have already hinted that constructivism has a point implying that the materialism of neorealism à la Kenneth N. Waltz (1979) has its limits. Specifically, I have announced an analysis of power political intentions which points towards strategic culture as an appropriate methodological framework for the issue at hand. Strategic culture refers to a constructivism-inspired discourse analysis of security policy perceptions and intentions mainly at the level of decision makers (Johnston, 1995; Lantis and Howlett, 2010). It is an approach that explicitly challenges the axiom of Waltz about states being ‘like units’ - all conforming to the logic of power politics, i.e. seeking to balance the power of the dominant great power in the international system and hereby producing a global balance of power. By contrast, strategic culture analysts emphasize the starkly differing strategic cultures and thus make the actual strategic culture of any power an empirical question. The key insight of the field is that some states may, in fact, be die-hard neorealists in their outlook and security policy practice whereas others may be genuine liberals and honestly pursue ‘democratic peace’ in their mutual relationship such as Germany and France; Denmark and Sweden etc. It means that the security policy intentions of states must be settled through careful empirical analysis of decision maker statements, security policy doctrines and similar official documents or through an analysis of secret sources in order to establish possible unofficial, yet operational strategic cultures.

Accordingly, the task ahead is to examine actual security policy considerations and conduct in Brazil, Russia, India and China by focusing on the BRIC security policy elites zooming into their words and deeds in relation to the United States; secondarily, regarding contemporary international institutions. This, admittedly, is a tall order for the space limits of just an ordinary conference paper, so I shall have to be very selective and just illustrative when presenting the empirical evidence. My inquiry into the BRIC security policy will expose both clashes of

interest and perceived convergence of interest in relation to the United States and other Western actors and their international fora. Further, I shall dwell on the preferred security policy instruments of the BRIC elites, for instance their the resort to arms and military means.

Concerning my questioning of the insights of neorealism I shall make the following particular argument: *whatever soft balancing there may be in the BRICs this is very much a result of 2nd image dynamics and not polarity at the global level (3rd image dynamics)*. I shall explain the concept of soft balancing shortly as the theoretical point of departure for this paper.

3. The neorealist theory of soft balancing

The launching of the neorealist theory of international politics by Waltz (1979) may have advanced the study of international relations, but also inspired a tsunami of criticism of his materialistic thesis of hard, military balancing against the dominant great power for reasons of survival as the ‘law of gravity’ of world affairs. Among other things neorealism has been attacked on two fronts of significance for the argument I later want to make:

- *methodologically* for blinding itself to what Kenneth Waltz himself termed 2nd image explanations, i.e. explaining by the nature of the political system of states, their internal societal dynamics; cultural, geopolitical, demographic and resource endowment dynamics.
- *Ontologically* for blinding itself to the complex non-military dimensions of world affairs making it tricky to pursue persistent policies of a zero sum nature and opening for a much broader menu of interests and preferences.

The first bullet point refers to the 3rd image nature of neorealist analysis – the fact that neorealists explain world political phenomena through the current polarity – number of significant great power poles – anarchy, security dilemmas and similar fairly abstract power political features of the international system. In short they ‘black box’ the state and its inside. As already suggested, strategic culture being mainly a 2nd image theory addresses this flaw.

The second bullet point refers to neorealism’s obsession with power politics and its basis in the destructive capabilities of states at the expense of constructive, non-military capabilities as well as the intangible, yet vital resources of ‘soft power’, a concept invented by the liberal scholar Joseph S. Nye (2004). Given the worldwide forces of globalization including economic deregulation, this is a serious flaw. Neorealism hereby exaggerates state control over outcomes.

Nowadays neorealists themselves increasingly question and reformulate the old tenets held by Waltz. Here I shall limit myself to the argument about soft balancing mainly in the version offered by Robert A. Pape (2005) because of its direct relevance for interpreting the foreign and security policy of the BRICs as maintained by Hurrell (2006) and others (Skak, 2010: 48 ff. and passim). Pape begins by observing the paradigmatic change towards unilateralism in U.S. national security policy under President George W. Bush citing as evidence the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, the Kyoto accords along with the fact that the United States never joined the International Criminal Court. The ongoing technological ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’ (RMA) translates into a U.S. share of whopping 43 per cent of world military expenditures as of 2009 compared to China’s 6.6 per cent and Russia’s 3.5 per cent shares

(SIPRI Yearbook, 2010). The extreme asymmetry in power inherent in these figures enforces a change in the balancing behaviour of rival powers away from so-called hard, military balancing towards alternative measures of soft balancing against the United States, argues Pape (2005).

In contrast to other advocates of soft balancing such as T. V. Paul (2005:59) Pape insists on the outright aggressive unilateralism of the U.S. “giving other major powers reason to fear its power” (2005:9). But directly confronting the United States in the traditional hard balancing manner of military build-ups, war-fighting alliances, and transfers of military technology to U.S. opponents is too costly for any individual state and too risky for multiple states, he continues. Instead, major powers are likely to adopt soft balancing measures: that is, *actions that do not directly challenge U.S. military preponderance but that use non-military tools to delay, frustrate and undermine aggressive unilateral U.S. military policies* (italics mine; *ibid.*:10). The key tactics behind a strategy of soft balancing are the following according to Pape (*ibid.* 36f.):

- Territorial denial
- Entangling diplomacy
- Economic strengthening
- Signals of resolve to balance

The first bullet point implies *to deny the United States access to military bases* on one’s own territory, something pretty close to hard balancing, but still something I intend to address in the empirical analysis below. As for *entangling diplomacy*, the idea is to use international institutions such as the veto of the United Nations’ Security Council to delay a superior state’s plan for war. *Economic strengthening* is very much what the BRIC phenomenon is all about Pape would certainly conclude from their rising GDPs poised to outperform that of the U.S.

In his words, “The most reliable long-run measure of a state’s power is the size of its gross national product, because economic strength ultimately determines the limit of a state’s military potential” (*ibid.*:18). Further, Pape expects economic strengthening to materialize via regional trading blocs. Finally, *signals of resolve to balance* means to flash the ultimate option of hard balancing. Pape views this and the whole strategy of soft balancing as a game of coordination (*ibid.*: 16f.) because the preponderance of the U.S. unipolarity renders single-power balancing impossible.

Indeed, phrased in the jargon of the International Society school of international relations, the BRICs constitute a great power *concert* in international relations – a club of great powers seeking to commit themselves to collective action (Watson, 1992: 238-250). Already now there is quite some BRIC summitry to write home about – summitry that has raised the controversial issue of leaving the dollar aside as the world’s primary reserve currency.

Concludingly, all four bullet points may serve as operational research items to address in my subsequent analysis of whether the BRICs as actors display a strategic culture of soft balancing. I shall examine words and deeds of all four powers in the BRIC acronym order of appearance: first Brazil, then Russia, then India, and last, but certainly not least China which has the status as the undisputed backbone of the BRIC concept as acknowledged by O’Neill (Skak, 2010). In addition I shall seek to question and ultimately challenge the interpretation of soft balancing.

4. Soft balancing by Brazil

Brazil used to be seen as a less convincing economic success story compared to the other BRICs and also as the ‘quintessential soft power BRIC’ implying not at all a country disposed towards soft neorealist balancing (Sotero and Armijo, 2007). The first observation is no longer valid as even the respectable British weekly *The Economist* concluded in November 2009 that ‘Brazil Takes off’. Brazil’s GDP grew 7.7 per cent in 2010. What about the last observation?

Concerning the first item, territorial denial this happens to be one field where Brazil comes out as practising rather harsh soft balancing as observed by Daniel Flemes (2007), Jonas Kraft (2010) and others. Thus, Brazil declined to let the U.S. use Brazilian aircraft bases and other military facilities in the Amazon in 2002. Brazil also reacted negatively to U.S. plans to use military bases in Colombia which the influential Brazilian foreign minister Celso Amorim described as “a strong military presence whose aim and capability seems to go well beyond what might be needed inside Colombia” (*Agence France Presse*, 2009-08-02).

Furthermore, Brazil does practice entangling diplomacy akin to that of France and Russia, a case in point being its vocal criticism of the U.S. decision to wage war against Iraq in March 2003. On that occasion Amorim said the Brazilian government would officially condemn the actions of the United States for disrespecting the United Nations' authority as it searched for a peaceful alternative to war with Iraq (*Newsmax Wires*, 2003-03-20). Arguably, Brazil’s soft balancing against the United States’ war in Iraq in the context of France’s, Russia’s, and Germany’s pioneering entangling diplomacy was something of a free ride. This, however, cannot be said of my second case of entangling diplomacy, namely Brazil and Turkey’s concerted effort of thwarting Obama’s hard line towards Iran through the controversial tripartite deal of May 17, 2010. Analysts saw this episode as heralding a new world order where the rising powers of the ‘South’ set the tune (*Le Monde*, 2010-05-19). Amorim wrote:

“Countries like Brazil, China, India, South Africa and a few others are the “new kids on the block” among global players that shape international relations. They legitimately aspire to greater participation in international institutions, which still suffer from a “democratic deficit.” Global decisions can no longer be made without listening to their voices.” (quoted from Sotero, 2010: 73).

Brazil also seeks to strengthen itself economically through the establishment of regional trading blocs and even went as far as derailing the U.S.-sponsored Free Trade Area of the Americas in late 2003 (McCoy, 2009). Brazil is broadly seen as key initiator behind *Mercosur* (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay) and *Unasur* (uniting all of South America). According to the Danish expert on Brazil and Latin America, Steen Fryba Christensen, Brazil attaches great significance to Mercosur and to the Buenos Aires consensus of 2003 that led to Unasur as a tool for strengthening Brazil’s and all of Latin America’s negotiating position vis-à-vis the United States and the European Union/EU (Skak, 2010: 81 ff.).

But Brazil is opposed to the idea of equipping Mercosur with supranational powers similar to EU, and Christensen also observes domestic criticism of Brazil’s acceptance of the safeguard mechanism of Mercosur securing Brazil’s eternal rival Argentina the right to protect its infant industries in the vein of the classical economic philosopher Friedrich List (*ibid.*: 96, 55). What this suggests is that Brazil’s apparent soft balancing is less of an abstract strategy of soft

balancing originating in polarity at the global level as held by Pape (2005) and more of plain nationalism pursued by a proud people entertaining a slightly local outlook upon world affairs.

Moreover, whatever significance Brazil attaches to Mercosur, Unasur and noble visions of regionalism great power concert-building in the format of both the BRICs and IBSA (the triangular concert among India, Brazil and South Africa) is what really counts for the Brazilians (Flemes, 2007). Clearly, it is the BRIC concept more than anything else - not least Brazil's hosting of the April 2010 BRIC summit in Brasilia - that has propelled Brazil to preeminence in world affairs ahead of any other country in Latin America - including emerging markets like Mexico and political rivals like Argentina and Venezuela under the Presidency of the ultra-populist Hugo Chavez. BRIC solidarity may indeed have emboldened the Brazilian Finance Minister Guido Mantega to lead the charge against the U.S. dollar as reserve currency at the G20 summit in Seoul last year and declare: "The U.S. economy used to reign absolute, it was the strongest economy in the world and stood out from the others. Today that is no longer the case" (Simpkins, 2010). To the displeasure of World Bank Director Robert Zoellick, a U.S. citizen, Mantega spoke of a 'currency war' to stress the urgency of the situation.

Within BRIC, the bilateral Brazil-China relationship must be singled out as done by a senior official in Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs ('Itamaraty'; *Xinhua*, 2010-02-15). China is the largest trading partner of Brazil – not the United States or any other American country – and the two great powers have a 'strategic dialogue' on issues of mutual concern, and further take part in the so-called BASIC concert uniting Brazil, South Africa, India, and China, a veto player at the COP15 summit in Copenhagen, December 2009. As stated above, China is the structural linchpin of the BRICs, and its strategic culture is often taken a priori to be neorealist. But is it? Well, see below in the China section of the present contribution!

Finally, concerning signals of resolve to balance the United States, neorealists would insist that this is the essential benefit Brazil receives from BRIC solidarity. The more consolidated and institutionalized the BRICs become the more of soft balancing bordering on hard balancing is being cultivated inside the group. In short, the BRICs as a vehicle for burden sharing, for lessening transaction costs of hard balancing etc. But readers should not be carried away by the evidence of soft balancing accumulated thus far.

As argued by Terry L. McCoy (2009) Brazil's strategic culture is solidly rooted in 2nd image conditions of political economy – Brazil's economic opening and the complexity of its business interests along with the nation's drive for *grandeza*. Regarding the latter great power instinct, in real life Brazil would hardly ever threaten and challenge the United States the way Fidel Castro did in October 1962. Instead, Brazil is being respected and even admired for its efforts in the field of peacekeeping – 38 such missions since 1948 including Angola, Mozambique and currently Haiti (Brigagao and Aguilar, 2009). Brazil pursues a much broader and notably more pragmatic agenda than that presumed within the neorealist theory of soft balancing. Relations with the U.S. are not that bad despite clashes at the Doha rounds in the WTO and elsewhere. For instance Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva once told a press conference together with U.S. President Bush that their two countries were searching for the "so-called G spot" in trade discussions. If anything, Lula's successor Dilma Rousseff is expected to seek to improve relations with Washington and leave aside the overreach of his unsuccessful May 2010 Iran-initiative (Sotero, 2010).

5. Soft balancing by Russia

Russia is definitely no ‘quintessential soft power’, but entertains a pretty neorealist strategic culture of ‘*kto kogo*’ (‘who wins over whom’) as illustrated by the opening quotation from Putin’s Munich speech. So one would expect exactly the Kremlin to display stiff and unswerving opposition to any attempt by the United States to establish military bases in Russia or nearby. There are no U.S. bases in Russia proper, but this is not the whole story. On the occasion of ‘9/11’ Putin chose to align himself with U.S. President George W. Bush and his war on terror. What is more, Putin gave his consent to the use of airfields – Manas - and air space in nearby Kyrgyzstan to support the waging of war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. It is true that during the corrupt and incompetent regime of Kurmanbek Bakiev, Russia was having second thoughts about the presence of the U.S. forces in Kyrgyzstan and tried to prevent their stay. But at the same time and to this very day the Russians have been careful not to seriously hinder the ISAF operation led by NATO in Afghanistan and are more cooperative than not when it comes to helping NATO by allowing logistical use of Uzbek or Kyrgyz territory. Once again a more complex pattern of interests than those predicted by the proponents of soft balancing.

Concerning entangling diplomacy Russia has often used the United Nations’ Security Council and other institutional avenues to thwart U.S. agendas, a prime example being the triangular diplomacy among France, Germany and Russia against the U.S. decision to wage war in Iraq. There is little doubt that for Russia, the important thing about being elevated to the status of a BRIC world economic powerhouse is the option of collectively – i.e. discreetly – pursuing additional entangling diplomacy, for instance by demanding better representation in global institutions. At any rate, Russia is the BRIC that was most enthusiastic about the concept from an early date, so nowadays the BRICs are always being singled out in Russian foreign and security policy doctrines as well as in the yearly ‘state of the Federation’ speeches held by the Russian President as a key target for Russian diplomacy (Skak, 2010: 115-160).

But beneath the obvious soft balancing against the United States in Russian strategic culture including the presumably warm ‘strategic partnership’ with China dating back to 1996 – launched to counter NATO’s eastward expansion (Oldberg, 2005: 44) - there is quite another Russian agenda of attaching priority to the E.U. and the U. S. as Russia’s vital ‘modernization allies’ (*Programma effektivnogo ispol’zovaniya na sistemnoi osnove vneshnepoliticheskikh faktorov v tseliakh dolgosrochnogo razvitiya Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 2010). Compared to these Western partners the BRICs are of secondary importance and among them China only of tertiary importance according to the cited document leaked in May 2010 to *Russkii Newsweek*. Compare the following excerpt from this “secret” Russian foreign policy doctrine:

“Special attention must be directed towards monitoring the growing role of China in international affairs, including having in mind the consequences of Beijing’s activities for our regional and global interests. We must proceed from the fundamental importance of keeping China on a position of acting jointly with us – taking into account the situational dynamics – within the G20, BRIC and SCO and also the Security Council of the U.N. (in which our support is often of greater significance for the Chinese than their support is for us nowadays).” (ibid.; translation mine/MS).

What we see here is a Russia itself entangled into a tricky diplomatic game of soft balancing not just against the United States, but also China complicating the picture further. It is the sheer geographic proximity of China combined with demographic asymmetries that force Russia into to balance of threat behaviour as argued by the neorealist Stephen Walt (1985) rather than soft balancing of the U.S. superpower at the global level of polarity as held by Pape (2005). For this reason we see not just occasional Russian bandwagoning with the United States and NATO, but also Russian bandwagoning with India and vice versa (see the section on India below).

The document I just quoted contains a very comprehensive shopping list of Russian foreign policy desiderata making it very difficult to uphold a thesis of simple soft balancing. If anything, the bottom line of the document is the primacy of modernization alliances implying a security policy dictated by Russia's globalized political economy just as in the case of Brazil.

Accordingly, economic strengthening is clearly a leitmotif in current Russian strategic culture. Russia occasionally pursues rather aggressive foreign economic policies, for instance in the shape of gas wars against its post-Soviet neighbours. Again we must ask: does this pattern match the predictions inherent in soft balancing theory? Is Russia's resort to bullying its neighbours in the region not counterproductive with respect to pushing these countries into the arms of either the United States or China – via the SCO - or both?! Monographs on the integration going on inside the Commonwealth of Independent States or CIS have been published under the title *Getting It Wrong* to stress how misguided Russia's policy is when it comes to regional trading blocs (Olcott et al., 1999). True, Putin has been signalling greater determination to integrate Russia with Belarus and Kazakhstan than to have Russia join the WTO, but this was mainly another way of shooting Russia itself in the foot, analysts agree. Not least the Russian ruling strata's incapacity to diversify the export structure of the country away from energy puts Russia in the category of mixed economic success stories among the BRICs.

Lastly, there is the soft balancing option of signalling resolve to balance hard. It is in this respect that Russia stands out as a soft balancer of some clout – virtually as a *hard balancer*. I am referring to Russia's punitive war against Georgia in the summer of 2008 as a proxy war against the United States as reprisal for having toyed too much with the idea of inviting Georgia and Ukraine inside NATO. Interestingly, this measure of soft balancing never received any support from the other BRICs. Perhaps to the surprise of Russia, China would not dream of recognizing the two breakaway republics South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states despite then Russian Prime Minister Putin's framing of the whole thing as logical and legitimate in the context of Western recognition of Kosovo. Since then Russia's resolve to balance against the United States has weakened and the trend in U.S.-Russian as well as NATO-Russian relations is to try to 'reset' the relationship for the better.

All in all then, it is problematic to interpret even such a diehard neorealist strategic culture as the Russian one as a convincing, let alone successful case of soft balancing.

6. Soft balancing by India

India's great power ambitions was articulated as early as 1946, a year ahead of the gaining of independence from Great Britain, and has been repeated ever since both in words and deeds

(Wagner, 2010). Paradoxically, the impact of India's controversial nuclear explosions in 1998 pales in comparison with the effect from India's elevation to BRIC status through O'Neill's long-term economic extrapolations as observed by the Danish expert on India Jørgen Dige Pedersen. This underlines the myopia of the neorealist military hardware approach to the dynamics of international relations. Also in other respects India challenges the thesis of soft balancing.

As for territorial denial, there are no U.S. bases in India despite lasting interest by the Pentagon (Flemes, 2007: 16). This stance reflects India's track record of non-alignment dating back to 1954 when India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru launched '*panchsheel*', the five principles of peaceful coexistence. In the words, of former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, "India remains what I would call a 'sovereignty hawk'" (*Financial Times*, 2007-08-03). Even so it would be grossly misleading to portray India as an anti-American power in Asia and hence as a mainstream soft balancer.

India is the BRIC that gave the war on terror launched by U.S. President Bush jr. the warmest embrace. India could immediately identify itself with his struggle against Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden's sympathizers. On 26th November 2008 Islamist fanatics attacked several places in the city of Mumbai killing 164 and wounding double as many. Intimate cooperation in the field of counterterrorism is therefore very much what the India-United States '*strategic partnership*' is all about, another spectacular dimension being joint exercises and exchange of military hardware. India also stands out among the BRICs as having embraced the U.S. plans for a missile defence and for not really having criticized the war in Iraq at the level of decision makers despite popular resistance (Kraft, 2010:13).

Neorealists mindful of the problem about arguing that India is a soft balancer against the U.S. might resort to the concept of bandwagoning, of aligning oneself with the dominant power as the relevant tool for explaining India's strategic culture. But bandwagoning carries connotations of involuntary balancing, of submission that do not quite fit the India-U.S. relationship. This is because there is a significant dimension of common political values that fosters genuine friendship and respect between the two great powers. In November 2001, Bush and then-Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee agreed that "terrorism threatens not only the security of the United States and India, but also our efforts to build freedom, democracy and international security and stability around the world." (quoted from Kronstadt, 2007: 29). In other words, 2nd image factors of a democratic political make-up obviously count here – even more than in the case of Brazil, another full-blown democracy among the BRICs.

In other words, entangling diplomacy is not so typical for India as for the other BRICs except as rationale behind its long-time cooperation with Brazil on trade disputes in the WTO as well as India's diplomacy within the triangular IBSA concert uniting these two BRICs with South Africa (Flemes, 2007). India does appreciate the BRIC concert as an arena for promoting the common agenda of these four rising powers at the expense of the old industrial great powers including the U.S. Here I should like to quote what Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said at the occasion of the BRIC summit in Brasilia, April 2010 illuminating India's approach to BRIC cooperation:

"We are four large countries with abundant resources, large populations and diverse societies. . . . We aspire for rapid growth for ourselves and for an external environment

that is conducive to our development goals"[...] "Our grouping includes two of the largest energy producers and two of the largest consumers in the world. We can cooperate in both upstream and downstream areas, and in the development of new fuels and clean energy technologies" (PM pitches for close ties among BRIC nations, 2010).

These phrases can, however, also be taken as evidence that India pursues a much broader agenda of economic development including even climate concerns than that envisioned within the thesis of soft balancing. Like in the case of Brazil and Russia, India's strategic culture is significantly shaped by the country's economic opening since 1991 (Skak, 2010: 163-207).

India certainly pursues a strategy of economic strengthening, but less so through regional trade blocs. India enjoys only observer status in the SCO, and although there is an ASEAN-India dialogue, India's trade is to some extent directed towards the EU market. China is gaining importance as trade and business partner, and recently the two Asian giants agreed to heighten their trade volume to 100 bn. \$ by 2015. But the Sino-Indian relationship is not fully benign.

This is a result of the brief, but bloody war between China and India in 1962 as well as India's pro-Soviet inclination during the Cold War, when there was a parallel Sino-Soviet Cold War. Accordingly, India's *signals of resolve to balance* have China as the target rather than the U.S. Just as during the Cold War they involve the Kremlin on the side of India although the Russo-Indian relationship lost much of its significance with the demise of the Soviet Union. The perceived conflicts with China may also explain the trend towards Indian bandwagoning with the U.S. in stead of soft balancing. Recently, U.S. President Obama reciprocated by expressing strong support for India's candidacy for a permanent seat in the U.N. Security Council in November 2010, a move that was met with the great joy and enthusiasm in India.

7. Soft balancing by China

The above analysis would lead one to expect that China pursues a more consistent soft balancing compared to the other BRICs. This is actually the case, but there are additional twists to China's behaviour as shown by Kraft (2010) and others. It is important to be sensitive to the ongoing changes in Chinese strategic culture and to take into account its unofficial aspects.

Regarding territorial denial there are no U.S. military bases in China, because China like the other BRICs is a 'sovereignty hawk'. As evidence of this one might cite China's angry reaction to the crashing of a U.S. spy plane on Hainan Island on March 31, 2001. Furthermore, China joined Russia's campaign to push the U.S. out of Central Asia in later years. Notwithstanding this, China tacitly approves of the ISAF operation led by NATO in Afghanistan – as does India by the way. According to senior Danish defence officials, both the Chinese and the Indians off the record express relief over NATO's presence on the ground in Afghanistan as if realizing that the two Asian giants might easily slip into mutual armed conflict if they were to manage the security challenge arising from the turbulence in this neighbour to China on their own. As observed by Michael Glosny (2010) Chinese foreign ministry officials also express a more positive evaluation of America's presence in East Asia.

China does pursue entangling diplomacy in the U.N. Security Council and elsewhere, but as the above analysis of Russia revealed, the Kremlin feels that China is free riding upon Russia's

willingness to engage itself in soft balancing against the United States. Moreover, China's U.N. diplomacy appears more flexible and enlightened than that of Russia provided that the West is proceeding with tact. This is indicated by the evolution of China's policy towards Sudan. Once the Western world began to push behind the scenes for a more powerful chapter VII mandate behind the intervention in Darfur in 2007, China followed suit (*Sudan Tribune*, 2007-07-31). In connection with the recent referendum in South Sudan paving the way for an independent state of South Sudan, China's attitude was also remarkably pragmatic. It is tempting to argue that the China's rise to economic great power status enforces a more enlightened strategic culture (Wei, 2007) – an argument to be reiterated later.

China clearly pursues a policy of economic strengthening implying soft balancing against the United States. This is how most analysts interpret China's push for a new reserve currency in the shape of the IMF's Special Drawing Rights (SDR; *Wall Street Journal*, 2009-06-29). At the same time, China has shown more restraint and caution on this tricky issue than Russia – realizing that too radical a change may cause financial turbulence anew (Glosny, 2010). Like other BRICs China works through regional trading blocs and took the initiative to creating the SCO – of which China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are members - a forum gaining greater weight than the Russia-sponsored CIS. However, the Danish China expert, Clemens Stubbe Østergaard, perceives the triangular cooperation between China, Japan, and South Korea launched at the Fukuoka meeting in December 2008 as the true masterstroke (Skak, 2010: 229).

China does in no way limit itself to regional approaches – see the section above on Brazil, not the only trade partner for China in Latin America. On Christmas Eve 2010, Beijing announced it would use the occasion of its hosting of the 2011 BRIC summit to invite South Africa to join the BRIC group. This particular initiative has less to do with economic strengthening than with political strengthening of the soft balancing kind – South Africa is a much weaker economy than the original BRICs in several respects. This politically loaded invitation happens to put India in an awkward position despite its own IBSA outreach to South Africa with Brazil (Bhadrakumar, 2011). This source quotes from the Chinese People's Daily:

"The role of South Africa's traditional trading partners - Western countries - has been lessened significantly ... China is South Africa's largest trading partner, and South Africa is the largest destination in Africa for China's direct investment ... By joining the BRIC countries, South Africa also hopes to become the gateway for the BRIC countries' entry into Africa ... South Africa has the ability to promote agendas related to Africa on the international arena ... This is an important factor that makes South Africa valuable as a BRIC country." (ibid.)

There is a tenor of soft balancing against the West here, but the bottom line appears to be plain economic expansion. As argued by Wei Liang (2007), China's globalization simply pushes Chinese strategic culture in a more complex, liberal direction. In other words a logic akin to the 2nd image dynamics of strategic culture established above in the case of the other three BRICs.

Lastly, analysts are eagerly discussing if there are Chinese *signals of resolve to balance* hard beneath the official strategic culture of China's peaceful rise. Admittedly, the jury is still out on this vital point. Offensive realists arguing in the vein of John Mearsheimer (Tragedy, 1990?) would insist that with (economic) power grows the appetite for more (e.g. global political)

power – hegemony in short. As evidence they would cite hawkish Chinese views like the idea that China must keep its military strategy more or less hidden while maintaining powerful armed forces in order to be able to extend its influence beyond its traditional sphere (Geopolitics on Chinese Terms, 2010). They would stress the ambiguity of Chinese maxims according to which China's military power must be "flexible outside, firm within" (ibid.). Not least would they cite quantitative and qualitative data documenting the military build up in China, the acquisition of an aircraft carrier, the possible construction of a Chinese Stealth plane, Chinese cyber war capacity etc.

To be sure there is a big difference in magnitude between China's military and global economic and political ambitions and those of Brazil. But there are other points to take into account. To some extent China has "outsourced" its signals of resolve to balance hard to Russia. Much more than Russia, China is aware of avoiding the pitfalls of arming itself to death as did the Soviet Union and has relied much on Russian military R & D efforts by importing arms from both the Soviet Union and Russia. Also politically, China has outsourced its need for hard balancing against the United States to Russia as the Russians themselves realize. The sombre conclusion thus far is that China is a much smarter and hence more dangerous challenger than the hyper-militarized Soviet Union ruled by the Bolsheviks ever was – notwithstanding the fact that the RMA of the U.S. translates into a military budget almost seven times the size of China's military budget (based on 2009-data from SIPRI Yearbook, 2010).

That is, IF China really is a challenger – and this is still a big if judging from the many in-depth analyses tending to answer this question negatively: China is not a genuine challenger, but growing into 'a status quo power' (Wei, 2007); it is a 'dissatisfied responsible great power' (Bresling, 2010), 'China is not determinedly internally or externally balancing against the United States' (Johnston, 1999) etc. One litmus test of China's resolve to ultimately balance the U.S. hard is the Chinese reception of the concept of G2, i.e. the duopoly of China and the United States as envisioned by C. Fred Bergsten and repeated by Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, Niall Ferguson ('Chimerica') and others. Here I should like to quote from one thorough analysis:

"... although foreign analysts may call for a G-2, Premier Wen Jiabao and most Chinese experts have criticized the concept as inappropriate and infeasible, arguing that China is too weak to take on such responsibility and recognizing that endorsing the idea would harm China's diplomacy and isolate it from the developing world. In fact, rather than being eager to be seen as part of a G-2 leading and managing the world, China's leaders are much happier to continue to maintain a relatively low profile as a developing country, cooperate with other emerging developing countries, and benefit from this cooperation while not being seen as confronting the United States." (Glosny, 2010: 20-21).

To conclude, one should not be naïve about China, because China is a moving target in world affairs. However, some of the dynamics unfolding are globalization dynamics constraining China and pushing its core national interest in the direction of international society building rather than stiff balancing against the United States. This may be what the BRIC phenomenon is all about – including Brazil, India and not least China acting as a force disciplining the urge towards hard balancing in the case of Russia (Skak, 2010: 155). Similarly, it was instructive to watch China together with Russia joining forces with the U.S. in the strengthening of sanctions against Iran hereby going against their maverick BRIC buddy, Brazil as possible catalyst for Brazil's likely reconsideration of its Iran policy as hypothesized by Paulo Sotero (2010).

8. Challenging the neorealist approach to the BRIC phenomenon

By proceeding in the manner of strategic culture analysis I already distanced myself from neorealism as this is a school within the study of international relations that holds all states to be like units, i.e. equally neorealist. By contrast I treated the soft balancing of the BRICs as an empirical question. Let me recapitulate the general criticism often raised against neorealism:

- *methodologically* neorealism overlooks 2nd image explanations, i.e. explaining by the nature of the political system of states, their internal societal dynamics; resources etc.
- *Ontologically* neorealism blinds itself to the complex non-military dimensions of world affairs. The latter makes it tricky to pursue persistent policies of a zero sum-nature.

As for the methodological criticism, the empirical analysis of the BRICs often pointed to domestic factors in the shape of the political economy of the BRICs as driver of their foreign and security policy preferences. As my Danish BRIC colleagues and I argue, the rise of the BRICs as great power actors in world affairs stems from a deliberate choice made by decision makers of their country's economic opening and ensuing globalization (Skak, 2010: 13 ff.).

As early as 1978/79, Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese leader of the time embarked upon a policy of China's 'Four Modernizations' which slowly, but irreversibly opened China for the 3rd image forces of globalization. Similarly, following the crisis of hyperinflation in Brazil, the military junta ceded power to a popularly elected president, Collor de Mello who in 1989 initiated the reforms that led Brazil away from import substitution towards export-led industrialization. In the Soviet Union Mikhail S. Gorbachev launched *perestroika* in a failed attempt to reform the defunct Soviet economy – hereby paving the way for the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union.

The subsequent privatization dismantling the Communist command economy by Russian President Boris Yeltsin's team of reformers equipped Russia well for the 1998 crisis, so that from 1999 and onwards Russia was on a course of steep growth and general recovery. India had to follow suit and give up its Soviet-inspired import substitution model for the benefit of export orientation once its key Soviet economic and security policy partner collapsed. So in 1991 Prime Minister Narasimha Rao began a series of economic reforms opening the closed Indian economy for the forces of global competition. The rest is BRIC history.

Just one additional point about the BRIC phenomenon: All four BRICs opted for WTO membership – and only Russia has not been successful in this respect. What this means is that *the BRICs are united in a policy of world economic and political participation* – implying a win/win-outlook on world affairs. The decision makers in all four BRICs may express criticism of contemporary international institutions, but evidently they all realize that they have profited enormously from participating in the extant world order largely established after 1945 by the Western powers. In this sense the BRICs already represent a strategic culture of 'responsible shareholders' to use Zoellick's apt term (Roberts, 2010). It is on this account that the thesis of soft balancing fails - namely because of its in-built zero sum-ontology of states calculating only relative gains. Neorealism remains blind to the complex nature of state interests.

Also in another respect it is important to explain BRIC strategic culture on the 2nd image level-of-analysis. As observed in the empirical analysis above there is a powerful undercurrent of soft balancing against the United States in the strategic culture of all four BRICs. Often,

however, this appears to reflect anti-American impulses in the BRIC citizenries at the grass-root level than the decision maker's own strategic cultures. This applies to the nationalistic aspirations of the Brazilians I believe, and I am sure this is true of the Russians. Concerning Indians this happened to be the case in the context of the war in Iraq and the same seems to be true regarding China. Neorealists like Robert Kagan do resort to nationalism as causal factor but hereby they betray their neorealist credentials of focusing on polarity (cf. Johnston, 1999). All in all then, the neorealist thesis of soft balancing may have its merits, but it tends to obscure more than it reveals about BRIC strategic culture.

However, when it comes to the second ontological flaw in neorealism, its blindness to non-military aspects of world affairs Pape (2005) and others are to be congratulated for powerfully updating balance-of-power theory to contemporary world affairs. By moving away from the orthodoxy of hard balancing towards a much more sophisticated argument of economic and collective balancing through great power concerts, soft balancing is a really a leap forward. In this respect soft balancing overlaps with another neorealism-inspired concept, namely that of geo-economics launched by Edward N. Luttwak (1990) as well as the concept of competition state launched by Philip Cerny (1990) as clues to state behaviour in a globalized world.

Nevertheless, be it soft balancing or geo-economics, insofar as the ontology remains one of zero-sum state calculus their explanations do not adequately explain BRIC behaviour. Moreover, the theory of soft balancing is pretty blind to factors like resource endowment, geography, demographic dynamics as rather obvious determinants of BRIC strategic culture. By contrast, a full-blown strategic culture analysis addresses exactly such contextual factors.

Conclusion: the BRIC powers as actors in world affairs: soft balancing or ...?

The above analysis was launched as an attempt to analyze actual foreign and security policy intentions of the BRICs and hereby to challenge the neorealist approach to power politics within political science. The point of departure was the following research questions:

- *What unites the four BRICs – Brazil, Russia, India and China – in terms of power politics? Specifically, was the British scholar Andrew Hurrell (2006:16) right when arguing that so-called soft balancing ... "does form a very important element of the policies of Brazil, Russia, India and China"?*
- *Does the BRIC phenomenon – i.e. their stunning economic growth and standing as the 'fab four' among emerging markets – vindicate the approach of power politics in the shape of neorealism? Specifically, do the BRICs behave according to the thesis of 'soft balancing'?*

The empirical analysis was framed as a strategic culture analysis, i.e. a study of actual patterns of security policy considerations and conduct in Brazil, Russia, India and China zooming into their words and deeds in relation to the United States, secondly other institutional actors. A full-blown strategic culture analysis would have to systematically address 2nd image contextual factors as well as security policy doctrines of the BRICs and other documents and actual deeds in a meticulous manner; something going far beyond the limits of a conference paper.

In reality, my empirical analysis was a much less ambitious venture of pinpointing significant foreign and security policy patterns and episodes in Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Even so it was a fairly systematic inquiry into four dimensions of soft balancing invented by Pape (2005):

- Territorial denial
- Entangling diplomacy
- Economic strengthening
- Signals of resolve to balance

My findings are that there are certainly significant elements of soft balancing in the security policy considerations and conduct of all four BRICs – so YES! Hurrell (2006) would seem to be right when positing the BRICs to be united in a common strategic culture as soft balancers.

Regarding Brazil, the leitmotif of territorial denial is important, and Brazil also went into entangling diplomacy of its own in May 2010 together with Turkey, another G20 power. The record of economic strengthening is a bit more mixed – Brazil is a ‘sovereignty hawk’ in the context of e.g. Mercosur - and Brazil’s resolve to balance hard must really be questioned. In fact, Brazil under Rousseff is expected to improve its relationship with the United States.

Regarding Russia, territorial denial is less universal than one might expect and as for entangling diplomacy the recently leaked “secret” foreign policy doctrine of Russia reveals second thoughts about China’s “outsourcing” of its own resolve to balance to Russia. Besides beneath the surface of strategic partnership there is an undercurrent of balancing against China in Russia and a remarkable new trend of seeking to establish modernization alliances with the EU and secondly, the U.S. In short, a Russian win-win approach to relations with the West.

Regarding India, territorial denial is felt, yet India is the BRIC with the most harmonious relationship with the U.S. including shared values like democracy. For India, the BRIC forum obviously plays into its economic strengthening as seen in India’s appreciation of the almost organic division of labour among the BRICs into two energy producers and two energy consumers etc. However, India is somewhat isolated from regional trading blocs.

Regarding China, there are qualifications to the pattern of territorial denial and entangling diplomacy. China is by no means limited to a regional approach to economic strengthening as hypothesized by Pape and has invited South Africa to join the BRICs at the 2011 summit. The sticking point is China’s resolve to balance hard, a question examined at some length where I believe Glosny (2010) is right: China is not preparing to challenge the U.S. in earnest.

The penultimate part of the analysis contained a broader criticism of the neorealist soft balancing understanding of the BRICs exposing the profound 2nd image nature of the BRIC phenomenon as already displayed in the four chapters on each BRICs’ operational strategic culture. The problematic point about neorealism is its zero sum- and relative gains approach to the national interest of each BRIC. Yes, the BRICs are rising powers, but this does not automatically turn them into challengers – not least in view of their track record as responsible shareholders due to the fact that they acknowledge themselves to be winners in the process of globalization (Skak, 2010; Roberts 2010). In other words, the emergence of soft balancing patterns of balance of power politics may reflect the fairly benign nature of world affairs!

This brings the discussion back to Hurrell (2006) who insists that it is the much less neorealist understanding of soft balancing by Paul (2005) that makes sense when it comes to the BRICs. According to Hurrell, the insight of soft balancing theory is not that of a militarily threatening U.S. unipole – i.e. the approach of Pape (2005) - but that “radically unbalanced power will permit the powerful to ‘to lay down the law’ to the less powerful, to skew the terms of cooperation in its own favour, to impose its own values” (Hurrell, 2006: 16). In short soft balancing as a contest among institution builders sharing the idea of legitimacy as core value.

This may not be a bad description of what the BRIC concert is all about, but it removes the whole argument far away from neorealism as a materialistic approach to world affairs and kicks the discussion into the field of the English School of International Society or the like. As already hinted by my earlier references to Adam Watson (1992) who offers an empirical analysis of the Concert of Europe (from 1814 and onwards) the BRIC phenomenon is obviously a case of great power concert involving mutual moderation and policy coordination e.g. prior to G20 summits. Directly challenging neorealism, Watson invented the concept of *raison de système* as just as important as more myopic considerations of *raison d'état* – that is considerations of global political stability and world order as opposed to instincts of power.

Is soft balancing such a bad theory after all? Not at all. It offers insight into BRIC affairs and above all, it updates balance of power theory by firmly removing neorealism from the myopia of hard balancing. However, in view of the fact that Pape (2005) sticks to old neorealist guns of hypothesizing ‘signals of resolve to balance’ hard and of presuming territorial denial to U.S. military bases the insight of soft balancing theory is limited.

To conclude, a NO to research question number two – the case of the BRICs does not vindicate neorealism as such nor soft balancing as mid range theory. There is simply more to the BRIC phenomenon than that including instances of balancing not against the United States but against one another. One must understand BRIC strategic culture not as an outcome of polarity but as an outcome of 2nd image logics, namely the original decision to open the BRIC economies for the mostly attractive forces of globalization leading the BRICs to have a far more complex pattern of interests and preferences including pragmatic, sophisticated and enlightened *raison de système* behaviour. This applies even to China as demonstrated above – China being the structural linchpin of the BRICs and the sticking point in terms of resolve to balance hard.

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