



# Emerging Powers and Peacekeeping: an Unlikely Normative Clash

by *Thierry Tardy*

## Key Points

- While India has long been one of the most important contributors to UN missions, other emerging powers such as China, Brazil, and South Africa have recently become key players of UN peacekeeping operations.
- The increasing role of emerging powers in peacekeeping raises the question of the posture they will adopt. Will they buy into the existing rules? Will they significantly shape them? Or will they contest them as they become real stakeholders in the Western-dominated liberal peacekeeping-peacebuilding realm?
- So far, the normative clash between two conceptions of handling crises through UN peace missions has not taken place. While challenging the existing practices would require a degree of convergence among emerging powers, such cohesion has not tangibly materialized and disparities among emerging countries abound.
- In the peacekeeping field, emerging powers present very different profiles that make any generalization difficult. Similarly, their increasing contribution to peacekeeping has not been matched by parallel efforts in the peacebuilding domain.
- Furthermore, a greater involvement of emerging powers in peace missions may impact their own conceptions of crisis management, and may induce pragmatism that would bring them closer to the current philosophy and practice.
- Finally, the peacekeeping-peacebuilding field may not be worth the fight that normative divergences can entail.

The rise of the so-called “emerging powers” has been largely debated in relation to the evolution of the international system, global power shifts and changing security governance norms and mechanisms. Alongside China, countries like Brazil or India have over the last couple of years resisted or opposed Western positions in different UN bodies, and have called into question the legitimacy of the current international security architecture.

These discussions are of direct interest to the crisis management field, as they raise the issue of the potential impact of the emerging powers’ increasing presence in peace operations on the peacekeeping-peacebuilding underlying philosophy and praxis. In other words, what kind of peacekeepers-peacebuilders will emerging powers be? Given their positions as potential challengers of the status quo, will they buy into the existing rules and practices (“norms-followers”), will they significantly shape them (“norms-setters”), or will they contest them (“norms-breakers”) as they become real stakeholders in the Western-dominated liberal peacekeeping-peacebuilding realm? More precisely, if normative divergences increasingly characterize the relationship between the North and emerging powers, how will this affect the crisis management field and the “peace-

keeping consensus”?

## Emerging Powers’ Growing Role in Peace Operations

While India has long been one of the most important contributors to UN missions (ranking third among contributors in January 2012 with 8,093 troops deployed), other emerging powers such as China, Brazil, and South Africa have more recently become key players of peace operations. China is the first troop and police contributor of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, with 1,896 uniformed personnel as of January 2012 deployed

in 12 missions. Brazil has also significantly increased its presence in UN operations over the last decade, with a particular focus on its own region, through the mission in Haiti. Brazil’s contribution amounts to 2,488 in January 2012, which places it at the first rank of Latin America’s countries. In the same vein, South Africa has become more visible in Africa both in UN and African Union (AU) missions. It deploys 2,100 personnel in UN operations, asserting itself

as a regional power able and willing to shape the African security environment (see Table 1).

Peace operations provide an important profile enhancement tool for emerging powers. For China, the need to be perceived as a “responsible power” and to reassure

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**Table 1: Troop and Police Contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations – January 2012**

Source: Monthly Summary of Contributors as of 31 Jan. 2012, UN website.

Country (Presence in UN operations with more than 100 personnel)	Rank	Troops	Police	Experts	Total
<b>India</b> MONUSCO (DRC) MINUSTAH (Haiti) UNIFIL (Lebanon) UNDOF (Golan Heights) UNMIL (Liberia) UNMISS (South Sudan)	3	6,994	51 + 971 Formed Police Units	77	8,093
<b>Brazil</b> MINUSTAH (Haiti) UNIFIL (Lebanon)	11	2,444	17	27	2,488
<b>South Africa</b> MONUSCO (DRC) UNAMID (Darfur)	14	2,015	58	27	2,100
<b>China</b> MONUSCO (DRC) UNAMID (Darfur) UNIFIL (Lebanon) UNMIL (Liberia) UNMISS (South Sudan)	16	1,788	71	37	1,896
<b>Total of UN Troops</b>					<b>99,030</b>

its neighbours about its “peaceful intentions”,<sup>1</sup> makes contribution to international peacekeeping a valuable foreign policy instrument. For Brazil, India, and South Africa, contributing to peace operations helps assert the position of regional leader as well as it serves international objectives, including the aspiration to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Brazil’s heavy role in the MINUSTAH in Haiti supports both Brazilian aspirations to regional leadership and to permanent Security Council membership. In the same vein, through its presence in peace-making and peacekeeping efforts on the African continent, post-apartheid South Africa asserts its authority and legitimacy within Africa and the AU as well as it demonstrates a capacity to play with the great powers. Similarly, for India, the only emerging power with a long-standing presence in UN operations, such role matches regional power politics considerations (in relation with Pakistan) as well as serving Indian global aspirations.

The growing involvement of emerging powers in peace operations can have an impact at different levels. First, it breaks the paradigm by which crisis management is a North-South interaction with conflicts occurring in the South while the responses come from the North. The role of emerging powers in peacekeeping is one example, among others, of a South-South interaction pattern. Second, from a UN Secretariat point of view, an increased contribution of countries with large defence and police capabilities is seen as positive as it potentially provides an answer to the capability deficit that has structurally affected UN operations. The presence of several great powers in UN missions also enhances their legitimacy in the sense that it reinforces the idea of an “international community” acting through the

UN, as opposed to medium-sized countries carrying the bulk of the burden. For Western states, increased resources from non-Western powers may alleviate the pressure emanating from their limited involvement. While they are involved in other types of crisis management activities, in particular in NATO and EU operations, the role played by emerging powers in UN operations can be presented as an illustration of global crisis management burden-sharing.

Third, the involvement of emerging powers may impact peacekeeping and peacebuilding policies as they put forward different ideas or policy options than the prevailing ones. Emerging powers agree on some guiding conflict management principles. In particular, their narrow understanding of the concept of state sovereignty is equated by a relatively strict adherence to the three peacekeeping principles (impartiality, non resort to force and consent of the host state), and a general opposition to the conceptual overstretch that characterizes them. The insistence on state sovereignty is not only driven by a certain conception of international relations; it also has practical implications as it shapes emerging powers’ vision of the level of ambition of peace operations. Emerging countries would then promote a “light footprint” approach rather than heavier “generating dependence”<sup>2</sup> missions, insist on local ownership and states’ responsibilities, and warn against transplanting models from one region to another.<sup>3</sup> The critiques vary

***“The lines of convergence among emerging countries are more likely to be case-based rather than the result of a ‘Southern caucus’”***

1 B. Gill and C.-H. Huang, “China’s Expanding Role in Peacekeeping. Prospects and Policy Implications”, *SIPRI Policy Paper* 25, Nov. 2009, p.12.

2 See Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations, Special Political and Decolonization Committee of the GA, New York, 25 Oct. 2010.

3 See Statement by the Chinese Ambassador at the Security Council debate on Post-conflict Peacebuilding, 22 July 2009; Statement by the Indian Permanent Representative to the UN at the GA Informal Meeting on the 2010 Review of the Peacebuilding Commission, New York, 10 May 2010; and Proceedings of the C-34 debates, GA/PK/203, United Nations, 22 Feb. 2010, and GA/PK/204, United Nations, 23 Feb. 2010.

from one country to another, but reflect an overall uneasiness about the current practices. Moreover, it is the liberal approach as a panacea that is implicitly called into question. The Indian argument about its own “nation-building experience” or the Chinese rejection of “unified standards for peacebuilding endeavours” and emphasis on development as the central long-term objective of peacebuilding, attest to these normative divergences. This may impact peacekeeping-peacebuilding mandates whenever emerging powers sit at the Security Council or at the Peacebuilding Commission, or manage to get their position defended by others. Already, mandates are regularly softened at the Security Council to accommodate China’s positions, and the year 2011, with all emerging powers sitting at the Council, provided an interesting laboratory of their behaviours and tactics in shaping peacekeeping-peacebuilding mandates.

### **Emerging Powers versus the Western Agenda: No Looming Normative Clash**

While emerging powers may in the future represent a force that can potentially affect the way peacekeeping-peacebuilding activities are being run, the measurement of such impact is for the time being limited for at least four sets of reasons.

First, the characterization of emerging powers as an entity that could speak and act as such is empirically problematic. This raises the question of the existence of emerging powers as a political force bringing together liked-minded states and buttressing common interests. In general terms, such cohesion has not tangibly materialized and disparities among emerging countries abound. China occupies a particular position among emerging powers: its political system distinguishes it from the “league of democracies” that are gathered in the India-Brazil-South Africa Forum (IBSA), and its long-lasting rivalry with India – and lukewarm position on an Indian Security Council permanent seat – tends to downplay any prediction of a political alliance of emerging powers. Also, China’s Security Council permanent seat *de facto* places it in a different posture, while all three IBSA countries’ foreign policies are to a degree determined by their aspiration to join the restricted club. As a consequence, the lines of convergence among emerging countries are more likely to be case-based rather than the result of a “Southern caucus”. Likewise, the prospect of emerging countries banding together in case of political disagreement over peacekeeping or peacebuilding between one of them and Northern countries does not appear to be the most evident scenario. Brazilian policy in Haiti is not unrelated to the US-Brazil relationship, and even if Brazil has shown evidence of its independence *vis-à-vis* Northern countries over the last years, it arguably shares as many interests with the United States and the European Union as with India or China. The same is true for India whose relationship with the United States may well prevail over that with China on a potential North-South disagreement over peacekeeping.

Similarly, insofar as the critique of the liberal peace model is concerned, a united front is unlikely to occur. With

a few caveats on state sovereignty and the degree of intrusiveness, Brazil and India would presumably have little problem with the liberal peace approach. Indeed, Brazil’s policy as chair of the country-specific configuration for Guinea-Bissau in the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) has not revealed any significant distance from the traditional peacebuilding agenda. Even China would most likely put up with economic liberalization – provided that state consent is given – and only question the political dimension of liberal peace.

Second, emerging powers present very different peacekeeping profiles that make any generalizing difficult. With the exception of India which has always been an important troop contributor, the others have only recently started to see peace operations as vehicles of their own foreign policies. As of January 2012, India, Brazil, South Africa, and China were all in the top 20 of military and police contributors. Ten years ago, however, while India was already ranking 4<sup>th</sup>, China was 45<sup>th</sup>, Brazil was 48<sup>th</sup>, and South Africa was 46<sup>th</sup>.<sup>4</sup> For these three countries, while motivations and objectives begin to be relatively well documented, the story of the impact of their engagement is to be written. In the same vein, despite their growing importance, the three newcomers contribute less than countries with much more modest size and political and economic statures, such as Jordan, Nepal, or Senegal. Only China contributes significantly to several operations on different continents. But Brazil is mainly present in Haiti (and Lebanon), and South Africa participates in only two operations, both in Africa (MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and UNAMID in Darfur). Contrary to India, their civilian presence in UN peacekeeping operations, peace operations headquarters, and political missions is equally weak, or close to inexistent.

Furthermore, emerging countries offer different patterns of contribution to peace missions. India has a long record of providing both troops and “enablers” (such as helicopters), has had many high-ranking positions in UN missions, and regularly takes part in coercive actions, although it is uneasy about the term “robust peacekeeping”. South Africa has raised its profile as a peacemaker on the African continent before it became engaged in peacekeeping operations. In contrast, while Chinese cooperation is increasingly required for conflict resolution, China’s peace-making record is mixed, as was shown in the Darfur case where China first protected the Sudanese regime from sanctions and delayed the deployment of an operation, before it intervened in favour of the UN-AU mission. In the peacekeeping field, Chinese contribution has so far been confined to engineering battalions, field hospitals, and police personnel. The deployment of combat troops has been contemplated, but China would probably not consider coercive missions to the extent India does.

In financial terms, while China is now the 7<sup>th</sup> largest contributor to the peacekeeping budget (with 3.939 percent in 2010-2012) – right after the United States, Japan, Germany, Britain, France and Italy – Brazil, India, and South Africa remain weak financial players, with 0.322 percent for Brazil (comparable with Singapore), 0.107 percent for

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4 Monthly Summary of Contributors as of 31 Jan. 2002, UN website.

India (comparable with Slovenia), and 0.077 percent for South Africa (comparable with Venezuela).<sup>5</sup>

Most importantly, the increasing contribution of emerging powers to peacekeeping operations has not so far been matched by parallel efforts in the peacebuilding domain. Be it in the fields of humanitarian or development aid in post-conflict environments, emerging countries still lag behind countries of the North, in the policy debates, in the funding of programmes, and in their actual implementation. In the PBC for example, while peacebuilding could be an area where a normative disconnect between the prevailing norms and emerging powers preferences could be expressed, emerging powers tend to put up with the objectives and policies of the Commission.

4 Third, a greater involvement of emerging powers in peace missions may impact their own conceptions of crisis management, in a way that would bring them closer to the current philosophy and practice. A mix of pragmatism and socialization may develop as emerging powers get more involved and grasp the complexity of conflict management policies. Already, current operations have shown how emerging powers implicitly draw a distinction between principled positions expressed in UN political fora on issues such as state sovereignty, host states' consent or protection of civilians on the one hand, and country-specific situations or actions on the ground on the other hand. China is a case in point. Be it in relation to its "One China" policy, its state-centric approach to international relations, or its narrow conception of sovereignty, China has revealed pragmatism and flexibility, for example by contributing to the Haiti mission though Haiti formally recognizes Taiwan, or by tacitly endorsing intrusive Security Council mandates and the broad interpretation of the peacekeeping principles. Brazil's and India's policies have equally been to a degree shaped by the operations they have participated in. And if sovereignty and host state consent are central to their conception of peace operations, their own contributions, from Haiti (where Brazilian forces are much involved in coercively confronting criminal gangs) to the DRC (where Indian peacekeepers are engaged in coercive operations against the militias), have shown that pragmatism often prevails over ideology. Furthermore, their aspiration to become Security Council

permanent members acts as a disincentive to challenge too directly the existing practices. It is also possible that emerging countries will go through the process of disillusion and retrenchment experienced by Western states in the early 1990s.

Together with pragmatism, contributing to peace operations leads to a socialisation process by which emerging countries' positions and policies are shaped by their involvement in international institutions and the social interactions that characterize multilateral policy-making. In this context, it is in Western countries' interest to co-opt emerging powers and make sure that they act within existing institutions rather than outside.

Finally, although emerging powers see peace operations as a vehicle for raising their profile and possibly buttressing their national interests, the importance of peace operations in the broader international politics realm should not be overestimated. In other words, the peacekeeping-peacebuilding field may not be worth the fight that normative divergences can entail. As said before, the three Southern democracies would probably balance possible grievances about peacekeeping against more immediate interests (Security Council membership, Iran, relationship with the United States, etc.), and therefore develop a case-by-case approach rather than a consistent and principled policy. As a matter of fact, although India develops a well-articulated discourse on peacekeeping issues, and is critical of the Security Council's working methods, it has not acquired the type of political influence commensurate with its massive field presence, nor is it giving any indication that it intends to. India wants to play a role for the above-mentioned reasons and puts forward its own views, but does not necessarily see peacekeeping as an area where norms should be broken. In the same vein, the level of political input that China has provided has also remained limited. China may reject the liberal peace model, yet it has remained low-key in mandate design as well as in missions' strategic oversight. This leads back to the issue of the relatively low strategic importance of peace operations, and therefore the cost/gain calculus of norm-breaking versus norm-following. If challenging the peacekeeping consensus is politically costly, then reform of current practices may prevail over normative clash.

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<sup>5</sup> UN General Assembly, "Implementation of GA Resolutions 55/235 and 55/236", Report of the Secretary-General, A/64/220, 23 Sept. 2009.

NB: This paper is solely the opinion of the author and does not necessarily reflect the official view of the GCSP.

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