



## Assessing the EU's Strategic Partnerships in the UN System

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In this *Security Policy Brief*, Thomas Renard and Bas Hooijmaaijers look at the relationship between the EU and its ten strategic partners in the UN system, focussing on the UNGA, the UN Security Council and the DPKO. Part of their analysis is based upon statistical data retrieved from UN databases.

The EU has ten strategic partnerships with third countries: Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea and the United States. These strategic partnerships should constitute an effective tool for the EU to pursue its interests globally, preferably in a multilateral framework but relying on its bilateral relationships. Yet, the EU's strategic partnerships are regularly criticized for their lack of implementation. This *Security Policy Brief* assesses their effectiveness in the UN system, focussing on three central institutions: the UN General Assembly (UNGA), the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).

### **In the General Assembly**

Our data show that over the 2004-2009 period there was no sign of increasing consensus

between the EU and its strategic partners in the UN General Assembly, based on an analysis of their voting patterns (*see Chart 1 in appendix*). If anything, the trend seems to be one of (insignificant) decrease. Canada, Japan and South Korea – the EU's “natural allies” – have the higher voting cohesion with the EU among the ten strategic partners, as they cast identical votes 80 to 90 percent of the time. Brazil, Mexico, Russia and South Africa – a group of countries including “pivotal partners” and “regional partners” – feature a voting cohesion with the EU ranging from 60 to 70 percent, a significantly lower cohesion than the previous set of partners but still above the 50 percent threshold. China and India – two key “pivotal partners” – voted against the EU almost every other time during the 2004-2009 period, suggesting a diverging view on world affairs between the EU and the two Asian emerging powers. Finally, the US – the EU's “essential partner” – had the lowest voting cohesion with the EU among the ten partners, although it significantly increased in 2009 (which could be related to the election of Barack Obama, although this remains to be confirmed).

To look at the voting cohesion between the EU and its strategic partners from another angle, it is possible to distinguish three broad

categories of resolutions voted upon: development and human rights issues; conflict resolution issues; and security issues.

On development and human rights issues (*see Chart 2 in appendix*), the cohesion with Canada, Japan and South Korea is very high. For all the other seven partners, however, the voting cohesion significantly drops to levels around 50 percent or less, notably for the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). The trend in voting cohesion between the EU and the BRICS countries is clearly one of decrease. This finding confirms the trend that had been observed previously by Richard Gowan and Franziska Brantner. Focussing on human rights issues, they described a trend where “the EU increasingly votes as one but the rest of the world has not followed; support for the EU positions at the UN is steadily decreasing”.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, when it comes to the point of agenda-setting they state that on human rights issues “the UN is increasingly being shaped by China, Russia and their allies”.<sup>2</sup>

On conflict resolution issues (*see Chart 3 in appendix*) – mainly limited to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – there was remarkably a full voting cohesion between the EU and Japan for the entire researched period and a full cohesion with South Korea except in 2009. The cohesion with Brazil, China, India, Mexico, Russia and South Africa was very high as well, at 80 percent or more. In contrast, cohesion with the US is almost inexistent throughout the period. Finally, the cohesion with Canada has been significantly decreasing over the 2004-2009 period. This finding seems to confirm previous research, which showed a very high level of voting cohesion between the EU and Canada and Japan regarding Middle East issues, a relatively high level of cohesion with its other strategic partners (notably Brazil, China, India and Mexico), and no cohesion at all with the US.<sup>3</sup>

On security issues (*see Chart 4 in appendix*), Canada casted an identical vote with the EU almost every time, whereas the US has moved significantly closer to the EU in recent years, rising from the last position in 2007 and 2008 (at around 30 percent) to the second position in 2009, possibly a consequence of a change in the US administration. Most of the other partners have maintained a relatively steady voting pattern vis-à-vis the EU at a relatively high level (between 60 and 80 percent), with the notable exception of India, which remains below the 50 percent threshold, whereas China remains around the 60 percent level, below most other strategic partners. This finding seems to challenge somewhat previous research, which found much less cohesion between the EU and its strategic partners on security issues (notably Brazil, China, Mexico and Russia).<sup>4</sup>

Our data suggest that the process of establishing a strategic partnership had no visible impact on the voting patterns within the UNGA. Indeed, during the 2004-2009 period, voting cohesion between the EU and its strategic partners remained stable at best or at times even decreased. Among the partners, the status of “natural allies” of Canada, Japan and South Korea was confirmed by a large voting cohesion, whereas the “essential partnership” with the US can be questioned in light of the very low voting cohesion with the EU. Regarding the other strategic partners, voting cohesion varies from one issue to another, although China and India – two key rising powers – tend to vote less in line with the EU.

Of course, only limited conclusions can be drawn from such quantitative analysis. First, the researched period is relatively limited, although the findings were generally coherent with previous research. Second and more importantly, only a limited amount of issues are voted upon within the UNGA, meaning that the statistical sample is very limited, but also that there are many key resolutions that

fall outside the scope of this research. Indeed, only a minority of roughly 20 to 30 percent of the resolutions is voted upon. An example of an important resolution that passed without vote is the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which was adopted in September 2006 and readopted in 2008 and 2010. Third, such analysis might overlook the fact that cohesion between the EU and its partners is part of a much broader cohesion among UN members, hence diminishing the meaning of strategic partnerships in this cohesion. Fourth, most sensitive issues are discussed outside the UNGA.

Another problem is that this research focuses on voting cohesion in case of EU unanimity, i.e. the EU voting as one group, which further diminishes the number of researched resolutions. Although the EU voting cohesion has steadily increased over time, EU unanimity still occurs in only 70 percent of the votes. However, it should be added that many times full cohesion is only broken by one or two Member States, and that cases of fundamental EU disagreement are purely fictional (e.g. a 50 percent voting cohesion). A broadening of the dataset to include cases where the EU voted “almost” as one (i.e. a 90 percent majority or more) does not trigger fundamentally different findings. If anything, such broadening suggests an even lower voting cohesion with some partners, notably with Russia and the US.

The fact that EU Member States do not always vote as one raises some questions on intra-EU coordination, and it is surely an easy argument for the EU’s strategic partners to question the *strategic actorness* of the EU. Now, it could be argued that a (quasi-) full member status for the EU as such in the UNGA, in line with the competences of the EU, could facilitate the EU’s internal coordination (not the least because this would force the EU to discuss the UNGA agenda more regularly in Brussels to reach common positions) but it could also reinforce the EU’s visibility and actorness in

the UN. It is therefore regrettable that the vote on the resolution introduced in September 2010 to upgrade the EU’s status in line with its new competences was postponed, notably due to the vote – or abstention – of six of the EU’s ten strategic partners.

### **In the Security Council**

The Security Council is the UN body where most important decisions are taken and is therefore a place for potential clashes of interest between the EU and its partners. It is also an exclusive group limited to 15 countries only. This means that a quantitative analysis is not possible for not all EU Member States and not all strategic partners are members of the Security Council. Two Member States (France and UK) and three strategic partners (China, Russia and the US) are permanent members with a special veto power. Among the other strategic partners, Brazil and Japan were the most often elected countries (10 times) in the UNSC, whereas South Africa (2) and South Korea (1) were the least often elected partners.

Previous studies on the effectiveness of the UNSC have shown that regular disagreements among the Security Council’s members and particularly among the P5 have prevented the UNSC from dealing effectively with many pressing international issues.<sup>5</sup> The crisis in Libya and the vote for a UN resolution was another recent illustration of diverging interests and priorities between European countries (France and the UK in this case) and some of its strategic partners (the BRIC countries) who abstained, although remarkably China and Russia decided not to veto it either.<sup>6</sup> Other major clashes in the UNSC in recent history include the 2003 Iraq war, or the 2008 Kosovo declaration of independence. Arguably, the use of the veto power constitutes the most visible expression of a clash between the EU and its partners, although such use is very rare (much more exceptional than during the Cold War) for most sensitive issues are generally avoided

to eschew a public veto. However, when vetoes do occur, they have always opposed the EU and some of its strategic partners (*see Table 1*) in the 2004-2009 period.

of course, would be possible if there were clearly identified interests and priorities – which is unfortunately not the case. In the absence of such direction for the EU foreign

**Table 1: Vetoes in the UNSC (2004-2009)**

Year	Veto by UNSC P-5 member	UNSC resolution subject
2004	USA	Israeli-Palestinian conflict
2004	Russia	Cyprus
2004	USA	Israeli-Palestinian conflict
2006	USA	Israeli-Palestinian conflict
2006	USA	Israeli-Palestinian conflict
2007	China and Russia jointly	Myanmar
2008	China and Russia jointly	Zimbabwe
2009	Russia	Georgia and Abkhazia

Source: [www.globalpolicy.org](http://www.globalpolicy.org)

An additional problem is that clashes of interests and priorities are not only limited to an opposition between the EU and its partners, but they also divide Europe itself sometimes. Again, the recent vote on Libya directly opposed Germany to France and the UK, who had introduced the resolution. In the past, European countries have also famously clashed over Iraq or on the occasion of discussions on UNSC reform, opposing notably Germany and Italy. A divided Europe, particularly in the UNSC, is a major challenge to the EU’s *strategic actorness* – for itself (i.e. to safeguard European interests) but also in the eyes of its strategic partners.

With the Lisbon Treaty, the EU now has the opportunity to directly address the UNSC via its Head of delegation or via its High Representative. Although Catherine Ashton has already used her capacity to address the UNSC, she purposely kept a low profile during her interventions. Yet, this innovation entails a lot of potential for the common foreign and security policy, notably the possibility for the EU to provide direction (set the EU’s interests and priorities) whereas the Member States can provide the political backing and the means – soft or hard – to pursue the EU’s interests. This,

policy, it seems rather difficult for European members of the UNSC to strictly abide by Article 34 of the Lisbon Treaty stating that “Member States which are members of the Security Council will, in the execution of their functions, defend the positions and the interests of the Union”. The opposition over Libya between France and the UK on the one hand, and Germany on the other hand illustrates the current limits of Article 34.

### **In Peacekeeping Operations**

UN peacekeeping operations are another framework where the EU and its strategic partners have the possibility to work constructively together (*see Table 2 in appendix*). In Lebanon, for instance, Europeans (5050) work alongside Indians (899), South Koreans (369) and Chinese (344) in the UNIFIL mission. Yet the level of involvement within UN peacekeeping operations varies from one partner to another and barely reflects any form of strategic partnership. In terms of staff, for instance, India is the biggest contributor, whereas China and Brazil have significantly increased their contributions in the recent years but not yet to similar levels. European Member States contribute a big chunk as well,

with over 7000 men and women. On the other hand, countries like Japan, Mexico, Russia or the US contribute little to the staffing of UN peacekeeping operations.

While China is the largest contributor among the P5, India is the EU's strategic partner that is the largest personnel contributor to peacekeeping operations overall. Although India is a significant contributor to these operations, it is also a "receiver" of peacekeeping troops, as there is a peacekeeping mission deployed on its own territory, in Jammu and Kashmir. In 2007, Russia, another BRIC country, decided to increase its personnel contribution to UN peacekeeping missions to a level that suits its international status, according to the Kremlin. Despite this declaration of intent, the Russian contribution remains limited to 257 men and women.

The EU's personnel contribution to UN-led peacekeeping operations has been steadily decreasing in the last years, although it has also launched its own missions (CSDP) under a UN mandate. Nonetheless, the EU remains a major contributor to UN peacekeeping operations in terms of troops.

Do the EU and its strategic partners deploy troops in the same places? The EU's most comprehensive strategic partner in peacekeeping operations is China, as they deploy alongside each other in 11 missions in total. India, Russia and South Korea share personnel contributions with the EU in nine UN peacekeeping operations, and Brazil and Canada share the burden in eight missions. South Africa, Japan and the USA deployed personnel in respectively two, four and six UN peacekeeping missions. It should be noted here that a country's contribution to a peacekeeping operation can vary from only a few policemen to several hundreds or thousands of troops. Moreover, the EU and some of its strategic partners have launched their own missions, outside the DPKO framework, where they can as well deploy

alongside each other or not, as illustrated by the maritime operations in the Gulf of Aden.

Financial contributions to UN peacekeeping operations are a different story. Europe tops the chart, covering over 40% of the total budget, and the US almost 30%. Japan is another important financial contributor, although its contribution to the total budget in relative terms diminished by over 35% over the last six years. All the other partners are very small contributors, China covering for instance less than 4% of the total budget and India 0.1%. As the EU and all its partners recognise the legitimacy of the UN, one would expect that a true strategic partnership would translate into greater cooperation and involvement in peacekeeping operations yet practice shows otherwise.

The EU and its strategic partners share the burden of peacekeeping unequally. The establishment of strategic partnerships does not seem to have altered this reality. Nonetheless, peacekeeping is one area where more cooperation between the EU and its partners is not only desirable, but also possible. This calls for more coordination at the political level between the EU and its partners (where to launch new missions?) and more cooperation on the ground (not only deploying troops alongside each other but effectively cooperating together – within the UN framework or not). This calls also for a greater burden-sharing between the EU and its partners, who would significantly improve their international image as a result of a further cooperation in the field of peacekeeping.

### **Conclusion**

A rapid overview of the relations between the EU and its strategic partners in the UN system – focusing on the UNGA, the UNSC and the DPKO – suggests that cooperation is still limited. The establishment of a strategic



partnership between the EU and a third country does not seem yet to have an impact on bilateral cooperation within the UN system. On some issues, cooperation seems to become even more problematic as emerging powers are increasingly able and willing to shape the UN agenda, although they have simultaneously displayed signs of responsible behaviour such as on the vote over Libya; it remains unclear whether such behaviour will become the rule or an exception. The future only will tell whether the relationship between the EU and the emerging powers will be cooperative or confrontational. However, to put all chances on the EU's side, strategic partnerships should become an instrument to move towards a cooperative future. Our data and other studies suggest that the strategic partnerships are still rhetorical façades and remain short of implementation.<sup>7</sup> Time has come to put strategy into the EU's partnerships.

On the other hand, time has also come to rethink the EU's approach to international relations. Indeed, the EU itself is often perceived as the weak end of the strategic partnerships. Looking at the world from Washington, Beijing, New Delhi, or Moscow, the strategic value of the EU can be questioned. A cable recently released by *Wikileaks* quotes an Indian official saying that the EU is too "obvious, shabby, shortsighted, full of contradictions, naïve, overly pro-active, and possessing a tendency to go overboard when it comes to delicate issues".<sup>8</sup> As a matter of fact, several strategic partners have proven better at dividing Europe than at acting strategically alongside Europe to tackle global challenges.<sup>9</sup> To be frank, Europeans have very often rendered their task easy.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Gowan, Richard. Brantner, Franziska. 2008. *A Global Force for Human Rights? An Audit of European Power at the UN*. London: European Council on Foreign Relations, p. 7
- <sup>2</sup> Gowan, Richard. Brantner, Franziska. *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Luif, Paul. 2003. *EU cohesion in the UN General Assembly*. Occasional Paper 49, Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies.
- <sup>4</sup> Luif, Paul. *Idem*.
- <sup>5</sup> Hannay, David. 2009. *Effectiveness and Ineffectiveness of the UN Security Council in the Last Twenty Years: A European Perspective*. Documentia Instituto Affari Internazionali 0928.
- <sup>6</sup> Renard, Thomas. 2011. *Libya and the Post-American World: Implications for the EU*. Security Policy Brief 20, Brussels: Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations.
- <sup>7</sup> Renard, Thomas. 2011. *The Treachery of Strategies: A Call for True EU Strategic Partnerships*. Egmont Paper 45, Brussels: Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations.
- <sup>8</sup> <http://www.thehindu.com/news/the-india-cables/the-cables/article1554270.ece>
- <sup>9</sup> See for instance Fox, John. Godement, François. 2009. *A Power Audit of EU-China Relations*. London: European Council on Foreign Relations.

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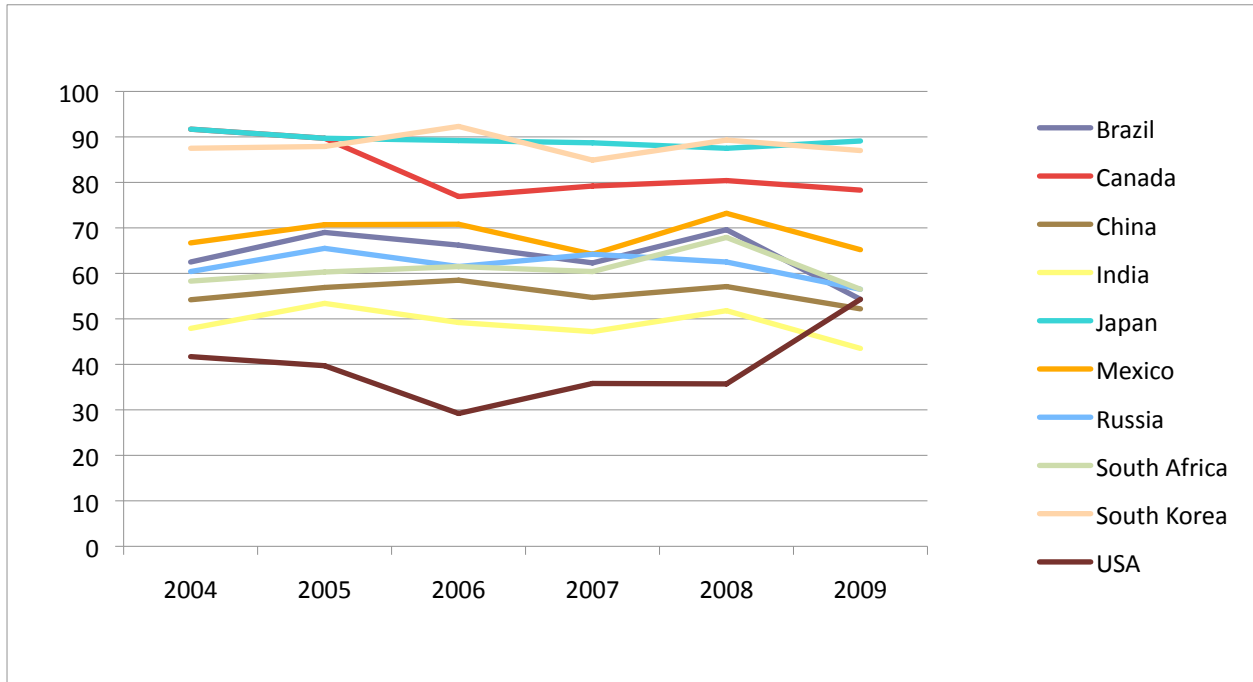
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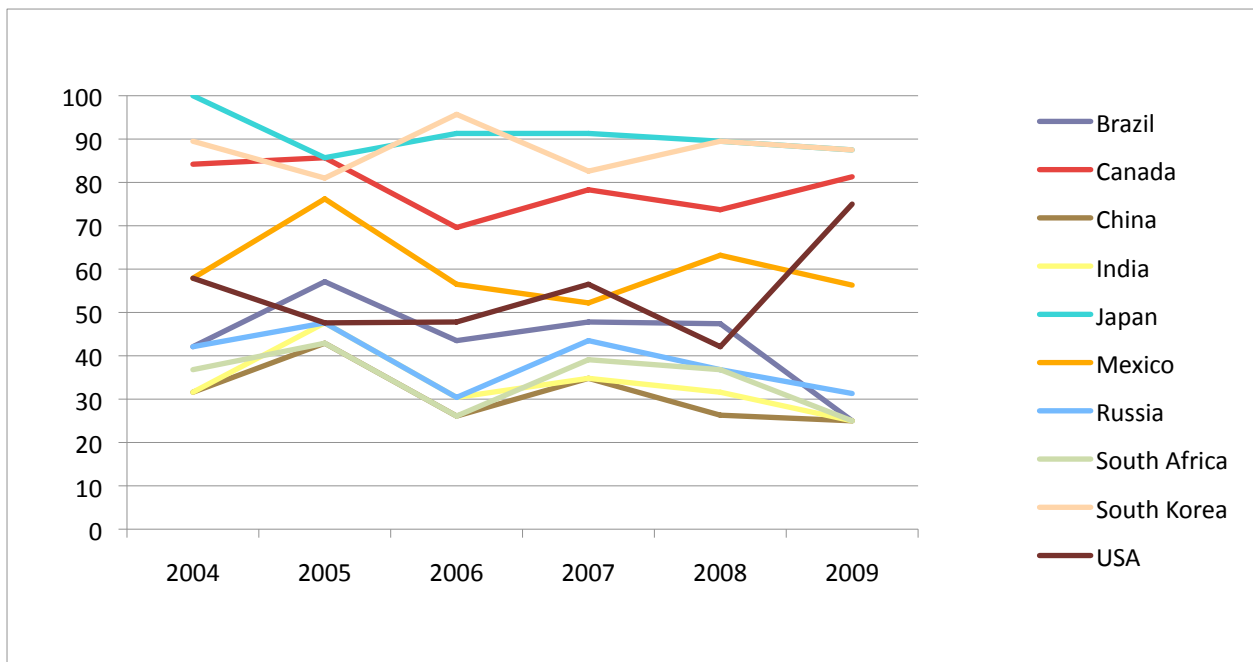
APPENDIX

Chart 1: Voting cohesion between the EU and its strategic partners in the UNGA (2004-2009)



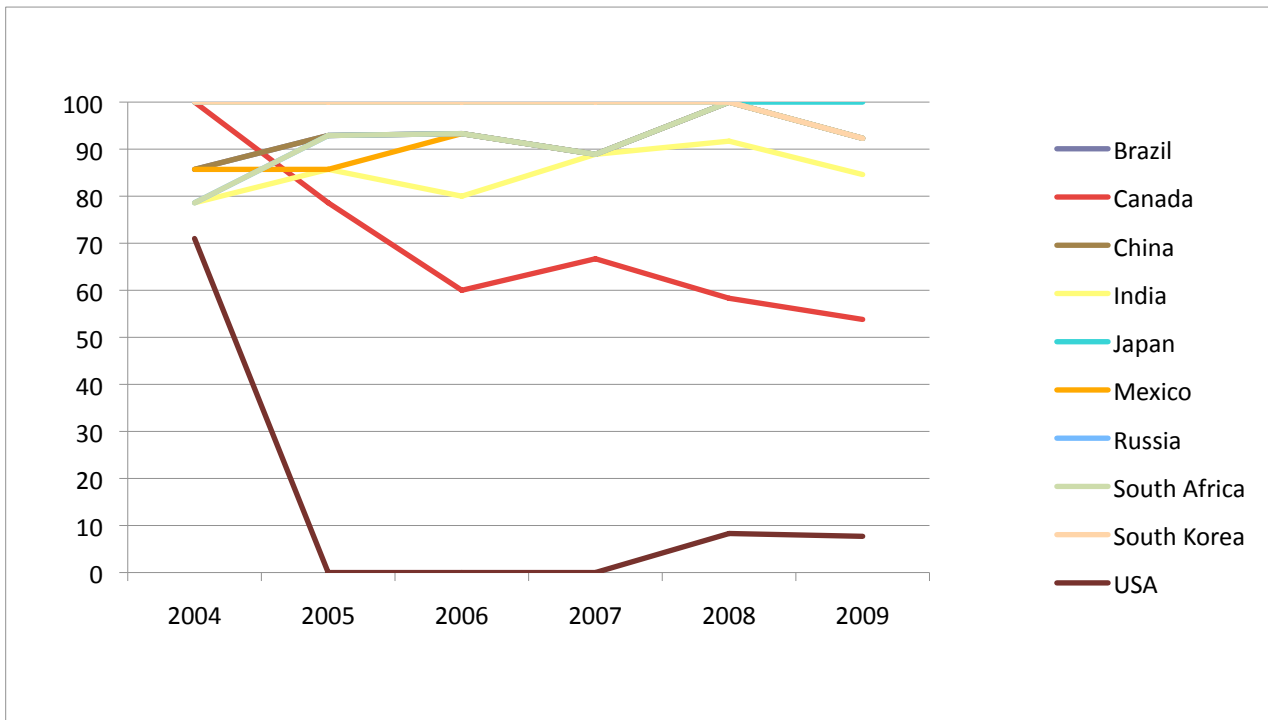
Source: Data retrieved from [www.unbisnet.un.org](http://www.unbisnet.un.org)

Chart 2: Voting cohesion between the EU and its strategic partners on Development and Human Rights issues in the UNGA (2004-2009)



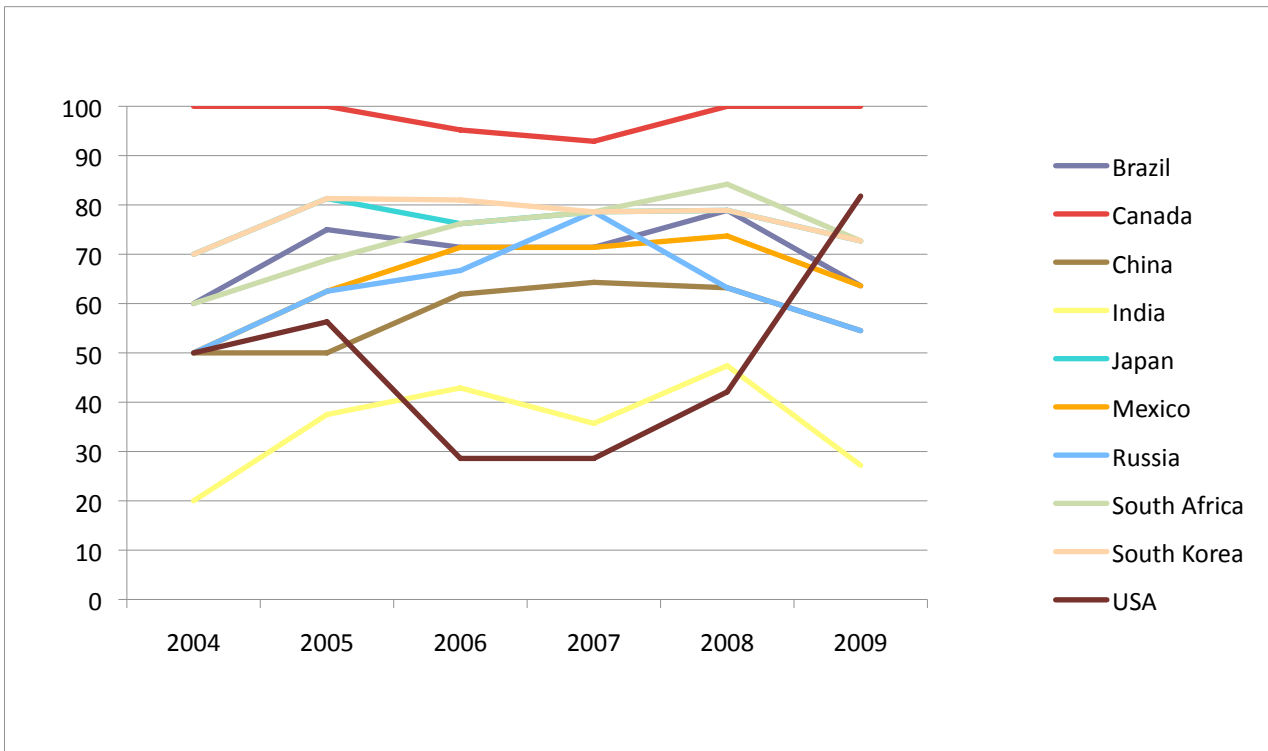
Source: Data retrieved from [www.unbisnet.un.org](http://www.unbisnet.un.org)

Chart 3: Voting cohesion between the EU and its strategic partners on Conflict Resolution issues in the UNGA (2004-2009)



Source: Data retrieved from [www.unbisnet.un.org](http://www.unbisnet.un.org)

Chart 4: Voting cohesion between the EU and its strategic partners on Security issues in the UNGA (2004-2009)



Source: Data retrieved from [www.unbisnet.un.org](http://www.unbisnet.un.org)



Table 2: Overview of personnel contributions to UNDPKO (as of 28 February 2011)

	EU27	Brazil	Canada	China	India	Japan	Mexico	Russia	South Africa	South Korea	USA	Mission Total
MINURSO	✓	✓		✓				✓		✓		232
MINUSTAH	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	12,055
MONUSCO	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	19,136
UNAMA	✓											16
UNAMID	✓		✓	✓					✓			23,055
UNDOF	✓		✓		✓	✓						1,045
UNFICYP	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							980
UNIFIL	✓	✓		✓	✓					✓		11,766
UNMIK	✓							✓				16
UNMIL	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	9,402
UNMIS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	10,456
UNMIT	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		1,463
UNMOGIP	✓									✓		44
UNOCI	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		9,062
UNTSO	✓		✓	✓				✓			✓	152
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,547</b>	<b>2,271</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>2,026</b>	<b>8,665</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>2,184</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>93</b>	

Source: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/>