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# FACTS & FINDINGS



## **NATO-Brazil Relations: Limits of a Partnership Policy**

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**This paper assesses the potential of a partnership between NATO and Brazil, based on interviews with over twenty high-level experts on Brazilian foreign policy. Because building international partnerships has become a vital task of NATO and since Brazil is seeking to increase its influence in global politics, senior NATO officials have called for the Alliance to reach out to Brazil. The paper argues that NATO would be unlikely to succeed in establishing a genuine partnership with Brazil because Brasília's foreign policy-makers envision a world order different from that for which NATO stands. Although the actors share too few security concerns in order to overcome their competing strategies, they can find ways to cooperate on an uncontroversial and strategically lower operational level, for example by jointly fighting piracy in West Africa and sharing best practices in protecting national cyber space.**

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## CONTENTS

3 | 1. INTRODUCTION

3 | 2. NATO'S PARTNERSHIP POLICY

4 | 3. BRAZIL'S BROADER FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY  
WITH REGARD TO NATO

6 | 4. POSSIBLE COOPERATIVE INITIATIVES

6 | 5. CONCLUSION

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

After NATO's April 2012 Chicago Summit, Secretary General Rasmussen proclaimed, "there is great potential to enhance [NATO's] political dialogue and [...] practical cooperation." While NATO seeks new partnerships outside the North Atlantic region, rising powers such as Brazil attempt to establish themselves in international organizations and take on new responsibilities as part of gaining more influence in international relations. This is why senior NATO officials, such as Admiral James Stavridis, former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, have called for NATO to reach out to Brazil.

Although democratic and stable Brazil seems to be a fit as a partner, in the eyes of NATO policy-makers who seek to expand the Alliance's reach internationally, NATO's outreach is limited by Brazil's foreign policy strategy. Brazil has increasingly embraced its position as a leader in South America and among developing countries, thereby showing ambivalence towards institutions traditionally shaped by the West such as the IMF, World Bank, and OECD. Given NATO's role as the leading Western security organization, is a partnership between NATO and Brazil even possible?

## 2. NATO'S PARTNERSHIP POLICY

Building partnerships has become a key activity of NATO. The Alliance devoted a whole section of its 2010 strategic concept to partnerships. It stressed that "the promotion of Euro-Atlantic security is best assured through a wide network of partner relationships with countries and organisations around the globe." In its partnership policy from April 2011, the Alliance states that it is prepared to develop a dialogue with *any* state which shares the Alliance's interest in "peaceful international relations." Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges Jamie Shea points out that "[n]o other regional organization has such a global support and outreach network." Given the importance of reaching out to new potential partners, NATO reformed its frameworks to make partnerships more flexible and open. In addition to regional forums like the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, the Alliance has introduced the 28 (all members) + N (potential partners) format through which NATO offers specific options tailored to its partners, including consultations, operational support, and educational cooperation. These reforms opened NATO's outreach to potential partners without any ambitions for membership.

The new policy establishes a bilateral framework for cooperation. NATO thus becomes a hub for dialogue and specific projects, such as supporting English language training in the Mongolian forces. NATO also seeks to enhance its operational capabilities by partnering with states which are willing to support NATO operations, as the Alliance has been doing with long-standing partners such as Australia. NATO also seeks to support its network to advance its legitimacy and coordination with global partners, thereby becoming a genuinely global security organization. Partnerships also help NATO to promote its interests based on cooperation and shared norms in a time of relative Western decline.

While the Alliance clearly defined its new approach to partnerships, different factions within NATO foresee different goals with regard to international cooperation. Specific member states within NATO may take initiative to shape the policy debate towards reaching out to the South Atlantic, most notably Portugal and Spain. Because of their historic, linguistic, and geographical ties, they could drive the policy planning discussions towards the South Atlantic, as France did in regard to the Mediterranean and Germany did in regard to Central and Eastern Europe. In fact, countries such as Portugal have already been lobbying to extend the Alliance's view to the South Atlantic, what Petro Seabra of the Portuguese Institute of International and Security Relations calls "the strategic square that connects Lisbon to the United States, Brazil and Angola."

Brazil fits into NATO's partnership framework because it shares the Alliance's democratic values (although this is not a necessary precondition for a partnership) and, despite Brasília's outreach to the Global South and critique of the Western world order, continues to regard itself as part of the Western camp mainly because of its European heritage. Also, a partnership with Brazil would be in alignment with NATO's aim to expand burden-sharing in international security as Brasília could serve as a partner to take on challenges in the South Atlantic, such as it did in several peacekeeping operations, most notably in Haiti.

In addition, a partnership with Brasília would not require NATO to commit vast resources because Brazil is neither involved in any serious international conflicts, nor does it desire direct external aid to overcome internal security issues. By establishing a relationship with Brazil, therefore, NATO would not only confirm its commitment to democratic cooperation, but also open the possibility to cooperate in the field with South America's leading state without entangling the alliance in a crisis area.



### 3. BRAZIL'S BROADER FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY WITH REGARD TO NATO

Brazil is the leading actor in South America and a force for regional integration. With over half the continent's population and GDP, Brazil takes on a natural leadership position in South America, most notably in the regional trade and political organizations Mercosur and Unasur. In addition to its regional hegemonic position, Brasília has expanded its focus internationally, especially by engaging in South-South cooperation and establishing rising-power forums, such as BRICS and IBSA.

It is not clear whether Brasília will continue to reach out to the Global South, build closer ties to emerging economies or simply strengthen its leadership position in South America. Since Brazil is investing in greater diplomatic initiatives, these options are not exclusive of each other. No serious Brazilian foreign policy expert, however, foresees Brazil to sign on to the North Atlantic countries' agenda. Instead, Brazil seeks to restructure the UN to become a permanent member of the Security Council and move to the top of global governance.

Brazil's foreign policy outlook is shaped just as much by multilateralism as it is by negotiation and the peaceful resolution of disputes. The country does not face traditional military threats and it has not been in an armed conflict against another state since the Paraguayan War in 1870, except for its involvement in World Wars I and II. Brazil became a committed member of non-proliferation regimes, and the country's leadership traditionally does not seek international recognition by advancing its military capabilities. The country justifies its armament by the necessity to secure its vast territory and resources instead of joining the world's circle of military powers.

A study by the Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI) shows that global warming, international drug trafficking and trade protectionism rank as the three most serious threats in the eyes of Brazil's foreign policy community.<sup>1</sup> In terms of traditional defense, however, Brazil is especially concerned about two regions: the Amazon and the coastal strip where Brazil's oil reserves are located, which stretches from Santos in the state of São Paulo through Rio de Janeiro to Vitória in the state of Espírito Santo.

The Amazon still plays a large role in Brazilian security policy. Some analysts, such as Brazilian Colonel Gelio Fregapani, argue that the international community uses environmental protection and the protection of local tribes as a false pre-

tense to hinder Brazil to exploit its biodiversity and mineral deposits in the Amazon. Fregapani also accuses international non-governmental organizations of being Western agents. He argues that by complying with these organizations' demands, Brazil compromises its sovereignty and national integrity in light of international competition for resources. Almost half of the policy-makers interviewed for the CEBRI study believe the internationalization of the Amazon to be a threat. This is why the sovereignty of the Amazon is among the most important components of Brazil's National Strategy of Defense from 2008.

A specific security concern arose with the installation of the 4<sup>th</sup> U.S. fleet in the South Atlantic in 2008, just after the discovery of large oil fields off Brazil's coast in 2006 and 2008. The reinstatement of the fleet, which remained inactive since 1950, was announced without prior diplomatic consultation with the allies in the region. This surprise led to severe negative reactions in the Brazilian government. Thus, the United States missed an opportunity to highlight collateral benefits, and instead created suspicion among the Brazilian security community.

In addition to the reinstatement of the 4<sup>th</sup> fleet, the fact that the United States has never signed the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea raises concerns among Brazilian foreign policy-makers who seek to protect their sovereignty off the country's coast. Former Brazilian Defense Minister Nelson Jobim pointed out that "Amazonia Azul" belongs to Brazil. The term means "blue Amazon" and refers to the exclusive economic zone off the coast of Brazil with an area of 963,000 km<sup>2</sup>. After the recommendation to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf to extend the coast limits beyond 200 nautical miles has been accepted, the Brazilian maritime areas, according to the Brazilian navy, could reach approximately 4.5 million km<sup>2</sup>, an area larger than the green Amazon or over twelve times the area of Germany. At the "Forte de Copacabana" conference on international security co-organized by CEBRI and the German Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), Jobim pointed out that the United States does not recognize the "legal status of countries like Brazil, which has 350 miles of its continental shelf under its sovereignty." Brazil's serious concerns about its oil reserves are also reflected in Brazil's National Strategy of Defense: "Brazil and its Armed Forces should be ready to take measures to protect the [country's] sea lines of trade and oil platforms."

Brazil's relations to the United States have been ambivalent in many respects. Brasília has been a close partner of the United States since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when



Brazil aligned with the United States under the leadership of Foreign Minister Baron of Rio Branco. Most recently, U.S. President Obama's visit to Brazil in March 2011 confirmed the countries' long-standing relations marked by massive trade, development cooperation, and human exchange.

Serious tensions over specific policy and suspicion of U.S. global leadership, however, remain in place. Brazilian policy-makers are worried about U.S. presence in South America, as they view the United States as a competitor for the pre-eminent influence on its continent. Some even interchange foreign presence and occupation, which touches on Brazil's sensitive understanding of sovereignty. This is why Brasília is concerned about U.S. activities in its sphere of influence. For example, Brazil opposes the United States' usage of Colombian air bases to engage in joint anti-drug operations. Brazil was also among those states which blocked the United States' efforts to establish a free trade area in the Americas that could have included 34 states throughout the Western Hemisphere. Opposition to foreign influence in Brazil's sphere of influence also holds true with regard to the improving relations between Russia and Venezuela as well as the UK's presence in the South Atlantic. For example, in 2011, the British Falkland patrol vessel HMS Clyde was declined to board in Rio de Janeiro. The United States stands out, however, because it simply has much closer relations to South America than any other state.

Brazil's attitude toward the U.S. presence in South America is in accordance with Brazil's opposition to the overarching U.S. power extension around the world. Brasília knows that its country is seen as a source for diversifying American oil imports away from the Middle East, and that Washington hopes to profit from free trade agreements with South American states, such as the most recent one with Colombia which went into effect in 2012. This is why Brazil sees itself in a position of power in which it tries to soft-balance the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Brasília's stance on Washington also reflects its views on Brussels. Brazil's then-Defense Minister Nelson Jobim has voiced his opposition to NATO on several occasions, including at the Lisbon National Defense Institute in April 2010, in a meeting with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Arturo Valenzuela in October 2010, and at the "Forte de Copacabana" conference in Rio de Janeiro in November 2010. Jobim underlined Brazil's stance that the security of South America is the sole responsibility of the South Americans and declared that Brazil will not be a U.S. ally in order for Washington to keep its role in the world. In August 2013, then-Foreign Minister and current

UN ambassador Antonio Patriota underlined Brazil's position on NATO's partnership initiatives during a speech at the UN: "We are concerned, as well, that NATO has been searching to establish partnerships out of area, far beyond the North Atlantic, including in regions of peace, democracy, social inclusion, and that rule out the presence of weapons of mass destruction in their territories."

These views are not unique. Based on interviews conducted for this paper, many Brazilian senior diplomats and administration officials have denounced NATO's legitimacy because they see the organization as a tool for American power projection. In addition, many believe that there is no compelling case for the continuation of NATO after the Cold War. Instead of expanding its role, they argue, NATO should dissolve and pass on its role to the UN. It is clear that Brazil's foreign policy elite has a very suspicious and overall negative view of NATO.

This was confirmed when Brazil, at the time a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, abstained from the vote for the UN mandate for NATO to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya in March 2011. The Brazilian government noted that humanitarian intervention might be misused for purposes other than protecting civilians. Abstaining from this decision does not necessarily prove a negative attitude towards NATO in general. Yet, Brazil denounced NATO's "responsibility to protect" policy and developed the "responsibility while protecting" policy in response to NATO's Libya campaign, which places limitations on the interveners, in order to prevent them from using humanitarian intervention as a tool for power projection.

Based on the assessment of Brazil's foreign and security policy with regard to NATO, the Alliance faces three main challenges which make it unlikely for NATO to enter a partnership agreement with Brazil:

1. Brazil's strategic priority is international governance reform. NATO, however, is seen as an instrument of an obsolete Western order, not as an organization respectful of Brazil's interests that can contribute to future global justice and stability. Hence, a formal partnership with NATO is for Brazilian decision-makers counterintuitive.
2. Brazil's security interests, which mainly revolve around domestic security as well as the protection of its sovereignty in the Amazon and its coastal region, vastly differ from NATO's stakes in international security. The lack of common regional security challenges makes it almost impossible to overcome ideological differences.



3. The adverse relationship between Brazil and the United States hinders substantial cooperation with NATO. Since Brazilian policy-makers are actively soft-balancing the United States' presence in Brazil's sphere of influence, it would counter their strategy to enter a partnership agreement with an Alliance led by the United States.

Despite these differences, initiatives on the track-II level continue because cooperation on an operational and strategically lower level remains possible. In February 2013, for instance, the NATO Defense College (NDC) was invited by the Institute of International Relations of the University of Brasília to hold a seminar on NATO-African Union relations, which highlighted the focus on Africa as a potential field of collaboration. Another notable event took place in Rio de Janeiro in May 2013, when a delegation of the NDC came together with Brazilian counterparts to discuss perceptions of each other, the responsibility while protecting policy, maritime security, humanitarian assistance operations, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

#### 4. POSSIBLE COOPERATIVE INITIATIVES

Even though the chances for a partnership between NATO and Brazil are slim, it is worth considering possible approaches. The list of potential benefits of being a NATO partner is long, ranging from gaining expertise on military issues such as force transformation, cyber security, terrorism, and counter-piracy to joining a diplomatic inner circle of many of the most powerful states in the world. One needs to keep in mind, however, that Brazil already is a close partner of a number of NATO states from which Brasília can gain similar benefits. One thing Brazil seeks, for example, is military equipment and technology which NATO, in contrast to its members, cannot offer directly. Therefore, it is not easy to find possible areas of cooperation from which both Brazil and the Alliance can benefit.

Fighting piracy in the Gulf of Guinea would be a regional example. The Gulf of Guinea, located in West Africa, is not just within what Brazilian policy-makers consider their sphere of interest, but also includes São Tomé and Príncipe, which has close ties to Brazil because of shared Portuguese colonial history. In addition, the region is a large oil exporter which depends on the protection of the sea lanes. Piracy in the region is on the rise and is considered to cost \$2 billion per year, compared to \$7 billion per year in Somalia. The UN has already called for technical and logistical assistance from the international community. Since the United States currently imports 15 percent of its oil from this region, a number which is projected to increase, the U.S. African

Command (Africom) is already engaged in supporting local forces through joint training exercises. This is where Brazil could step in to take responsibility for its African neighbors. NATO, which is already engaged in similar operations off the coast of Somalia, could serve as a coordination platform between the parties. Possible cooperation could include maritime surveillance, search and rescue, and environmental security missions.

As a functional example, Brazil could work together with NATO to protect its national cyberspace. Cybercrime is a "rising threat" which poses unforeseeable consequences. The Alliance has built up vast capabilities to protect its member states' cyberspace and works together with partners around the world to share best practices and coordinate legislation. Brazil, which also has an interest to protect its cyberspace, already cooperates on this issue with the UK, for example. Brasília would be able to benefit by sharing best practices with NATO and develop joint solutions on uncontroversial issues without being concerned about its intelligence security. After all, the country can monitor its own cyberspace, but it may be interested in how to defend its cyberspace more efficiently, assuming there is room for improvement. However, Brazil does not appear eager to cooperate on matters of cyber security. As one European diplomat noted, Brasília is not even remotely interested in joining the Convention on Cybercrime of the Council of Europe, which is the only international apparatus on cyber security with the goal of developing anti-cybercrime legislation and fostering cooperation between its members on the matter.<sup>3</sup>

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Considering the obstacles described, even if NATO portrays itself as genuinely cooperative and reaches out to Brazil, the Alliance is likely to fail at establishing a meaningful partnership. Assuming that it is NATO's goal to build new partnerships in the South Atlantic and/or South American region, it is worth considering the Alliance's alternatives. Possible NATO initiatives include reaching out to Unasur and IBSA as well as redefining the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance with a connection to NATO. The Alliance could also focus on Colombia, which has indicated interest in establishing a closer relationship.

Even though NATO is an attractive partner for many states around the world, the Alliance needs to be aware of the limits of its global outreach, even among states which share the Alliance's democratic values. Brazil's case exemplifies the limits of the formation of international democratic regimes and depicts how rising power strategy can conflict



with alliances dominated by the sole global hegemon. Given the nature of other rising democratic powers, NATO will encounter similar struggles in reaching out to India and South Africa.

NATO should therefore carefully consider how to spend its very limited resources to achieve the goal of increasing its influence in international security. After all, a partnership with Brazil does not constitute an end in itself, rather one possibility to expand its international outreach. Despite obstacles to a close partnership, NATO can aim toward a strategically lower operational cooperation with Brazil in areas of converging interests, such as maritime security. Beyond this, a more in-depth partnership between the parties, however, is not likely.

- 1| *De Souza, Amaury. "Brazil's International Agenda Revisited: Perceptions of the Brazilian Foreign Policy Community." Brazilian Center for International Relations Executive Summary, May 2009 [http://www.cebri.org/midia/documentos/brazil's\\_international\\_agenda\\_revisited\\_-\\_cebri.amaury\\_de\\_souza\\_-\\_may2009.pdf](http://www.cebri.org/midia/documentos/brazil's_international_agenda_revisited_-_cebri.amaury_de_souza_-_may2009.pdf) (accessed March 3, 2013).*
- 2| *According to T.V. Paul of McGill University, Soft Balancing "involves tacit balancing short of formal alliances [...] often based on a limited arms buildup, ad hoc cooperative exercises, or collaboration in regional or international institutions [...]; Paul, T.V. "The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory." in: Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, eds., Balance of Power Revisited: Theory and Practice in the Twenty-first Century, 1-25, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004.*
- 3| *45 states have signed on to the convention, many of which are not members of the Council of Europe, such as South Africa, Australia and Japan.*