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## **Brazilian International Perspectives and the Fate of Security Relations with the European Union: a brief Assessment**

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The present text comprises an initial appraisal of core issues and major trends shaping Brazil's position and role in regional and global affairs in the coming decades. The country's prospects as regards its relations with the European Union are also considered, in the same time frame and with a particular accent on the security dimension. Most forecasts regarding Brazil's future international profile usually highlight its economic rise, its status as a regional power and its willingness to play a more assertive role in the international arena. These aspects are generally seen as core determinants of its acknowledged condition of a rising global actor. Even though both Brazilian foreign policy and economic performance have respectively experienced a significant slowdown over the past four years, the afore-mentioned 'global actor' premises have not been changed, both as regards mid- and long-term prospect assessments. Therefore, these aspects shall continue to provide Brazil with important leverage capabilities and represent important assets for the country's pursuit of an improved international status.

### **Brazil: still a rising Actor?**

Brazil has significant political and economic assets that provide stable grounds for strengthening its international profile as a global actor. However, translating these assets into an improved international status is neither natural nor automatic. On the contrary, considerable difficulties and setbacks still prevent – and will probably continue, in the near future, to do so – Brazil from taking full advantage of its regional

prominence. Despite its position amongst the ten largest economies of the world, Brazil's share of global production and exports as well as its participation in global financial flows is still fairly small, and strongly subject to domestic and external constraints. This generates a gap between the enthusiastic expectations regarding the country's political and economic influence on the global stage – and that which it is actually able to wield.

## The Place of the EU in Brazil's international Strategy

In such a context, Brazil shall likely continue to pursue a strategy of expansion and diversification of its major international partnerships with the intent of maximising political and economic opportunities. This might entail closer relations not only with other emerging powers, as seen during the Lula da Silva presidency, but with major world powers as well. In either case, the European Union has surprisingly been depicted as of secondary importance to Brazil's intent to rise as a global actor. This is a strong paradox if one considers that the EU is Brazil's major economic partner second only to China, and that Brazil is the fourth largest destination of European foreign investment. Equally, Brazil and the EU have a number of converging interests in global affairs – interests which paved the way for the strategic partnership launched in 2007.

Clear references to the EU's declining importance were made at the time of the reassessment of Brazilian foreign policy priorities carried out during the Lula da Silva administrations<sup>1</sup>. This trend was confirmed during Dilma Rousseff's first term. South America and Africa along with the other BRICS members were the key targets for Brazilian trade partnerships. The promotion of South-South co-operation was prioritised while the relations with Europe continued to face difficulties on several fronts, from trade negotiations to political issues. Points of tension ranged from human rights to policies towards the Middle East; respective positions on the Syria and the Ukraine crises were also touched upon more recently. Over the past seven years, these difficulties have been exacerbated by the 2008 economic crisis, by the crisis affecting the Eurozone, and finally by Brazil's own political and economic difficulties and loss of impulse in foreign policy. In current prevailing interpretations, the pursuit of a more Global South oriented approach to its partnerships might be leading Brazil to distance itself from its traditional foreign policy approach anchored in the Atlantic axis with a view to exploiting new possibilities of international insertion in other regions of the globe.

## The Prospects for Security Relations

Although Europe still remains a privileged political and economic partner to Brazil, for most of the past decade bilateral relationships have not met mutual expectations as to their political and economic outcomes, either bilaterally or internationally. The strategic partnership offered by the EU in 2007 was intended to provide a proper political framework so as to generate greater impetus, but its effective importance and actual impact have not been evident so far. On the contrary, in some cases, the influence of

<sup>1</sup> Brazil and Europe towards 2015. [http://www.econ.uba.ar/planfenix/aportes/8/Bekerman\\_Montgu](http://www.econ.uba.ar/planfenix/aportes/8/Bekerman_Montgu). China en el futuro del Mercosur.pdf

Europe not only in Brazil but in Latin America as a whole continues to be regarded as secondary to that of the USA and, more recently, to China. Such a view certainly applies to Central America, somehow less so to South America and much less so to Brazil alone. Regardless of these considerations, Brazil will continue to seek to exploit political convergences with the EU at the global stage, namely those associated to the strengthening of multilateralism and multipolarity as well as to the treatment of major global issues<sup>2</sup>. This strategy pertains to pave the way for the pursuit of positive initiatives regarding many key global issues. These range from strengthening the security realm and dealing with transnational threats to sustainability issues such as energy and food provision, as argued in the following paragraphs.

The growing relevance of food and energy security concerns in both Brazilian domestic and foreign policy agendas reflect developments directly associated to:

- › changes at the production level (increase of productivity and international competitiveness of the agro-industrial sector, the changing dynamics of the domestic and international market for biofuels, the findings of huge deep-sea-oil and gas reserves;
- › the increased strategic importance, internationally, of access to natural resources and energy sources;
- › the uncertainties related to oil markets and the prospect of the oil age coming to an end;
- › the food crisis associated to rising prices of basic agricultural commodities and to the mid- and long-term effects of global climate change on food production.

These factors taken altogether – plus the worldwide recognition of Brazil as a major food exporter and energy supplier, along with the imperative of addressing the effects of global climate change – have led sustainability to become inextricably associated to security concerns. Therefore, the securitisation of environmental, energy and food policies may be expected to become a driving force of Brazil's domestic and foreign policies in the near future.

The rise of non-conventional security concerns in Brazil's foreign and domestic security policies is a trend which favours closer links with the EU. Alongside this consideration, the rise of Brazil as a regional power and a global actor has taken place in a context in which access to natural and energy resources has become a key issue in and of itself within the arena of international politics. This has led to greater concern in Brazil with traditional security issues such as the control of its territory and the protection of its natural and biodiversity resources. Such concern is explicitly expressed in the National Defence Strategy<sup>3</sup> and is now a major directive for military planning regarding the protection of continental and maritime territories. This is equally seen in the control of Brazil's northern borders where, due to insufficient security capabilities, an intense flow of illegal trade in drugs, arms, wild animals, plants and minerals takes place.

<sup>2</sup> Gilberto Calcagnoto, *O Brasil e a União Européia*. Nueva Sociedad, Special Edition, Oct. 2008, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> Ministério da Defesa (2008). *Estratégia Nacional de Defesa*.

Therefore, a meaningful improvement in the provision of security in such areas remains a significant endeavour that Brazil is gradually addressing. As such, defence concerns play an important role in shaping Brazil's international profile as a regional power and global actor. Indeed, as global competition for natural resources intensifies, Brazil – despite its intent to improve its defence capabilities – will still face significant restrictions as regards its dissuasive capabilities. It is not certain that the country would be able to prevent and/or defensively react to unauthorised foreign presence and activities on Brazilian soil. This sense of vulnerability and insecurity must therefore remain as a driving force shaping Brazil's defence policies, and its international partnerships and initiatives in this domain. In opposition, thus, to the favourable prospect for Brazil-EU relations in dealing with non-conventional security concerns such as food, energy and environmental security, Brazilian defence stances regarding the more traditional protection of resources and the possibility of an unwanted engagement of NATO in South Atlantic security issues will entail political grievances to Brazil's relations with the European Union.

Beyond these issues, threats such as transnational organised crime and drug trafficking are also expected to remain as major security challenges with important implications for Brazil's domestic policies and for its relations with its neighbourhood and with extra-regional actors. To a great extent, developments in this realm also pend upon economic performance and on the effectiveness of policies forged to respond to the unabated escalation of organised crime, both domestically and internationally. Economic prospects are not really favourable in this regard: even in a highly optimistic scenario (not to say highly unfeasible one, if seen from Brazil's current economic outlook) of steady GDP growth at the 4% level over the next two decades would still not suffice to reduce poverty and social inequalities. Difficulties in sustaining higher levels of economic growth will, thus, also increase the challenge of countering organised crime and transnational threats in the Brazilian territory. Simultaneously, it is widely and internationally recognised that the difficulty in fighting organised crime in its different expressions is a serious political liability for Brazil as a regional power and global actor. International terrorism, meanwhile, although naturally acknowledged as an issue to be dealt with carefully, is not particularly high on Brazil's security policy agenda. Brazil is neither envisaged as prime target for terrorist activities, nor as a safe breeding ground for terrorist organisations. However, given current international trends and the Brazilian desire to be a global player, this is an issue which must acquire greater visibility and importance within Brazilian security policies.

The greater exposure to the risks and threats posed by the convergent strengthening of energy and food security concerns, along with the continued challenges posed by organised crime and terrorism, provide grounds for closer co-operation between Brazil and the European Union. Such co-operation may feasibly yield positive side effects in the domain of defence. The major hindrance in this regard is associated to NATO's potential future activities in the South Atlantic, which would directly confront Brazilian strategic interests.

## **Strategic Implications for Relations between Brazil and the European Union**

The current context is marked by the diversification of options for Brazil to forge its international insertion in the decades to come, and by a quest for greater autonomy driven by the prominence of nationalist forces in the realm of foreign and security policies. In view of this, more immediate efforts intended to revert perceptions of the declining importance of Europe as a political and economic partner are of utmost importance for the sake of defining the prospects of EU-Brazil relationships in the midterm future. It is worth noting that there are actual incentives for Brazil to take advantage of the US/ EU relative decline so as to favour its own political ambitions as a global actor. However fulfilling these ambitions and deepening Brazil-EU relations in particular are not mutually exclusive concepts; a decisive political investment towards strengthening bilateral relations will however be required.

In the next two decades, as the need for global governance mechanisms will reach unprecedented levels with increasingly high stakes, understanding the domestic dynamics of foreign policy decision-making including as regards the forging of international alliances and partnerships (such as that which exists between the EU and Brazil) will be of ever-greater importance. A greater appeal of cosmopolitan perspectives on global governance will probably provide more room to accommodate international interests but this endeavour will evolve in a more critical and demanding political environment, particularly when issues related to sovereignty over territory and natural resources as well as environmental, energy and food security concerns are at stake. On the other hand, fighting transnational threats (organised crime, terrorism and cyber threats) will provide opportunities to foster mechanisms and partnerships for international co-operation both bilaterally and multilaterally. In this regard, the framework of the EU-Brazil strategic partnership is a favourable departing point from which to address these security issues.

In the near future, there might be more convergence between Brazil and Europe on global security issues and governance mechanisms, a scenario favoured by the strengthening of cosmopolitan views regarding global issues traditionally approached from a nationalistic bias within Brazilian society. However, concerns regarding the protection of territory and resources as well as efforts towards reconciling sustainability, food, energy and environmental security concerns might lead to political discrepancies. Given the limitations of inter-regionalism in providing a broader framework for bilateral relations, the prospect of an updated, enduring and all-encompassing security relationship between Brazil and the EU will increasingly rely on the possibility of working together on the most contentious issues of the global agenda. In this regard, a more open and flexible attitude will be required from both sides to find common ground in addressing the political and security challenges posed by the interplay of sustainability, environmental, food and energy interests and concerns at the international level. Failing this, the enduring inertial trend and the political obstacles that have marked EU-Brazil security relations will inevitably subsist.