



An Overview of Brazilian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Brazil's role in international relations has altered somewhat in recent years. Under President Luiz 'Lula' da Silva, presidential diplomacy has dominated an active foreign policy aimed at expanding the country's presence in global economic negotiations, multilateral institutions and regional affairs. This has involved deepening ties with both industrialised economies and the emergent South. Such a multi-polar approach is evident in Brazil's renewed relations with the United States (US) and Europe — arguably on a more equal footing than in the past — along with closer ties to China, India, Russia and South Africa. There is also a resurging priority for South America through converging diplomatic and development efforts. Brazil has refused to address political turbulences in the region via a security prism, opting instead for promoting improved governance and democratic action. It has reinforced its support for multilateralism to deal with crises in international politics and security, and has insisted on the need for a conceptual revision of international structures like the Security Council of the United Nations (UN).

Brazil's key challenge is to balance its role as a regional power with that of a global player, which will depend largely on its array of soft power assets and middle power diplomacy.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years Brazil has pursued a more ambitious foreign policy that aims to expand the country's presence in global economic negotiations, multilateral institutions and regional affairs.² Presidential diplomacy has become an active foreign policy approach concerned with deepening ties with industrialised economies and with the emergent South. Relations with the US and the

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Brazil's rise needs to be matched with a greater regional and international presence especially through multilateral reform and democratisation. This requires delicate balancing between regional and global ambitions.
- Brazil needs to move cautiously in the region. Brazil's political, economic and security involvement has not implied automatic regional leadership. More effort is required to galvanise its position by promoting broad-based democratic governance.
- Brazil should collaborate rather than competing with the United States. Its regional ambitions have a direct impact on US relations.
- Using its soft power attributes, from cultural influences to development assistance prudently to improve multilateral action and strengthen existing arrangements. This is relevant to its commitment to democratic governance in South America and broader international development co-operation.
- Recognising that 'Lula' da Silva is the icon of Brazil's international resurgence and that the country's global and regional ambitions are inextricably linked to presidential diplomacy. The Brazilian government needs to start discussing and disseminating Brazil's post-'Lula' foreign policy.

European Union have been reshaped. China and India are now key international partners. And there is a conscious fostering of South–South multilateralism and an unprecedented presence in South America.

A diversified set of ‘external fronts’ has led to an innovative participation in global politics and economic forums, even though Brazil still faces the constraints of an asymmetrical international system and ongoing US prominence in hemispheric affairs.

In the realm of security, Brazil has developed approaches to deal with new global threats and inter- and intra-state conflicts. It has avoided expressed alignment with US security policies while granting discreet support to the US-led war against terrorism.

Multilaterally, most notably in the UN, the country has insisted on the need for a conceptual revision of world institutional structures, particularly the reform of the UN Security Council. Brazilian foreign policy has become concerned with the humanitarian impact of military action and the importance of balancing peace, solidarity and globalisation. Its proactive diplomacy resulted in non-permanent membership of the Security Council four times in the last 20 years: 1988–89, 1993–94, 1998–99, and 2004–05. It will assume membership again in 2010–11.

An important aspect of foreign and defence policies relates to regional affairs. South America has assumed unprecedented relevance for Brazil. It feels responsible for maintaining regional political stability by promoting stronger democratic institutions and values, and expanding security co-operation. In dealing with political turbulences in the region it has assumed the role of peace broker, offering local political mediation and contributing to institutional and democratic outcomes.

Since the inauguration of the da Silva administration in 2003, Brazilian diplomacy has been particularly active in promoting stable democratic rule in South America, leaving behind its previous attachment to the principle of non-intervention in affairs of other states. This shift was particularly evident during the UN’s latest intervention in Haiti, in which Brazil assumed

military command of the MINUSTAH (UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti).

FOREIGN POLICY UNDER ‘LULA’ DA SILVA

Brazil has become more proactive in world economic, political and security affairs, expanding its global and regional interests and responsibilities. This has coincided with a global diffusion of power that has opened a space for a new set of emerging powers. Brazil is no doubt one of these.

Under President ‘Lula’ da Silva, diplomacy reached its apogee in Brazilian international affairs. The Foreign Ministry — known as *Itamaraty* — remains the main state agency in charge of international affairs: political, security or economic in nature, or bilateral, regional, or multilateral in level of engagement. This obviously imposes a state-centric profile on external negotiations and affects the definition of national interests. Diplomatic activity has grown more specialised as the country’s international agenda has become more diverse and complex. It is subject to greater societal and political pressures in a context of intense bureaucratic competition between ministries and the deepening of democracy.

On the domestic front, foreign policy priorities have stimulated a polarised debate among an ‘attentive public’. At the heart of this debate has been an evaluation of the political gains and economic incentives for the country arising from the focus on international affairs.

For the first time, international choices have become a matter of internal debate and innate tension in Brazil, leading to a clear differentiation between neo-liberal and neo-developmental inclinations. Though more committed to the second option, the government also mirrors the ambiguities and contradictions imposed on it by the broad political spectrum it has relied on during both its first (2003–06) and second term (since 2007). This tension is likely to continue and inform Brazilian foreign policy well beyond da Silva’s presidency.

GAINING GROUND GLOBALLY

Brazil has always favoured multipolarity. Once again, in this new era of foreign policy, it has reinforced its support for multilateralism to deal with international crises.

The country has become an active supporter of enhanced multilateral initiatives, particularly the expanded role of the UN in world politics, while increasing its own participation and responsibilities. Reform of the judicial and parliamentary structure of the UN has become a permanent fixture on its agenda, making explicit to the international community its ambition to be a permanent member of the Security Council.

It is part of the so-called G4 with Germany, Japan and India — all countries that are mobilising support for their claims to permanent seats on the council. And it has participated in emerging power coalitions such as BRICs (Brazil–Russia–India–China) and IBSA (India–Brazil–South Africa). These are seen to bolster its influence and power on the world stage.

Differences between the US and Brazil in global politics deepened post-9/11. Brazil avoided full-scale alignment with US security policies and shaped its own approach to contain terrorism. It cautiously supported the invasion of Afghanistan but opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq. The administration has maintained a balanced position in dealing with Arab and Middle-East matters. It has enhanced its visibility with Arab nations through the 2005 Summit of South American–Arab Countries, when Brazil refused to invite the US as an observer. It has also made a special effort to hold a more active position on the Israeli–Palestine conflict.

Finally, Brazil's trade policy is an important component of its global economic and political articulation. The country has become an active player in world trade negotiations. Since the 1990s, it has steadily advanced towards free market economics, moving ahead in liberalising its economy without giving up its industrial development strategies. It has also been a very successful exporter of agricultural goods, which has informed its position on global trade negotiations.

It has concentrated on two main subjects in multilateral trade negotiations: the distortion of trade practices for agricultural goods and the uneven conditions of market access. This focus was demonstrated at the Cancun Ministerial in 2003, when Brazil assumed a leading role in the creation of the G20 group of developing nations that helped de-rail negotiations and highlight the developing world agenda for the first time.

In the current international financial crisis Brazil has played its part as an active member of the G20 summit, which has sought remedies for the global meltdown since the end of 2008.

REGIONAL CHALLENGES

For Brazil, regional affairs — and particularly regional affairs in South America — have assumed unprecedented importance. During the 1990s policy gave priority to regional integration, the creation of a South America community, and particularly to the establishment of Mercosur. But gradually its identity as a Latin American country was replaced by that of a South American power. The idea began to grow that it should expand its responsibility for maintaining regional political stability by promoting stronger democratic institutions and values. Ties with Argentina deepened even more as former rivalries were replaced by a 'strategic partnership', combining asymmetric interdependency, political co-ordination and permanent security co-operation.

Acknowledgement by its South American partners of its role as a regional leader has been retarded by a combination of structural asymmetries, enduring misperceptions and political differences. Another factor has been reticence over the country's regional ambitions among domestic constituencies such as business, political and intellectual sectors.

Brazil's difficulties in South American regional politics have been further compounded by the new strain of ideological polarisation vaunted in the last decade by Venezuela's government under President Hugo Chavez. Most feel that the Brazilian administration has to deal with this pragmatically.

In the first years of the 21st century, South America faced a new phase of political instability, particularly in the Andean region. It led to institutional breakdowns, massive popular protests, political violence and local turmoil accompanied by strong anti-American sentiments.³ Brazil became crucial as a stabilising force, insisting on finding political solutions that avoided US-led security-oriented perceptions. This led to a leadership crisis in the region for Washington. Coupled with a lack of interest and political energy to deal with the ‘turbulent peripheries’, it helped Brazil establish its status as a regional power.

Brazil also wishes to be a mediator capable of ‘de-ideologising’ the dialogue between the US and certain countries in the region, especially Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba. Indeed, Cuban affairs are likely to become a new issue on the Brazil–US agenda.

Brazil has strongly supported the establishment of a South American Union (UNASUR) to improve political and defence co-ordination. This initiative has recently led to the creation of a South America Defence Council — a regional body to co-ordinate dialogue on security matters.

The recent National Defense Plan (2009) has made explicit an innovative approach in the articulation between domestic defence matters and the international affairs of the country. Brazilian military officials retain strong nationalistic sentiments, nowadays manifested in a defensive posture toward international actors (especially non-governmental organisations) in strategic areas like the Amazon or in bordering countries.

In the last decade Brazil has increased its defence budget by 29.8%.⁴ Its armed forces total

342 300. It has expanded its presence in the global military equipment market both as a supplier and purchaser.

Since the mid-1990s Brazil has adhered to international non-proliferation of arms regimes. These remain fundamental principles of its multilateral engagement, and continue to inform its defense expenditure according to internationally accepted norms and regulations.

Finally, the expansion of Brazil’s regional co-operative security agenda has evolved in tandem with its increased involvement in peacekeeping activities. Converging interests in regional and global defence provided an important step forward in 2003 when the country assumed military command of a UN-led post-conflict reconstruction mission in Haiti.

ENDNOTES

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- 2 Hirst M, De Lima S & M Regina, ‘Brazil as an intermediate state and regional power: Action, choice and responsibilities’, *International Affairs*, 82, 1, 2006, pp. 21–24; Hurrell A, ‘Lula’s Brazil: A rising power, but going where?’ *Current History*, February 2008, pp. 51–57.
- 3 Examples include Argentina (2001), Bolivia (2003, 2005), Ecuador (2000, 2005), Haiti (2004), Paraguay (1999), Peru (2000) and Venezuela (2002).
- 4 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2008, Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, Sweden: SIPRI, 2008. <<http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2008/yearbook/2008>>.

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