Brazil, Defense Issues in South America and the USA: is there enough room for two major players?

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January 2017

Translated to English by: Anabel W. Teixeira
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Introduction

This essay addresses the evolution of the Brazilian defense agenda for South America since the end of the Cold War and its consequences in the bilateral relations between Brazil and the United States. It will argue that the greater leadership of Brazilian foreign affairs since the first decade of the 21st century, Brazilian investment in military capabilities, and the adoption of a strategy of integration of the Southern hemisphere had effects that shifted the regional strategic panorama. This agenda, however, is constrained it two ways. On one hand, the country remains relying on relatively limited military capabilities that are not well coordinated among the nations of the area, combined with the hesitation to bear the costs that accompany the leadership of a regional integration effort. On the other hand, the United States, as the hegemon, maintains a regional agenda that is focused on security issues (narcotraffic, cross-border problems, non-proliferation) that are distinct from the ones perceived by Brazil, even though the American discourse approves Brazilian regional leadership. This disparity, accentuated by differing views on sovereignty, autonomy, and the use of force, represents an obstacle to the cooperation possibilities between the United States and Brazil and exposes the limits of the regional system when operating with two actors that are attempting to be the protagonist.

This essay’s arguments originate from two basic considerations. The first is related to the fact that the United States has played - and remains playing - a fundamental role in the international security agenda of South America. This is evident not only by the structuring character of its military and in the security institutions put in place by them in the region since the 1940s, but also in its military presence (through both cooperation programs and unilateralism). The second consideration is in regards to the orientation of defense policies and to the regional security of Brazil. Inserted in a region that is characterized by the low
incidence of interstate conflict and by elevated indexes of internal violence, Brazil does not face tangible threats to its security. It does, however, perceive the vulnerabilities resulting from the weakness of its military power, from the possibility of overflow of neighboring countries’ domestic conflicts, and from the possibility of interventions of countries with larger military capabilities, especially in the Amazon and, more recently, in the so-called Amazônia Azul\(^1\) (Blue Amazon). Therefore, the promotion of democracy, of regional stability, and of development has been the cornerstone of the country’s foreign policy discourse, generally more proactive than the initiatives in the practical field. In parallel, Brazil foments the disposition of changing its relative position in the international scenario, and also seeks larger autonomy in the defense field. Thus, in lieu of its possibilities, the...

...insertion of the international security of Brazil is defined based on three general objectives: i) balancing the interest in and the need for accessibility and development of strategic technologies and the application of multilateral commitments with non-proliferation and control; ii) favoring the surge of propitious conditions for the execution of its interests and its needs in security and defense; iii) boosting the gradual transformation of structures and configurations of international power in the direction of a multipolar order (Vaz, 2006).

Pursuing these objectives had undeniable implications in the relations with the United States and with other South American countries. In order to handle the proposal, this text is divided in four sections: this introduction, a second section that addresses the American security policies for South America, and a third that analyzes the evolution of the Brazilian agenda, its strategies, limitations, and recent inflections. Lastly, the fourth section will formulate conclusions and ponderations about possible outcomes.

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\(^1\) According to the Brazilian Marines, it regards the maritime area comprised by the Economic Exclusive Zone and the Extension of the Continental Platform under the Brazilian jurisdiction in scope of the UN Convention about Sea Law.
United States Policies for South America

Throughout the 20th century, the United States consolidated the American continent as its sphere of immediate influence. The principles of the Monroe Doctrine, in 1823, were updated in the 1930s through the Pan-Americanism banner and, during the Cold War, through a free world discourse. In this process, the American hegemony over the region was established due to a combination of economic influence, political and military interventions, and the countries’ willingness to integrate interactional institutions that crystalized this systemic configuration. In the security field, the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance and the military bilateral agreements were fundamental for promoting the anticommmunist agenda and the standardization of the region’s armed forces. This process, however, was not linear, given that in the decades of 1960 and 1970, many countries diverged - to different extents – from the leadership of the United States in the region (Mora and Hey, 2003).

The two final decades of the 20th century, however, were marked by the reaffirmation of the US hegemony in the global and regional arenas. In the 1990s, in the midst of the optimism resulting from the Cold War victory and from globalization, Washington’s focus in the region was directed towards the FTAA and to “democratic governance.” Because of this, the American government took on the agenda of promoting civil control over the military, supporting the creation of defense ministries, and elaborating defense white books and other transparency measures. The US also created the CHDS2 in order to encourage the capabilities of civilians from the region in defense affairs (Barrachina, 2006).

At that moment, the most relevant characteristic of the US security policy towards the region was the introduction of the “new threats” agenda. Since then, the United States insists on the use of the Latin American armed forces as a strategy against organized crime, facing opposition from countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile (D’Araújo, 2010). Themes such as political instability, threats to democracy, corruption, money laundering, organized crime, terrorism, natural disasters and migration, traditionally connected with

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2 The William J Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies is an educational and research institution from the National Defense University, which periodically offers courses in the areas of defense and international security for Latin American civilians and military members.
social and development projects, were secured - both in the Andes and in Mexico - as the main targets of this policy (Villa, 2010; Tokatlian, 2003). This agenda (and the pressures that stemmed from it) made the task of using another strategy against the drug problem - other than the one defined by the United States, the main consumer of the products - even more difficult.

The response to the September 11, 2001 attacks only reinforced the tendency taking place in the region. The amplified concept of terrorism contaminated the regional security agenda as the “war against drugs” was incorporated by the “global war against terror” (Saint-Pierre, 2011). The United States’ decision of reactivating its navy’s IV Fleet in 2008 and the announcement of the agreement that established operational bases and American military personnel in Colombia in 2009, both without informing the other countries of the region, contributed to the perception that it was attempting to balance the center-left governments in place. This environment of increasing unilateralism and of American “preventive interventions” led to the gradual removal and skepticism on the part of Brazil.

In the global level, due to the exhaustion caused by the Bush administration, the 2008 economic crisis, and China’s emergence, the Barack Obama administration strategically repositioned the United States at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Since then Washington started redefining the scope of its definition of threats to its security and to the international order, now focusing more in Asia and the Pacific. At the same time, it started emphasizing the cooperation with other countries that share the same values (NSS 2010).

In regards to Latin America, one can observe an important shift in the discourse, as it now suggests an “equal partnership” that advocates for social and economic inclusion, citizen security, clean energy, and universal values. Furthermore, the illicit drug theme stops being directly associated to the region. Documents such as the *Western Hemispheric Defense Policy Statement* signal that the Department of Defense will seek partners to split the costs and responsibilities of peace and security between countries that sustain increasing capabilities and desires to export security. Thus, a “new era of defense cooperation” in the Americas appears to be arising (p.1). The document recognizes the

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development of larger military capabilities in Brazil and its neighbors and its use for the sake of international security, making this process eminently positive.

However, although poverty and underdevelopment are now part of the discussion, the definition of the threats to regional security changed only partially. When speaking at the congress in January of 2013\(^5\), the Southcom commander defined as “challenges to regional security” the known issue of transnational organized crime (drugs) and its link with terrorism (referring directly to FARC), which collides with the White House initiative of supporting the peace process in Colombia and even the recognition of the role Cuba has played in it. The novelty in the definition of the threats resides in the presence of extra regional actors in the continent. Iran was described as committed to increasing its influences among the countries of the region that have opposing interests to the United States (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Argentina), for the sake of working around the international sanctions and for the “cultivation the anti-American sentiment” (p.12). Distinctively, the crescent economic presence of China in Latin America is described as a disposition to compete with Washington in the military influence over the countries of the region (p.14).

In the bilateral playing field, however, the United States and Brazil were capable of establishing agreements that had the purpose of making commercial and operational objectives in the defense sector more feasible. During the period, North American companies participated in the public tenders of the Brazilian Airforce (FAB) for the acquisition of new jets. In 2010, an instrument that facilitated the transferal of warlike material – especially replacement parts - to Brazil was signed. This could establish the legal framework for an eventual purchase, in the case that Boeing won the public tender. Later, in 2012, this company established a partnership with Brazilian company Embraer in order to cooperate in the development of the new tactical transport aircraft, KC-390, commissioned by FAB. The following year, the United States selected the aircraft manufactured by Embraer for counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan. Furthermore, in 2015, a new agreement was signed, which regulated the sharing of classified information.

and the execution of joint trainings, courses, and internships. This level of convergence, although relevant, should not be overestimated due to accumulated mutual frustrations and suspicions. The United States Congress embargo on Brazilian aircraft sales to Venezuela in 2006, as well as the espionage of Brazilian companies and authorities by the NSA, which were revealed by Edward Snowden in 2013, remains very much present in the memories of Brazilian policymakers. Embargoes, espionage, and the effort to avoid the dependence of supplier willing to impose restrictions are a few of the multiple factors that explain the Brazilian decision to buy the Swedish Gripen jets and not the United States Boeing ones in 2013 (Vucetic e Duarte, 2015). Additionally, the differences between Brasília and Washington in regards to Tehran and to the crises in Honduras, Paraguay, Libya, Syria, and Ukraine foster an increasingly skeptical literature regarding the convergence between Brazil and the United States in terms of international security (Piccone, 2016).

There is, therefore, a difference between the efforts to recover the worn out image of the USA in the region and imprint a new regional defense agenda that incorporates a new protagonist. Despite the discursive inflection and the effective normalization policies of the US-Cuba relations, one cannot observe a significant change in issues such as narcotraffic, the presence of US military in South America, or the activities in the Guantanamo base. The espionage practices of Brazilian authorities and companies by North American intelligence agencies and the continuation of the restrictions towards Brazilian dual technology development programs sustained Brazilian suspicions in relations to the extent of the cooperation with the United States.

There was undeniably a change in approach, which was more open to dialogue and to the establishment of specific partnerships. The “cooperative defense” proposal of the region is based on the recognition of regional leaderships (Brazil especially), however, the framework of the threats, the definition of the agenda and of the partnership terminations differ only slightly from the pre-established standard. The wiggle room for Brazilian political initiatives lies in regards to the presence of the hegemonic power in South America: on one hand the United States seems to be inclined to support Brazilian

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leadership in the region. On the other hand, they have maintained their original security perspectives and these are distinct approaches from what has been adopted by Brazil. It is still too early to evaluate what will change with Donald Trump’s administration. However, his campaign discourse and his first selections for his cabinet suggest that securitization will be the future framework, not only for narcotrafficking but also for immigration.

**The Evolution of the Brazilian agenda**

Despite its relative importance in the region, combined with its economic growth and political projection from the first decade of the 21st century, Brazilian capability of imprinting a security agenda unique to South America has been limited. Similarly, the possibilities of generating a consensus that is alternative to the formulations defined in Washington are also limited, both in virtue of the material dependence in relation to the power or and in function of the divergent and even conflicting interests of some countries. Still, the low priority that South America traditionally receives in the US international security policies and the low frequency of wars in the region allow for a space open for the construction of their own agenda, that may or may not collide with the American one (Tulchin, 2005). This space, although receiving some degree of ambiguity on the part of the US, amplified since the country adopted this “burden sharing” and international security partnerships discourse. Brazil took advantage of this opening in Lula’s second term, yet, throughout Dilma Rousseff’s government, it was gradually retreated until the Michel Temer, where another type of agenda began being considered.

Since the first steps of the integration process, that later evolved into the creation of Mercosul, one can identify a Brazilian agenda on defense and regional security that is modest, yet coherent, and that in the first decade of the 21st century, adopted an incremental character. The distension of the relations with Argentina and the creation of mutual trust mechanisms in the nuclear sector, such as the ABACC7, and still in a Cold War scenario, the creation of the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone (ZOPACAS), are

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7 The Brazilian-Argentine Agency of Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials is the international organization created by Argentina and Brazil in 1991 to supply safeguards regarding the peaceful use of nuclear materials.
important landmarks. They are significant to measure the relevance of topics such as stability, cooperation, and efforts to maintain extraregional powers distant, much like the strategy of constructing institutions that employ shame of sorts among the actors, as it is based on the legitimacy of an international agreement and not on the threat of using force. There is, undeniably, a reactive component in much of the Brazilian initiatives. ZOPACAS itself was a response to the Falklands War and to the increment of British military presence in the region since.

After the end of the military dictatorship, Brazil was even more in need of a time period to publicly inform its national defense policies and its vision regarding regional security. The National Defense Policy of 1996 defined South America and the South Atlantic as its strategic scope. By describing the region as peaceful and demilitarized, the document does not postulate the use of force. Rather, the priority is regional integrational with the purpose of securing “peace and cooperation throughout the national borders.” This orientation was associated to the severe contraction of the Brazilian defense budget. It is important to note, however, that the Brazilian silence in regards to the North American agenda of “new threats”, was an attempt to work around the theme that has been the object of multiple misunderstandings and dissent between the two countries. The silence reflects the institutional fragility of the Brazilian defense sector, still mobilized with the questions of transition to democracy and with civilian control over the armed forces. Without even having a defense ministry that subordinated the three singular forces, the capability of proposing a security agenda for the region that was dissonant from Washington’s was practically null.

Throughout the second mandate of the Lula administration, Brazil imprinted a more assertive character for its defense agenda, associating it to the goal of global projection (Villa and Viana, 2010). This movement was in tune with the inflection of the Brazilian foreign policy of the beginning of the 21st century, marked by the criticism to the asymmetry of the international system, the diversification of partnerships, the priority to the “global south”, and the relative distancing to the United States and the European Union (Vizentini and Silva, 2010). The larger external protagonism that revealed itself then was supported by positive economic indicators, political stability, and widespread optimism stemming from the improved living conditions of an important portion of the population.
This allowed for a recuperation of the state capability of investing and the real growth of the Defense Ministry budget.

In the South American scope, Brasília continued the strategy of creation and fortification of institutions that simultaneously promoted regional integration and reinforced its negotiating position with the US in regards to the themes that were unfavorable to them. In systemic terms, the Brazilian projection occurred in an environment of generalized contestation of the North American unilateralism of the George W. Bush government and of the strategic repositioning and relative opening to “responsible” regional actors of the Barack Obama administration.

During the culmination of this process, in 2008, Brazil published the National Defense Strategy (END), a detailed document that sought to restructure the Brazilian armed forces, reorganize the defense industry and recompose the mandatory military service, as a means of making Brazil capable of defending its territory and its international rise. In regards to the regional agenda, this declaratory document highlights the Amazon region as its priority, where the performance of the forces must be reinforced. The presence, however, is not presented solely as a dissuasive element, but also as part of a Defense Ministry effort to cooperate with the countries that border Brazil in favor of the regional stability and of economic and social development (p. 44).

The emphasis placed on the international projection of Brazil and on the autonomous development of new military, technological, and industrial capabilities reveals an agenda that questions the North American hegemony in the continent and the regional balance of power. The formulation of objectives such as the development of submarines, -conventional and nuclear and capable of operating missiles – satellite launching vehicles, and of satellites with integral technological dominance (p.9, 12, and 16), clashes with American “technological retrenchment,” (Longo and Moreira, 2010) policies that are referred to in the document as “technological blockages imposed by developed countries” (p. 21). This element of asymmetrical competition is, in part, softened with the Brazilian search for partnerships that is limited to Western countries (France and Sweden) and with the nation’s external performance being in line with the UN principles. Their performance
in peace missions in Haiti and in Lebanon,\textsuperscript{8} the discrete mediation in the tensions between the United States and Venezuela, and the moderate discourse of the reform of global governance mechanisms also tend to soften the perception of an eventual zero-sum game between the United States and Brazil in South America.

In South America, the fortification and modernization of the Brazilian armed forces, in the wake of the country’s economic growth, possesses the potential of generating apprehension among the neighboring countries and, in an environment of interstate completion, initiating balancing attempts of the Brazilian position. Due to this, differently from the economic expansion and of the projection of the Brazilian military capabilities of the 1970s and 1980s, Brazilian associated its international rise to regional cooperation and integration. Thus, the END informs that one of the guidelines of the Brazilian strategy is the South American integration, which comprises not only the integration of the Brazilian defense industry with the ones from other nations, but also the role of the South American Defense Counsel, presented as a “consulting measure that will allow the prevention of conflicts and will foment the regional military cooperation and integration of the defense industrial bases, without allowing the participation of a country that is not part of the region” (p. 7). One can observe in the document that, when “rising”, Brazil plans to take the process of regional integration beyond the commercial sphere, creating a new concertation space which the United States is alienated from and where the countries of the region will have larger protagonism in the routing of South American security questions. The integration and the cooperation in defense and international security would be, therefore, methods of avoiding the regional competition and of fomenting trust. At the same time, this strategy of “area formation,” committed to democracy, development, and regional stability, can also be presented as convenient to the hegemonic power, as, on the Brazilian part, is deprived of the anti-American rhetoric and that fits into the international security “division of the burden” discourse.

In 2012, the National Defense White Book reaffirmed the importance of South America and of the South Atlantic to Brazil. In a coherent fashion, the theme of South

\textsuperscript{8} Brazil leads the military contingency of the UN peace missions in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and is present in the missions in South Sudan (UNMISS), Western Sahara (MINURSA), Ivory Coast (UNOCI), Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), Liberia (UNMIL), Sudan (UNISFA), and Cyprus (UNFICYP).
American cooperation appears in multiple manners. One of them is evident in the stricter sense of joint action regarding the issues of defense of national sovereignty and of natural resources, in which the partners would be the fellow countries of the Amazon region (p. 15). In other sense, the theme composes the more generic discourse of legitimization of the Brazilian international projection in which Brazil would seek its “affirmative and cooperative” insertion in a multipolar global order, engaging itself in the consolidation of multilateral governance structures that are representative of the new distribution of global power. By affirming that Brazil desires a “participative and inclusive global community” and that it wishes to engage in a “multilateral cooperative” in the regional defense playing field, the mechanisms of cooperation underway would be creating the emergence of a security community in South America (p. 29). It reinforces, thus, the Brazilian projection as a collective good for the region and for the United States, which would also benefit from the stability in the continent.

Brazil sought to design a South American defense agenda in which its interests of regional stability, global projection, and its military fortification were not only balanced by its neighbors but also accepted as conducive to their interests. In this aspect, the addition of ZOPACAS in its regional agenda also worked as means to seek, through cooperation, the benefits of regional stability, supported not only through the efforts to maintain itself distant from the nuclear powers but also through the concertation increment. The resuming of this initiative, established by a United Nations resolution in 1986 (which the US voted against) and that involves countries of the two margins of the South Atlantic, gave more substance to the governmental criticisms to the reactivation of the American IV Fleet. In the context of discovering new oil sources on the bed of the oceans of the region and of the incremental issues of maritime security in the African coast, ZOPACAS was described by Brazilian authorities as a space for cooperation towards the maintenance of stability as well as for the development of the countries of the region.

Another point that is present in the Brazilian agenda for South America is the production of a regional defense identity, expressed in the objectives declared by not only UNASUL (in a broader sense related to development) but also by the South American Defense Counsel. The profile and political instrumentality of this South American identity had already been defined by Celso Amorim in 2003 in the following terms:
We possess a unique strategic identity, that is not to be confused with the North American one, which makes the concept of “one size fits all” for hemispheric security inapplicable. We are a region where military spending is proportionately very low, we do not have nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction and we do not participate, nor do we wish to participate, in military alliances that are of doubtful compatibility with the United Nations (Amorim, 2003).

The implication of this identity, according to Amorim is that:

All of these factors lead us to work towards an agenda exclusive to the South American preoccupations. A South America that is even more united and cohesive can formulate positions and can better refute questionable concepts and initiatives (Amorim, 2003).

This identity construction is also supported by the political coordination and operation cooperation that caused the military command of MINUSTAH. The division of the project between Argentina, Brazil, and Chile was successful in making South America a region with certain capabilities of “exporting security.” A component that has marked the disclosure of MINUSTAH’s performance is that, in relation to peacekeeping functions, the troops under Brazilian command have also been committed to humanitarian and economic assistance. These efforts project the Brazilian image as an actor that comprehends the security questions in light of the issues of food, health, and public security and development, all of which concerns that it also faces domestically.

The creation of the South American Defense Counsel, an organization subordinate to UNASUL, was a product of a Brazilian initiative that concretized because of the convergence between the countries of the region for the sake of institutionalizing debate spaces and defense cooperation without the presence of external actors (the United States). This convergence is a result of a long process of the creation of bonds between South American nations (D’Araújo, 2010). Its consulting character and its objectives reveal an institutional design dedicated to the construction of mutual trust, the cooperation in
numerous areas, and the non-execution of military operations. This allowed for the incorporation of countries with distinctive visions at the time, such as Colombia and Venezuela, and for a discursive alignment between the Brazilian agenda and UNASUL’s.

There is, however, a mismatch between the Brazilian discourse of cooperation and integration and the projects that seek to modernize its Armed Forces. These programs contemplate the development of autonomous capacities for the national industry to supply weapons and technologically-advanced systems via its own development and via the establishment of partnerships with nations that possess technologies that Brazil does not. The states of the region are only exceptionally present in these programs, given that their limited industrial capacities tend to restrict participation in an eventual process of integration of the defense sector supply chains in South America. Moreover, the countries that have spent the most with defense in the region, Colombia, Chile, and Venezuela, make acquisitions jointly with other nations (USA and Russia) and not in the domestic market, so the growth prognostics of the sector in the region are modest.

The disharmony between the propositions in the political sphere and the actions taking place in scope of the singular forces tends to weaken the consistency and credibility of the Brazilian agenda among the countries of the region. Even though the Brazilian commitment with regional stability and the negotiated conflict revolution are widely recognized, the country has been criticized for not dealing with the economic costs of the integration that it attempts to lead, which has led to several patterns of contestation in the region (Flemes and Wehner, 2012). In the diplomatic sphere, Brasília has been facing some difficulties in coordinating with the countries of the region in terms of some of its costlier objectives. These include the attainment of a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and the bitter setbacks in Bolivia regarding gas and the Petrobras refineries, in Paraguay, due to the discussion of the Itaipu agreement, and in Ecuador, regarding the contestation of this government to the performance of a Brazilian contractor. Furthermore, Venezuela, until recently, positioned itself as an alternative leadership to Brazil. Movements such as these are typical of countries whose agendas are not fully conducive to the Brazilian agenda and that also seek a better position in order to bargain the benefits that the Brazilian leadership can provide.
This negative picture exacerbated throughout the Dilma Rousseff governments. In her first mandate, Rousseff maintained the same agenda and orientation of her predecessor. However, the Brazilian foreign performance as a whole suffered heightened political retraction and deflation (Saraiva, 2016). Her second term, which was interrupted by the Brazilian Congress in August of 2016, was so consumed by the internal political crisis and by budgetary restraints that it fomented doubts regarding the Brazilian capability of sustaining its ascending trajectory.

These doubts were reinforced due to the first measures implemented by the Michel Temer government. The Brazilian foreign agenda now prioritizes the search for commercial agreements and for a larger liberalization of Mercosul, while UNASUL, BRICS and other forums remain in a political vacuum. On the other hand, the new government opted for politicizing the relationship with Venezuela, expressing open criticism to the Nicolás Maduro government and maneuvering so that this country does not assume the pro tempore presidency of Mercosul. The effort of the Temer government in adopting austerity measures and in proposing a constitutional amendment that limits (for two decades) the public spending to inflation variations also reinforces the skepticism regarding the continuity to the modernization of the armed forces projects and to its employment as inducers of technological and industrial development, domestically and regionally, and as support for the international projection of the nation, globally.

It is important to note that, even if the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff had not occurred, an adjustment in the regional defense agenda had to be made, given that the scenario has been changing significantly. In Argentina and in Peru, center-left governments, potentially more in tune with the Brazilian leadership and more reticent to the agendas originating from Washington, were succeeded by politically-conservative and economically-neoliberal governments. In Bolivia, a new Evo Morales government is no longer expected and, in Venezuela, the internal crisis and the fall of the oil prices compromised its foreign performance capability. In Colombia, the continuity of the cease-fire suggests that the possibility of achieving a peace agreement is real. The relative retraction of the Chinese economy and the reduction in the prices of commodities that were exported by the countries of the region suggest a lesser disposition for defense spending and make the integration projects of the region’s defense industry more remote.
On the other hand, the incremental and long-lasting character of the Brazilian agenda, focused on dialogue, on trust-building, and on the creation of institutions (better characterized as concertation spaces rather than regional alliances) allow one to affirm that the institutional and discursive repertoire is likely to persist. Donald Trump’s election, which rekindles the fears regarding United States unilateralism can reinforce the Brazilian gamble on the virtues of a multipolar world and of a region with its own defense identity.

Final remarks

This essay argued that Brazil undertook a defense agenda for South America whose concretization had implications in a relevant shift in the regional strategic scenario. Continuing a long effort of intensification of the regional institutions in favor of mechanisms of mutual trust and of concertation without the US presence (Zopacas, Unasul, CDS), Brazil sought to elevate its military capabilities defining them not only as a sovereign decision, but also as a collective gain for the regional security and development. In intending to configure another pole in a multipolar world, the Brazilian strategy presented itself as coherent to the principles regarding democracy and the market economy, aligned with the international system led by the United States.

This strategy was possible due to a period of prosperity in the country and in the region. It was also due to a relative relegation of South America on the part of the United States, which was absorbed by the “global war on terror” in the Bush years and by the willingness to allow “responsible” regional actors with more space in the Obama years. A Brazilian leadership would be of interest to the United States as long as it assures regional stability at relatively low costs. In this sense, one can affirm that, strategically, there is enough room for two protagonists in the region, although there is an evident power asymmetry. The contour definition of this space, however, is not that simple. Even though the United States and Brazil share a series of common interests and values, they possess distinctive practices and visions in the international arena. This is the key to understanding the cycles of expectation and frustration that characterize the bilateral relations between the two countries. The continuity of the traditional American framework in relation to themes such as narcotraffic, terrorism, and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass
destruction, as well as its military presence in the region and disposition to monitoring the communications of Brazilian companies and authorities are friction points that add to the divergences and security crises in other regions that are frequently not understood or poorly understood by Washington.

The international protagonism of Brazil in the 21st century has aroused the expectation of a new global actor that is convergent to the United States' values and interests, which was fomented by an eminently positive narrative in relation to Brazil among the government, media, and think tanks (Svartman, 2016). On the other hand, the dissents signaled in this paper, followed by the Brazilian retraction, negatively affected this narrative and nourished a skepticism regarding the country's ability to lead. In Brazil, the Temer government presented itself as willing to politically align with the US and nurtured the expectation of a larger synergy in the commercial camp as a means of establishing another relationship standard. However, the new political framework in Washington can force a revision of this orientation, given that, in confirming the expectations of larger unilateralism, nativism, and protectionism of the hegemonic power, it will be costly to maintain the alignment and negotiate bilaterally.

The changes in Washington and Brasília, coupled with the new regional scenario, generate new questions in relation to the bilateral relationship and to the defense and international security agenda. Since the engagement in MINUSTAH and UNIFIL, Brazil has become (under the UN mandate) a security provider with reasonable coordination and convergence with the United States. With the current external retraction of Brazil, what can the United States expect from Brazil in terms of cooperation towards the maintenance of peace? The disposition manifested by the new Brazilian government of restricting the public investment capabilities will certainly affect the projects of modernization of the armed forces and the modest possibilities of integration of the South American defense industry. Will this be the end of the Brazilian emergence as a regional military power? Could the demotion of the Brazilian foreign action profile, coupled with the opening of the domestic oil and infrastructure market to the North American companies revert the restrictions to technology transfer from the US to the remaining Brazilian military programs? Considering that the United States is the main destiny of Brazilian migrants and that the crisis in the country will undoubtedly accentuate emigration, would the possibility
of a new government in Washington securitizing immigration affect the relations with Brazil? Does the recent Argentine disposition to host United States military bases and the silence of the Brazilian diplomacy (not as emphatic as in the Colombian case) mark an end to the construction of South American as a region with its own security identity? These questions can lead to new research programs and deserve the due reflection as this new scenario consolidates itself. Debating them in the public sphere is fundamental for the political definition of the directions that will be taken by the bilateral relation between United States and Brazil in the field of defense and international security.

**Bibliography**


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