



Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional

ISSN: 0034-7329

rbpi@ibri-rbpi.org.br

Instituto Brasileiro de Relações Internacionais
Brasil

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Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional, vol. 53, núm. 2, 2010, pp. 107-124

Instituto Brasileiro de Relações Internacionais
Brasília, Brasil

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Brazil: an emerging military power? The problem of the use of force in Brazilian international relations in the 21st century

*Brasil: uma potência militar emergente?
O problema do uso da força nas Relações Internacionais
do Brasil no século 21*

JOÃO FÁBIO BERTONHA*

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int. 53 (2): 107-124 [2010]

Introduction

This paper has as its main concern the issue of Brazilian military power and its role in the country's international relations in future years. Specifically speaking, its goal is to discuss whether a reinforcement of Brazilian military capacity would be desirable or not, considering the expansion of the country's international ambitions. Would giving the Brazilian State adequate military devices mean a growth in national power and in its capacity to influence the world? Or, on the other hand, would it make Brazil lose its apparently peaceful image and, therefore, damage the nation's attempts at reaching its goals? These are the background questions that will be examined in this text.

In order to achieve this goal, the article will be divided in several parts. First of all, it will try to demonstrate one of Brazil's significant characteristics within the countries, that is, the country's lack of importance in military terms. After that, we shall ask whether this option for a lack of strategic relevance is something that is actually conscious or a reaction to historical circumstances and whether it can (or cannot) be changed in view of the country's new international ambitions. Finally, starting with an assessment of Brazil's latest military capacities, the article will attempt to evaluate whether the current initiatives of Luis Inácio da Silva's government concerning this issue (the National Defense Strategy in 2008 and the agreements with France in 2009) represent consistent steps in a desirable direction or not.

The main theme of this text is, therefore, comprehending the strategic moment is experiencing and presenting ideas about how the national military

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machine could be and must be enhanced in order to fit into the new international scenario and Brazil's ambitions within it.

Brazil: the peaceful member of BRIC?

Talking about the countries and their role in 21st century geopolitics has become almost a commonplace as Brazil, Russia, India, and China are becoming the protagonists of international relations during that the beginning of this century. These four countries constitute the emerging bloc in the area of global decisions and the can be already seen participating in many multilateral organizations, in meetings such as the one in Brasilia in 2010 and in several other initiatives.

It is certain that the rise of this bloc (and of other medium-sized countries such as Indonesia, Mexico and Iran) represents a radical transformation in the global economy and the distribution of the world power for the foreseeable future. Joint initiatives from Moscow, Brasilia, New Delhi and Beijing have also had repercussions particularly in forums like the G20 and others.

It is questionable, however, if there would be a chance for this block to create a common political philosophy, especially in strategic terms, as the interests of the four of them are very diverse, with an exception being made in relation to specific issues such as the search for more space in to confront the traditional power of the United States and Europe. The BRIC acronym, in fact, indicates a homogeneity that does not exist.

It is more than that. The use of the BRIC acronym hides an obvious fact, that is, the power elements available to each of the four nations are too different from each other and because of that their individual abilities to influence great global decisions are not exactly the same.

Russia, for instance, is a military power of the first magnitude with a diplomatic tradition and capacity to project power, at least in its immediate surroundings. Yet, its economic recovery is not certain due to it being very much based on oil, its population declining and with the attractions of its culture to other nations now in decline (BERTONHA, 2009 and 2009a). India can also boast a reasonable military apparatus and a growing economy, but its neighbor Pakistan is relatively hostile and its internal stability can be questioned.

China has a strong growing economy, a military apparatus in the process of modernization and a clearly increasing capacity in terms of international performance. The reasonable capacity Chinese culture to be exported and its moderate profile within international relations are also elements in its favor. Nevertheless no-one can be sure if the Chinese Communist Party will be able to sustain the monumental task of modernizing that society without tearing the social fabric apart, and the lack of raw materials and energy could be revealed as problematic in the future as well.

Brazil is starting from a different baseline. Its economy is more modern and mature than that of China, India and even Russia and due to that fact, it cannot grow as fast as its Asian counterparts. The country also faces problems, especially in the educational field, in order to become a knowledge society and economy. Nonetheless, in the past years Brazil has presented consistent growth and if it continues along this path the country will finally join the leading economies in the world. Resources such as energy, food, and raw materials are also abundant and factors in favor of sustained national growth.

Brazil's image in the world is in general a positive one and in a region without great rivals the country can progress without meeting major problems. Brazilian culture is much appreciated as well, even with the Portuguese language tending to isolate it (GRATIUS, 2007: 9), this is also the case concerning its diplomatic tradition, indicating that at least in terms of 'soft power' the situation is in the very least potentially positive.

Therefore, in relation to the other countries, the Brazilian situation could be considered quiet. We have a mature economy and the country has accomplished most of its modernization process and changed from an agriculture-based country to a modern one. Our culture is peaceful and appreciated; we are well-regarded by the rest of the world and our capacity for diplomatic performance, negotiation and acting on the world stage is positively looked on.

The remaining question is: are all of these factors enough? Among the four BRIC countries, Brazil is the only nation that does not have nuclear weapons. Russia, China, as well as India have the capacity to impose themselves militarily at least on their nearest neighbors (Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Far East and Indian Ocean Basin), while the Brazilian capacity to do the same in its surroundings (South America) is doubtful. The ability to project military resources beyond their immediate surroundings is limited in all four cases, but the Brazilian capacity is the smallest of all. Among the countries, not to mention other great global powers, Brazil is, for the better or for the worse, the least heavily armed. This cannot be of great importance in a peaceful neighborhood like South America (GRATIUS, 2007: 9), but it limits the international intervention capacity of the country and poses the as to whether this lack of power is a positive point or not for the country, and if it is intentional or a simple effect of the country's own unawareness of the security issue.

Brazil: a peaceful country by nature?

There has for a long time been a myth concerning the Brazilian identity, that is, the myth that says Brazilians are peaceful people in their beliefs, incapable of wasting time on civil wars or external conflicts in order to solve disputes or troubles. Conciliation and negotiation are always preferable and form a positive element of our society and culture.

It is the case that certain societies, such as some of those in Spanish America, have a cultural tradition especially in the political field that is much more confrontational and less willing to negotiate and to adopt a tranquil posture. In spite of that, we may note that the Brazilian tradition is a myth, especially if we think of the many accounts of conflicts, slavery, social problems, and urban violence among other issues that have marked Brazilian history. As a corollary of that myth there is the idea that Brazil, in its international relations, is a peaceful country that has abdicated the use of force as a tool for its external politics.

We may find some proof in our history of that so-called Brazilian peaceful character: the two major military actions of the country outside its boundaries (the Paraguayan War and the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, during the Second World War) are almost a century apart from one another and, since then, Brazil has only acted in peaceful international missions, such as that of the Dominican Republic in 1965, in Africa and in the Middle East and, more recently, in Haiti.

With our neighbors, we have always had tension that has sometimes reached high levels. There have actually been some moments, such as that during the military dictatorship, that Brazilian diplomacy and the armed forces were about to intervene in Chile, Uruguay, and Bolivia, but those were exceptional periods and Brazil has not been in a war against its neighbors for more than 140 years, which is undoubtedly an exceptional long time (Miyamoto, 2009: 24-26).

Similarly, in spite of our neighbors' continuous memories of Luso-Brazilian expansionism over the centuries and the occasional concerns that still appear, there is no about the fact that Brazil's frontiers have been consolidated for a long time and there was no need of a war to make that happen, but rather negotiation and diplomacy.

Other contentious issues are trade questions or the role of Brazil and Argentina in the UN Security Council. Such problems, however, are not uncommon in the routine of nations and no-one has ever gone to war because of that. The Brazilian State makes a great effort not to take regional questions into the defense field and to show caution in the intentions of its leadership. Mercosur may be understood in the context of this non-confrontational logic.

Concerning the world outside South America, Brazil's intentions have never been based on any military power, but on mediation, the righteousness of its cause, and the performance in the many international organizations the country belongs to (Miyamoto, 2009: 24-26).

All of this indicates how the international projection plan so long ago by the Brazilian elite does not mean taking an aggressive posture toward our neighbors, much less any attempt to modify the global order by the use of force. Brazil is, to all intents and purposes, a peaceful country which does not relate its external politics to the capacity of military projection, choosing instead to opt for dialog and continuous concessions.

Nevertheless, there is the question of whether this is the posture assumed by the Brazilian elite or simply an option that has arisen out of circumstances, derived from the cold evaluation of Brazil's strategic possibilities.

Alsina Jr. makes a very closely-argued evaluation of this topic and, in a nutshell, his conclusion is that, regarding the existence of a national tradition for the resolution of conflicts throughout negotiation, non-confrontational politics is also a reflection of a weakness in national military power that will last through the 21st century. Hence, the preponderance of diplomacy over armed force comes from a conciliatory national identity together with the awareness of the lack of an effective capacity for the use of force.

Thus, the idea that the country rationally chose to maintain its strength at a low base and to favor negotiation loses strength. It would only be possible if there were a great capacity for the construction of public policies and their coordination, subordinating the military to the diplomats, what has never occurred (Alsina Jr., 2009: 183). The Brazilian problem is that for many reasons (including the country's relative safety due to its geographic isolation and having few great rivals in the region) security and defense issues have never received proper attention and the armed forces have never had significant capacity for the projection of power in the 21st century, which has inevitably meant that the international issues have been left to the diplomats.

Comparing the Brazilian military actions in the Southern Cone during the 19th and 20th centuries can shed some light on the matter. In the 19th century, despite the modesty of the Brazilian military forces, they had a great deal of significance in the regional context. The Navy had a reasonable ability to act in the River Plate Basin and the Empire used force several times in the region, the climax of this process being the war against Paraguay. Brazilian diplomats did not hesitate to use force whenever it was necessary and even Baron Rio Branco during the Republic knew that both aspects of state action complemented each other.

Today, moving the reflection beyond Brazil and thinking about the regional context, the question remains whether the region is relatively peaceful and, due to that fact, spends few resources on the armed forces or whether, on the other hand, its low military investment implies in few conflicts because of the lack of means.

All the data gathered indicate the low relevance of the continent in strategic terms (Fraga, 2007). It is evident that objective factors, such as the hegemonic presence of the United States, the effective action of the countries in the region in the search for quick solutions to crises (Scardamaglia, 2008) or the lack of much more serious outbreaks of conflict – be they cultural or economic– (like those in the Middle East and Asia) help explain the relative peace in the region. The shortages and problems (drug dealing, crime rates, underdevelopment, and so on) of the continent's countries and societies also explain why the military forces have ended up focusing more on police tasks or even politics, in other times, and have abandoned their central function of preserving the sovereignty and defense

of national interests in terms of other states, which implies contemplating war against other armed forces.

Nevertheless, the lack of effective power to deal with any interstate conflict is also an important element to make the armed forces concentrate more on other tasks (including UN peace missions and social assistance) than those that have historically defined them.

In any case, since the abdication to force or the maintenance of the armed forces as auxiliary units of the police is an option and not a destiny, we are left with the question as to whether it is a correct one or not. As the economic conditions of Brazil improve, would the recovery of a military capacity imply progress or a regression in terms of the goals of achieving more influence concerning global decisions and regional peace?

Military Re-equipment: a factor of strength or weakness?

The conciliatory Brazilian foreign policy could be classified as a typical case of successful use of 'soft power' to achieve its national objectives. One of its results is the almost peaceful acceptance of Brazilian leadership in the region. Even if it is debatable that this leadership is relative because it is considered more rhetorical than real, it asserts itself and has not been causing excessive apprehension in the area. Brazil's geopolitical rise does not seem to be creating any alarm among the great powers either. Thus, we could say that the country's non-use of force is, in essence, positive.

However, the main problem is that the abdication of force does not solve all problems and dilemmas, especially when there is a relationship with a very powerful state such as the USA. The hypothesis of a war between Brazil and the USA is remote, but American power dominates the South Atlantic and it is strongly based in Colombia and in other countries (Bertonha, 2005; Scardamaglia, 2009), and Brazilian pacifism will not convince Washington to back away and give Brasilia a strategic monopoly to the south of Panama. As has been well indicated by Derghougassian (2009), the renunciation of force may be ethically defensible and may bring advantages, but it also brings, compared to stronger protagonists, an asymmetry that impairs relationships and does not always provide good results.

In the same way, a policy excessively based on negotiation may show signs of weakness and may generate more damage than benefits. This is seen in the example of the Bolivian gas crisis in 2006. Even considering that, essentially, the Brazilian answer to the Bolivian gas nationalization was a proper one (Bertonha, 2006), there is some legitimacy in saying that Itamaraty acted in a very complacent way at the beginning, whereas, if negotiation had been the only way of dealing with the matter, it does not seem proper to have started them in a subservient position, accepting everything the other side wanted. Also, some terms and statements from the Bolivian government took on an anti-Brazilian connotation and deserved

an immediate answer. After some time, under public pressure, the government reacted, but it was rather late in doing it.

In other words, the answer of president Luis Inácio Lula da Silva's government to this issue was essentially correct, but if it had had an active decision and pressure from the very beginning, it would have been more suitable. At the start, Petrobras seemed to be without any governmental support to react to the *fait accompli* and, as has been previously mentioned, hesitation and full acceptance of everything are not the best way to start any negotiation.

Perhaps the same might be said about Mercosur. The trade bloc cannot advance towards a larger integration and the smaller countries, as Uruguay and Paraguay seem to be less satisfied day by day. On the other hand, Argentina is more concerned about protecting its commercial flow with Brazil by means of some maneuvers (totally against the main proposal of a trade bloc) than deepen the association between them.

Outside Mercosur, the South-American Union seems to be a myth. Venezuela, despite its current crisis, has consolidated itself, although there is a great mythology involving it as an alternative leader in the region, while Colombia has gone towards a closer relationship with the United States. Mexico and the Central America are practically a part of US territory. Thus, union seems to exist only on paper.

Brazil and its foreign policy cannot be responsible for everything. However, as the biggest and most powerful country on the continent, Brazil should take some responsibility for the Latin-American integration problems. The entire South-American union project – essential to the region's progress, its competitive integration within the globalized market and its international projection – can only be done with Brazil at the center and then only the Brazilian leadership can deal with this project successfully. Nevertheless, Brazil seems to hesitate when it has to use its power and influence to accelerate and keep this process running.

The position assumed by Brazil seems to be correct in order not to impose a hegemonic position or back away in front of the requests from its poorer or discontented neighbors. But this wish to show goodwill may be seen as a weakness and no leadership can be seen in this light.

The renunciation of military hegemony in the South-American continent may not be an adequate response, being more self-defeating than valid. After all, a real capacity for intervention in the region when the Bolivian crisis appeared, for instance, could have given not just more options to the President of the Republic, but also led the Bolivian government to moderate its actions.

This paper does not suggest bombing Montevideo city to prevent Uruguay from leaving Mercosur, obtaining Bolivian gas with a large army, or blocking Buenos Aires harbor in order to bring Argentina back into the Mercosur project. But a stronger position (even if the definition of 'strength' might be difficult) may be necessary to advance the integration project.

In this way, the conclusion offered by this paper is that the conciliatory position of Brazil in regard to its neighbors and the world, taking into account its effort to negotiate and arbitrate between opposing sides, is a merit, a tradition of the country that must be protected and supported. However, the acquisition by the country of a reliable military capability would not be the renunciation of this policy; it would actually support that policy.

As was previously mentioned by Myamoto (2009: 29), the possibility of Brazil making demands in the international scenario has always been blocked by two variables: less power (economic, political and military) and no chances given to it by the great powers. A stronger army would decrease these disadvantages and give more credibility to Brazilian foreign policy.

Actually, the discourse, the rhetoric and good intentions are not enough to bring equality to the powerless, which is the main problem. Brasília can try to impose itself as a good actor that deserves a role in the Middle East scenario, for instance, but, due to the lack of power (not just military) of the country to make interventions and mediate, the effort may not be worthwhile.

When the recent earthquake occurred in Haiti this situation became visible. When the USA decided to help the victims of that disaster, it used a huge amount of resources, including an aircraft carrier, a hospital ship, helicopters and all the necessary tools to send help. Before this demonstration of military power, even if it was used for humanitarian purposes, the Brazilian government had to accept, at least at first, a secondary position in the control of the international help to those victims. Facing a huge material power, even in humanitarian missions, goodwill and kindness are not enough.

The present writer strongly subscribes to Alsina Jr's (2009: 187-189) conclusions that without the military power, the country is constrained in its relations and autonomy relation to the great powers and even its own national 'soft power' and diplomacy decrease in credibility. I also agree with his conclusion that the ownership of a limited, but real capacity of conventional dissuasion would be useful to the foreign policy interests of Brazil and its development.

When we consider the question, it is understandable how military power is effective when it is used. Making use of Nye (2004: 31) and Alsina Jr's (2009: 175) reflections, it is possible to realize that military power has a direct side and also a symbolic one, demonstrating its limits to others. In this way, the military power does not need to be used but it needs to be reliable, in other words, it must not exist symbolically, without a material base. Then, to discuss which military system we need to achieve our new political and symbolical goals is consequently the main point at the moment.

Brazil's strategic goals and its required military capacity

Rosendo Fraga (2009) presents the current Brazilian defense policy linked to three dimensions. The first, local or national, would represent the State

reaffirming its role as holder of the monopoly of violence inside national territory and in the absolute occupation of it. The second, regional or South-American, would imply stability and peace in the continent, while the third, global, would indicate an aspiration for global affirmation as a power worthy of respect.

On the first level, internal problems as the fight against the drug trade would be present. On the second, there would be the conflicts with the USA due to matters like the reactivation of the 4th Fleet or the Colombian bases and the effort to moderate Hugo Chávez and create regional defense structures. On the third level, there would be the explanation of Brazil's effort to obtain a nuclear submarine, which would show the world that the country has reached a further technological and strategic stage.

It can be doubted whether the national defense policy is as articulated and pondered as that author affirms, but he is able to summarize in a very good way the problems and the main questions to be taken into consideration in any defense strategy in the future.

If we think about the current situation, the chances of inter-state conflict are low. The world has a superpower (the United States) and other middle-level powers and it maintains its stability. Since the end of the Cold War there have hardly been any wars among the great powers and there seems to be little chance of there being others in the foreseeable future.

In this scenario, since the only military power which is able to beat Brazil is the USA and it has not shown interests in doing so (since our differences are few and negotiable), the immediate necessity of military equipment – possibly nuclear – to confront Washington is small.

If we take into account that Brazil does not even have in its region any enemy that can threaten it as a sovereign nation, and that risks to national security due to the drug trade or gangs are moderate, we may say that we do not have any immediate challenge or a real risk to the national territory. Potentially, there are always risks, even more so in a context of decrease of mineral, food and energy resources that the country has in large quantity, but those risks are only potential ones.

Considering the second main goal, the maintenance of peace and order in South America, the situation is also comfortable. South America, as has been previously mentioned, is very peaceful and its security problems are almost irrelevant in the world scenario.

However, this does not mean that there have not been conflicts or that there is no risk of violence in the region (Scardamaglia, 2008; Alsina Jr., 2009). So it is essential that Brazil has military tools to act beyond its frontiers both in the case of peaceful missions and in the protection of national interests, showing, even symbolically, its leadership in the continent.

Finally, in order to achieve credibility as an actor able to act effectively in global decisions, Brazil needs to acquire suitable instruments of power. Nuclear instruments are not under discussion, but some capacity of action – by air, water

or by land – to take part in collective actions outside the continent probably would be necessary, with modern equipment compatible to that used by the great powers. One or more nuclear submarines seem to be especially suitable to this purpose.

So, that would be the military capacity that Brazil might try to acquire in the years to come, that is, a medium-level one. It implies having suitable power to protect the territory and the national airspace against unequal intimidation and some dissuasion against the strongest states; a capacity for complete action in case of bringing about stabilization in South America and some global action in association with other states. This would be a level of power that would be suitable to Brazil's local and global intentions and that would be enough to achieve those intentions.

At the moment, it is necessary to verify if the Brazilian army is close to the minimum level suggested and if the recent steps taken by the Brazilian government – through the release of the National Defense Strategy document in 2008 and the agreement signed with France in 2009 – may indicate progress in this direction.

Current Brazilian military power and its immediate future

In 2007-2008, Brazilian military capacity seemed to be at its lowest level. An article written by the present writer (Bertonha, 2008), indicated how dramatic the situation was. Even with 300,000 soldiers the Brazilian military machine was almost static due to the lack of modern equipment, maintenance and training. The Army only had second-hand German and American tanks and armored fighting vehicles from the 1970s, of which just 30% were operational. Its anti-aircraft artillery had to be aimed and fired manually and its artillery was obsolete.

The Air Force only had light aircraft or some, such as F-5s, therefore out of commission although it was receiving some supersonic Mirage-2000. From its 719 military aircraft, just 267 were operational; the rest were in the repair parks or grounded due to lack of parts. The FAB did not have modern aircraft, attack helicopters or medium range air-to-air missile and its pilots only trained 80 hours per year.

In the Navy, less than half of the ships and submarines were operational and few ships were new. The nuclear submarine project was making a slow progress and the few expected acquisitions would not compensate for the units that would become obsolete. The morale of officers and men in the three forces was not good due to the low salaries and low prestige.

According to international analysts (Calle, 2007) Chile had the most modern and well trained military force in the continent, even though numerically smaller compared to the other nations. In the annual report *Military Power Review* (Calle, 2007: 34-35) of that year, it was considered that Chile had already reached the

third position in the rank of military forces in Latin America behind Brazil and Peru, almost overcoming the latter. Venezuela had gone from seventh to fifth place in the ranking and Argentina had reached fourth place. The prediction was that if Brazil did not react, despite its large number of soldiers, it would lose its position as the leading military power in the region.

This realization caused a reaction. After 2007, Parliament and the Executive increased the resources to conclude old projects, such as the nuclear submarine and rockets to launch satellites into outer space and to strengthen the armament industry. The military budget also increased by 50% in 2008 and many equipment programs for the military forces were approved. The government also increased spending on defense from 1.5% to 2.7% of GDP and released a National Defense Strategy, which will be discussed below.

The Army prioritized the acquisition of a new fleet of wheeled armored fighting vehicles, the operation of the new Special Forces brigades, its antiaircraft and communication capacity and bridges and boats for operations in the Amazon basin. The Navy wants a nuclear submarine, modernization and the construction of conventional submarines, new torpedoes, helicopters and command and control systems, while the Air Force has reopened the negotiations to get new fighters, has modernized the AMX and obtained around one hundred Super *Tucanos* for training and counter insurgency operations. In addition, with the arrival of great innovative weapons, such as some MI-35 Russian attack helicopters (a casual acquisition, based on commercial negotiations with the Russians), the Air Force has reached a new technological and operational level.

In the present writer's view, it is not clear yet what led Luis Inácio da Silva's government to provide privileges to an area that had almost forgotten in his first mandate. Calle (2007 and 2009) mentions that, since the end of the dictatorship period, there had been a kind of tactical agreement between civilians and the military: the latter would not be punished for the crimes committed in the dictatorship period and the military cast would have more autonomy in return for accepting low budgets. Moreover, due to the military collapse in Argentina and the economic crisis in the 1980s and 90s, there would be no reason for providing resources for armaments.

Nowadays, according to the same author, the economic and fiscal situation of the country has improved and many concerns have appeared such as: the growth of organized crime, the consolidation of Chávez' position in Venezuela, signs of international increasing interest in Brazilian oil and raw materials, the rise of native nationalism in Bolivia and the reinforcement of the American presence in Colombia and other countries, all of which have required increasing Brazil's military capacity.

Other authors, such as Noro (2009) and Oliveira (2008: 142) describe the great crisis of the FAB in 2007, giving increasing rearmament and tension in the Amazon and Andean regions as reasons for the new government's attention to the

issue. Nevertheless, although all those issues – together with the presence of such a dynamic and active personality as Jobim at the Defense Ministry – had been important, the chain of events that led Luis Inácio Lula da Silva's Government to this reversal of its position in the defense area is not yet clear.

What is remarkable is that President Lula, an ex-trade union leader and victim of the military dictatorship, is the president who has led the recovery of the nation's military power, in a situation that is almost the opposite of that in Argentina. There, the military lost their political power and subsequent democratic governments have tended to assume a confrontation posture in relation to the Armed Forces, which almost explains how they arrived at the critical operative, logistic and moral situation in which they find themselves (Bertonha, 2007; Hang, 2007; Calle, 2007 and Corbacho, 2008).

However, in spite of the recent acquisitions of arms, Brazilian military force is limited and far short of the desired minimum. To bring this situation in line with what is hoped for, there would need to be new investments and special care taken in planning them, which would imply an emphasis on quality instead of quantity and a review of some points of the National Defense Strategy that was approved in 2008.

Brazilian National Defense Strategy in 2008

The evaluation that this paper makes of the Brazilian armed forces at present is essentially correct: precarious, old-fashioned and technologically obsolete equipment, troop concentration in less sensitive areas, little coordination among the forces, purchases based on opportunity instead of on real needs, a defective mobilization system, an almost nonexistent industrial-military complex and dependence on foreign equipment and technology.

Some of the solutions discussed are difficult to disagree with: emphasis on defending the Amazonian region, which would result in a subsequent removal of armed forces from São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and other central states; better coordination between the forces, including common purchase policies and, wherever possible, harmonization of equipment and emphasis on flexibility and agility, with a massive use of technology.

The National Defense Strategy also correctly states that it is impossible for a country like Brazil, with its economic limitations, to be strong in all sectors, which leads to the establishment of priorities for each armed force. Such priorities are the right ones for the moment: that is, the denial of access to and use of Brazilian seas by hostile powers, vigilance and control of air space and the creation of mobile and flexible Army brigades for immediate action in all national territory, but mainly in Northern Brazil.

These are the strong points of the paper. It advocates collaboration between military personnel and civilians and points out the need for updating technology. It also clearly defines the problems of the Armed Forces, indicates priorities and

establishes lines of action to solve problems and to meet all the country's needs. Even so, it has some structural weaknesses that slightly decrease its worth.

The first is that, although the paper establishes priorities, some existing proposals divert resources and effort from the aforesaid priorities. One of them is that the Navy must keep some capacity for power projection. This is not an absurd goal: it is even desirable, in the light of Brazil's international goals for the near future. The problem is, projecting power is a very complex, expensive task for any Navy, because it means having not only a full-time Marine Corps ready for action but also huge ships and some kind of aircraft carrier. Would there be resources enough for a Navy which projects power at a sufficient level to discourage attack? This is hardly likely, which points to the need for further thinking on this point.

At the same time, there is move to reverse the trend of the professionalization in the Armed Forces in favor of compulsory service even strengthening the *Tiros de Guerra* (military reservists). Such a proposal is understandable from the point of view that military, especially the Army, has a role as builder of nationality and citizenship, but hardly stands up to scrutiny when we take into account the need to form mobile, highly trained units, equipped with advanced technologies. Even though the draft provides soldiers at a low cost, their efficiency is arguable and might compromise resources that would be better employed in other projects. In a context of limited resources, the wisdom of such a policy remains doubtful.

It is important to prioritize and reduce investments in retirement funds, salaries and numbers in order to reinforce technology, mobility and adequate instruments with clear goals in mind. Brazil, like other Latin American countries, spends too much on salaries, pensions and other expenses (Donadio, 2007; Comparative, 2008, p. 48-49 and Berttonha, 2008) and, without reducing those, there is no way to support the improvement of quality in the Armed Forces. The National Defense Strategy does not seem to do me concerned about this point.

The basic premise of the document is that Brazil will grow to become one of the world's main powers but "without hegemony or domination. Brazil does not want to rule over other nations. It shall grow without ruling." Such a premise is, at least, arguable. As already indicated in this paper, a state that aims to occupy an important position in the world's balance of power cannot just refuse to exert power. Imagining that the exercise of power is automatically bad and something Brazil will renounce forever simply compromises the country's credibility in the eyes of neighboring countries and the international community.

Nevertheless, among the positive and negative points, the simple fact of the document having been written is an immense step forward for the defense sector, simply because now there is a good, solid starting point to be discussed: what are Brazil's military needs for the coming years and decades? The same feeling of moving in the right direction comes when the 2009 strategic treaties with France are examined.

The treaties signed with France in 2009

The strategic partnership between Brazil and France has been in existence for some years and its limitations are obvious. Firstly, its goals are not clear. A desire for symbolic opposition to the United States of America and to show independence from Washington seems to one of its motivations, but neither Paris nor Brasilia wishes to take this opposition into the military and strategic fields, since Washington is a preferred ally for both countries.

Also, it is doubtful whether Paris would abandon its key alliances, such as NATO, the European Union or with the USA, in order to favor Brazil. How much would Brazil and France be willing to invest in this alliance? Paris and Brasilia seem ready to accept some burdens but only to a certain point (Rudzit & Nagami, 2009).

However, the treaty with France meets current Brazilian military and strategic aims perfectly. It allows, geopolitically and symbolically, a level of distancing from American power but without giving Washington cause for fear. A strategic partnership with Russia or China would have been a red flag to the Americans but not one with France. Thus, Brazilian independence and new confidence are symbolically asserted without alarming Washington. Another sign of Brasilia's desire to maintain a good relationship with the USA was the signing of a strategic cooperation agreement in 2010.

In practical terms, the purchase of French war materiel in huge quantities is appropriate for the country's goals. The jet fighters to be acquired will probably be the *Rafale* (or, if the political scene changes, equivalents such as the F-18 or *Gripen*) and the availability of some dozens of them will guarantee full control of Brazilian air space and continental supremacy. The fifty *Super Cougar* helicopters and other French equipment will ensure mobility for the Army's brigades on short-range expeditions.

But definitely more crucial are the submarines, specially the nuclear one. Having one or more of these at its disposal and, moreover, being able to build and maintain one, will give the country the necessary capacity to deal with other foreign powers in the foreseeable future. And, most importantly, this will put the country on a new strategic level, ending the situation of Brazil being the only unarmed BRIC country and broadening the scope of the country's international performance. German combat cars, new wheeled combat vehicles, Italian naval materiel or American electronic war equipment might be useful, but these aircraft, helicopters and submarines will be the military power basis the country will need in the coming years.

With the new jet fighters, nuclear submarines and the intended purchase of ships and naval equipment from Italy, Spain and the USA, Brazil will also have the continent's most powerful naval force by 2020. That will mean, both symbolically and practically, abandoning the old idea of continental balance and establishing a new kind of hegemony.

In global terms, Brazil will become a significant power strategically and will be able to collaborate with men and arms in international operations related to its interests. Brazil will leave behind the previously mentioned condition of being the only unarmed emerging power, which would boost a possible claim for a seat on the UN Security Council (even though it would not guarantee it) and in other areas of international discussion.

Also relevant is the task of guaranteeing not only the acquisition of weapons but also technology, which, at the proper moment, will enable Brazil to build its own nuclear submarines and, in the medium term, to create a national fifth-generation jet fighter force.

Of course nothing is ever perfect. Would Brazil really have the critical mass in intellectual and enterprise terms to absorb French technology and would that technology be completely transferred? Would the plans and projects continue after the da Silva government ends? Acquiring this amount of material from only one source might bring also future difficulties if, for any reason, the relationship with Paris deteriorates. Even so, the agreements with France are coherent with current Brazilian military needs and allow for practical solutions to some of the National Defense Strategy problems previously pointed out. Moreover, they indicate a maturity in long-term planning that must be commended.

Conclusion

Certain conceptual confusions are specially damaging in social relationships and among states and institutions. In the field of education, after years of military regime, many education experts tend to see any kind of authority as authoritarianism, leading to questioning the teacher's role and to huge classroom crises. The same could perhaps be said about parental authority in families.

A confusion to be avoided in international relations is that between the exercise of power and imperialism, as if any and all authority was bad and led to an empire which would treat its subordinates with violence and would dominate other nations. This is something to be avoided. But to be at the top of the world means to have power and to exert it; refusing to do so is simply to go down to the lowest level and even be manipulated by others. Just as authority is not authoritarianism, exerting power is not automatically imperialism and to forget these distinctions might be dangerous for the common good.

In this sense, the proposal of this paper is that Brazil should use its resources in 'soft power' (culture, empathy, language) terms and within its laudable peaceful diplomatic tradition, but 'hard power' cannot be forgotten, as found in economic and military power, in the country's quest for a better position on the international scene, which is necessary even if only for its own development. Without 'hard power', cultural links or diplomacy become less important or credible and by themselves they cannot change reality.

Currently, the demand for a future Brazilian military structure is quite small, considering the country's privileged national strategic situation. Without adjacent enemies and not being really threatened by extra-regional enemies, there is no need for more than a small, but credible, dissuasive capacity (air and naval) to guarantee national security. Beyond this, the important thing is to guarantee some capacity for projecting power and symbolic hegemony on the South American continent – and, on a smaller scale, in the world – in order to better support Brazil's entry on the international scene and to do away with the idea that Brazil is the only BRIC country that does not have to be considered on strategic matters.

The Brazilian economy is strong enough to support the necessary expense and the military forces have the structure and critical mass needed to absorb new weapons and technology. If the armed forces opt for quality instead of quantity, the cost for society would decrease, while their suitability for Brazilian international goals would increase. Such a positive scenario seems to have been created during President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva's second term and, hopefully, for the years to come.

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Received June 21, 2010
Accepted November 18, 2010

Abstract

The central goal of this paper is thinking about the Brazilian military power and its linking to the international ambitions of the country in the 21st century. After a comparative analysis to other BRICs and with a historical one about Brazil's strategic irrelevance, we aim to establish what the minimum military capacity Brazil would need in order to meet the country's latest international interests. Similarly, it will be discussed if the National Strategy of Defense, approved in 2008, and the recent strategic agreements signed with France represent one more step toward this minimum military capacity.

Resumo

O objetivo central deste artigo é analisar o poder militar brasileiro e as suas vinculações com as ambições internacionais do país no século 21. Após uma análise comparada com outros BRICs e uma análise histórica sobre a irrelevância estratégica do Brasil, pretende-se estabelecer quais as capacidades militares mínimas o Brasil deve necessitar para realizar os seus maiores interesses internacionais. Do mesmo modo, se discutirá se a Estratégia Nacional de Defesa, aprovada em 2008, e os recentes acordos militares firmados com a França representam um passo adicional em direção da realização dessa capacidade militar mínima.

Key words: Brazilian military power; National Defense Strategy; Strategic partnership Brazil-France.

Palavras-chave: Poder Militar Brasileiro; Estratégia Nacional de Defesa; Parceria Estratégica Brasil-França.