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Brazil as a Security Actor in Africa: Reckoning and Challenges Ahead

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The story of Brazil's engagement in Africa is not necessarily novel, but its security activities on the continent still are. Often presented as by-products of the new South–South relations, they have resulted in substantial inroads towards the increased security capacity of several key countries. However, economic constraints, an unpredictable political context back home, and previously existing structural fragilities have led to a new, bleaker outlook for Brazil's position in Africa.

- The last decade has seen Brazil adopt an expansive security agenda towards Africa that has preferentially targeted South Atlantic countries and built upon offers of military training, technical-scientific assistance, and private–public investments in defence hardware.
- This engagement is now showing signs of strain, with potential consequences for Brazil's aim of becoming an alternative security provider on the continent.
- This strain is a direct reflection of the current economic climate in Brazil, a new policy orientation on the part of the government that signals a detachment from issues of the Global South, and operational shortcomings that are curtailing cooperation initiatives.
- Possible scenarios for Brazil range from continuing to disengage from security issues in Africa, attempting to manage the bulk of previous endeavours, or depending on partnerships to mitigate a potentially broader cooperation cutback.

Policy Implications

In the context of increased engagement by rising powers in Africa, any retrenchment of cooperation initiatives will likely impair Brazil's position as a security partner on the continent. This limitation could potentially be counterbalanced by increasing the coordination of efforts with other bilateral or multilateral actors.



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Brazil as a New Security Player in Africa

Midway through Lula da Silva's tenure (2003–2010), Brazil's profile as an external security actor started to change. Whereas the country's external engagements had previously been limited in scope and ambition, new international responsibilities began to be inscribed more decisively in the country's foreign dealings, together with a more proactive stance towards the outside world. Brazil's leadership of the MINUSTAH mission in Haiti comprised the most well-known example as it entailed the single largest Brazilian military contribution abroad since World War II. But even though it required different policy tools and received less public attention, Africa also began to attract renewed Brazilian interest with respect to the capacity-building needs of local security sectors as well as shared security developments in the maritime space in-between.

The bulk of Brazil's efforts in Africa followed a preferential South Atlantic geographic demarcation in line with the official intent of fostering a regional consciousness around common security perceptions (Abdenur and Souza Neto 2014). That much was made clear in Brazilian defence guidelines such as the *National Defence Policy*, the *National Defence Strategy*, and the *Defence White Book*, which called for increased attention to West and Southern African countries as worthy partners in Brazil's immediate strategic surroundings. In time, this approach was also coupled with heavy criticism of Northern involvement in South Atlantic issues and external interventions in African hotspots such as Libya and Mali as Brazil aimed to secure a larger autonomous role of its own.

Three specific traits contributed to adding substance to Brazil's efforts and sustaining their implementation across the Atlantic. The first was Brazil's ability to replicate good practices and build upon prior successes in the security cooperation domain. Drawing on lessons gained through the naval training operation in Namibia from 1994 onwards (Seabra 2016), a new Brazilian naval support mission was opened in Cape Verde in 2014, followed a year later by a skeleton crew in São Tomé and Príncipe. Both endeavours proved small and flexible enough to not only generate concrete reputational results, but also promote further long-term contacts between the respective armed forces. The fact that these new missions were combined with a considerable increase in the provision of training opportunities for African military personnel in Brazilian military institutions – as overseen by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (Agência Brasileira de Cooperação, ABC) – further heightened Brazil's assistance profile.

A second trait of Brazilian cooperation involved the convergence of security cooperation initiatives with more technical-scientific assistance. The balance between harder and softer security dimensions became particularly clear in Brazil's support for the mapping and delimitation of several African countries' continental platforms, including Angola's and Namibia's, through Brazilian state-owned Empresa Gerencial de Projetos Navais (EMGEPRON). By tailoring its approach to the needs of each partner, Brazil was able to respond to a concrete technical demand and provide such countries with much-needed scientific expertise. All this while also reinforcing such countries' own legal claims to the surrounding waters and rebuffing third parties' interest in the underwater mineral wealth.

In addition to these activities, close institutional collaboration between different Brazilian officials was equally evident. Unprecedented interactions between the

Brazilian Ministry of External Relations (also known as Itamaraty) and the Ministry of Defence, together with the different branches of the Armed Forces, were effectively translated into support for new private–public ventures at the industrial-defence level. The air-to-air A-DARTER missile project with South Africa, in particular, proved to be the prime example of these dynamics. However, private-sector-led conglomerates such as Odebrecht, OAS and Camargo Corrêa also began to acquire or create defence subsidiaries in order to take advantage of the federal incentives to revamp Brazil’s defence industry, while also actively assessing new opportunities in African markets.

Nevertheless, as predominant as it might have been in Brazilian official calculations, the emphasis on the South Atlantic did not preclude other significant engagements across the continent. North African countries, for instance, remained important destinations for Brazilian weaponry, specifically small arms and ammunitions (Muggah and Thompson 2016). Likewise, Mauritania and Mali received considerable official accolades as they became key markets for Brazilian-made Embraer military airplanes, while Mozambique also retained privileged bilateral military ties due to historical-cultural affinities. Meanwhile, Brazil’s footprint on the ground grew larger through an expanded network of defence attachés. This network was, in turn, supplemented by a series of defence cooperation agreements that Brazil signed between 2003 and 2014 with countries such as Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, and South Africa (Seabra 2014).

These bilateral efforts were pursued in tandem with greater investment in multilateral frameworks. The revitalisation of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic (Zona de Paz e Cooperação do Atlântico Sul, ZOPACAS) took centre stage, as it enshrined a conceptualisation of the ocean in between that suited the official rhetoric of shared South–South security perceptions (Abdenur et al. 2016). But the defence component of the Community of Portuguese Language Speaking Countries (Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa, CPLP) and the international pulpit of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) received similar Brazilian interest, because they entailed close ties with the country’s African Lusophone counterparts. Continental organisations such as the African Union (AU) were targeted as well, with Brazil contributing to the design of the AU’s Integrated Maritime Strategy 2050 by means of a permanent defence attaché stationed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. All in all, by 2014 and after just a few years of active engagement, Brazil had managed to consolidate itself as a noteworthy security partner.

Mixed Signals and Growing Competition

The last two years, however, have seen significant changes in Brazil that have had an inescapable impact on its external relations. In this context, and despite the unparalleled level of interaction with the African continent during the last decade, recent developments have created mixed messages regarding the sustainability of Brazil’s role as a security actor in Africa. Lingering attempts to capitalise on prior gains with these countries can still be identified, though they have been limited. Brazil’s triad of strategic documents, for example, is on course to undergo the revision originally foreseen to take place every four years. All three sets of strategic

guidelines mentioned above are expected to be approved by Congress before year's end and will include new dispositions that not only reaffirm previous geographic emphases regarding a South Atlantic cooperation drive but also call for greater foreign policy and defence policy intersections at the highest federal levels. Additionally, a new defence cooperation agreement was signed with Cape Verde in October 2016. The agreement updated the previous one from 1994 and included the country in the roster of African partners that follow the same formal dispositions in this kind of initiative.

However, this narrative of continuity can be called into question by early evidence of declining engagement. This evidence includes, for instance, the volte-face regarding the long-planned donation of Brazilian T-27 Tucano training aircraft to Mozambique. First announced back in 2009, at the height of Brazil's engagement with the continent, the process was originally supposed to include the training of local technical support teams in order to open up a new market niche for further purchases of Embraer airplanes down the line. However, that donation was officially reversed in September 2016 as it was reportedly viewed as impacting the operational capabilities of the Brazilian Air Force, which decided it was not willing to let go of what was initially extra military hardware after all. The foreseeable cutbacks in Brazilian military re-equipment programmes due to the present economic climate were apparently taken into consideration here.

A second noteworthy episode concerned the single largest overseas deal for the Brazilian naval industry in recent years. After a protracted competing tender process, in 2014 Brazil secured a key position in Angola's plans to re-equip its navy. For an estimated cost of USD 170 million, the construction of seven 500t Macaé-class patrol vessels was formalised, with the first four to be built in Brazil and the remaining three in Angola, in a new local shipyard also included in the deal. Moreover, Brazil committed itself to provide the training and qualifications that the Angolan Navy personnel would need to operate and maintain the acquired vessels. By early 2016, however, the lauded deal was considered to have broken down entirely due to Brazilian shipyards' lack of logistical capacity to fulfil the agreed-upon delivery timeline. In light of this, Angola has opted to move on and pursue other external bidders.

Additional worrisome signs can be found in other examples of bureaucratic inaction. The creation of a new defence attaché post in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for example, remains illusory, despite repeated statements to the contrary by Brazilian officials back in 2013.^[1] Furthermore, negotiations for a defence cooperation agreement with Ghana have also been stalled since 2010, with no meaningful progress in sight. Finally, Brazil's naval operation in São Tomé and Príncipe, which has been in charge of training local marines, has yet to be elevated to full mission status like the mission in Cape Verde, as envisioned back in 2015 by Brazil's own navy officers.

Taken together, this lack of progress in domains previously considered the linchpins of Brazil's approach to Africa warrants some concern for the country's level of engagement in the coming years – and even more so given the growing competition with other rising powers for the same cooperation opportunities in Africa. The case of Namibia serves as an example. Despite a 22-year-old military partnership with Brazil and the expectation that this would translate into new naval opportunities for the Brazilian defence industry, Namibian authorities contracted a Chinese company as an alternative hardware supplier in 2012. Since then, rumours

¹ The announcement was originally tied to Brazilian General Carlos dos Santos Cruz's command of the MONUSCO mission in the country between 2013 and 2015. After his departure, official interest in the attaché post declined accordingly.

have swirled regarding the possible installation of a permanent Chinese base in the Namibian port of Walvis Bay. Even though such reports have been officially denied, they have enhanced the sense of other countries' growing competition with Brazil for similar roles as privileged cooperation partners.

Economic, Political, and Operational Constraints

After over 10 years of expansion, the Brazilian model of security cooperation abroad is evidencing signs of strain that are taking their toll on the effectiveness of cooperation projects and on the country's broader capacity as a key partner in this domain. The main causes can be found in Brazil's own internal woes, which have impeded long-term planning, the necessary allocation of resources, and the political support needed to proceed with such cooperation initiatives. Three blockade forces can be singled out.

The first derives from the current economic climate in Brazil, which has significantly dampened national growth expectations. The ongoing recession, which is expected to top 3 per cent in 2016 alone, will likely carry through until 2017, with evident ripple effects for Brazil's economic outlook. The most immediate consequences will be felt at the budgetary level, within each and every ministry and governmental agency. Itamaraty, the ABC, the Ministry of Defence, and the Armed Forces will not be exempt from the upcoming austerity drive. Already facing steep cutbacks since 2014, the ABC has been hit the hardest, with available resources for cooperation projects in Africa estimated to have fallen by 25 per cent between 2012 and 2015 (Mello 2015). However, the impact of the crisis will also be felt in terms of export funding lines, which were previously made available by the Brazilian Development Bank (Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social, BNDES) as part of a broad political mandate to increase its focus on Africa. Less public support will, in turn, hamper the planned engagement of Brazilian defence companies across the Atlantic. Much of this activity has now been put on hold due to the present economic uncertainty. [2]

A second hurdle to broader dealings with Africa resides at the heart of Brazil's own political class. The tumultuous process of Dilma Rousseff's impeachment and the subsequent swearing-in of Michel Temer as the new president triggered an unpredictable new cycle in Brazilian politics. A new foreign-policy orientation with less of a focus on South-South relations (Mello 2016) is unlikely to make room for niche cooperation initiatives with African countries. On top of these changes, a revolving door in terms of key posts has also caused many initiatives previously approved or announced to come to a standstill. The previous leadership of Celso Amorim at the helm of the Ministry of Defence (2011–2014) successfully built upon his prior stint leading Itamaraty (2003–2010) and contributed to expanding the profile of the country's external defence overtures. This continuity stands in contrast, however, with the latest influx of leadership. All in all, Brazil has witnessed three different defence ministers (Jacques Wagner, Aldo Rebelo, and Raul Jungmann) in two years alone, coupled with three different external relations ministers (Luís Alberto Figueiredo, Mauro Vieira, and José Serra) during the last three years. The concurrent impact on each ministry's bureaucratic apparatus has been significant. Likewise, the fact that every defence cooperation agreement signed with

2 The fact that the higher echelons of such firms have been caught in the comprehensive national anti-corruption drive Car Wash (*Lava Jato*) – which has uncovered widespread political kickbacks in exchange for preferential public tenders – has also impacted these expansion plans.

African countries in the last decade remains stuck in Congress waiting for final legal ratification further attests to the present dichotomy of priorities between Brazil's different branches of power.

A third blockade force goes beyond conjectural economic and political factors and can be found instead in the structural fragilities within the operational model put into place across different institutions and ministries. The provision of training opportunities for African militaries provides a good example. In light of growing African demand, the Ministry of Defence and the ABC had started collaborating on a new oversight framework for foreign military training programmes, which was formalised in 2010. But despite these institutional advancements, the Namibian mission still remains under the direct purview of the Brazilian Navy. This has prevented an overall cohesiveness of operations and has dispersed the intended chain of command. Irregular funding comprises yet another issue. Given the lack of an overarching legal framework to directly transfer resources abroad, the ABC is still forced to resort to occasional financial transfers through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Brazil and back to the ABC itself in order to maintain such initiatives, including those in the defence area. This raises questions of transparency and predictability regarding the overall cooperation drive. Finally, the Brazilian approach to Africa has met with its share of setbacks. The difficult experience of trying to implement a technical-military mission in Guinea-Bissau attests to this, as do the repeatedly delayed ATLANTIC TIDINGS joint naval exercises with Angola, Namibia, and South Africa. [3] In both cases, the willingness to devise new modes of engagement with African partners was subsequently undermined by contingencies and obstacles that could have been prevented with more fine-tuned assessments of local geopolitical sensitivities.

3 Such exercises also originally included the DRC, but after preliminary discussions, the country dropped out of the operational planning.

Latent Detachment, Business as Usual, or Branching Out?

Bearing in mind the present context and the existing fragilities at the core of Brazil's outwards approach, any additional signs of disengagement will likely undermine Brazil's previous gains in Africa as a rising security provider and will raise questions about its commitment to the capacitation of local security sectors. Accordingly, three prospective scenarios based on three different approaches can be explored, each of which would have important ramifications for the sustainability of Brazil's transatlantic initiatives.

- The first scenario would entail a further deepening of Brazil's retrenchment of African security issues in the short term. If Brazilian officials opt to go down that road, it will likely translate into more concrete and immediate steps, such as a steep reduction in regular bilateral consultations between defence ministries in order to focus on other external priorities, the scaling down of the defence attaché network and military exercises in order to meet budgetary constraints, or the defunding of wider multilateral regional initiatives such as ZOPACAS. This set of decisions would, in turn, kick-start Brazil's significantly diminished engagement in Africa and tarnish the goodwill acquired across the continent. Private defence industry players would still continue to look to African markets with some interest, possibly following the lead of Brazilian small arms manufacturers. But the on-the-ground knowledge obtained in recent years would

probably decrease. It can also be expected that external actors such as China would seek to fill the void in an even more prominent fashion, while trying to supplement Brazil's cutbacks. Given the present economic climate and the fact that new elections will only take place in 2018, thus delaying any significant political volte-face in this domain, such a scenario is not entirely unlikely.

- A second potential scenario would involve Brazil taking the middle ground and focusing on the management of expectations across the continent as well as on the low-key maintenance of existing activities. Flagship programmes (e.g. the naval mission in Namibia) would endure because they would remain shielded from the main austerity drive, while continuing to serve as an example of what Brazil can ideally provide in Africa. Meanwhile, Lusophone countries would likely receive the bulk of official investment inasmuch as Brazil would continue to participate in the CPLP's defence configuration, without over-committing to any new grand initiative. Other endeavours launched in recent years, however, would become harder to follow through as available resources will likely dwindle due to the focus of the present administration in Brasília on other geographic settings. Leading airplane manufacturer Embraer would still be able to close some pending deals, but further offers of technical cooperation on the part of EMGEPRON would only be pursued on a case-by-case basis, and upon payment of an appropriate fee. This scenario would grant a sense of normalcy to Brazilian interactions with Africa, but it would still remain at odds with the notion of business as usual.
- A third scenario would see the shaking of Brazil's approach to its core. Namely, it would see the country consider more seriously the triangulation of efforts with other individual and multilateral actors in Africa. This is far from being a novelty: in 2012, possible joint initiatives in Africa with the US government were discussed as part of the Defence Cooperation Dialogue (DCD) framework (The White House 2012). That bilateral pipe dream, however, never came to fruition. But if new activities were to be exempted from stringent Western-led conations and ownership labels, it is possible Brazil could find enough room to overcome its own former opposition, thus mitigating the fallout of the current economic climate for its cooperation initiatives. Even though the recent change of office in Washington DC is not particularly auspicious, a useful barometer for an evolution in Brazil's predisposition towards such partnerships could still be found in the country's decision to decrease, maintain, or reinforce its participation in the annual US-led Obangame Express naval exercise in the Gulf of Guinea. A similar rationale could also apply to increased operational support for other multilateral missions led by the UN or the European Union in Africa. This would prove an appealing choice as it would cement the country's multilateral credentials. The odds of its implementation, however, are also limited, as it would run counter to the Brazilian military's objections in recent years that it does not possess the capabilities to contribute a more significant number of troops for peacekeeping missions in Africa (Kenkel 2013).

Each prospective option is grounded in Brazil's previous track record, but none fully addresses the country's problems or entirely complements its shortcomings. An overall diagnosis of Brazil's future security relations with Africa that ranges from a worst-case, to a middle-ground, to a branch-out-type scenario could thus lead to a combination of different features as the more likely outcome. Given the Itamaraty's

current lack of political appetite for international security issues, it will probably be left to the Ministry of Defence and its own internal bureaucratic structure to try and preserve the bulk of cooperation initiatives abroad. Likewise, some pushback from military authorities in order to salvage the reputational gains obtained in Africa in recent years can be expected.

Broader Implications for Brazil's Security Cooperation with Africa

The Brazilian defence cooperation model in Africa appears to be nearing a watershed moment. Still, as fluid as the current situation may be, it also presents a challenge to the remaining international community in terms of how best to respond to such developments and how best to engage with Brazil in this particular domain. An advisable course of action should therefore build upon two complementary approaches.

The first (1) involves recognising that African countries chose to partner with Brazil for a reason – namely, because Brazil had something to offer and addressed their concrete capacity-building needs. Whether maritime technical expertise or specific military training, certain niche areas were evidently not covered by traditional security suppliers, thus causing African countries to look elsewhere. Overlooking the intricacies of these supply-and-demand dynamics will ultimately prove counterproductive if the goal is to provide any new assistance. The second approach (2) involves acknowledging the long-standing presence of Brazil in Africa while also understanding why its past experiences with capacity-building on the ground, such as the training of Namibia's Navy, have successfully endured over the years. Although still not well known, Southern-led initiatives have existed for a while now and are increasingly competing for the same space as Western ventures. To explicitly ignore their inroads only adds fuel to the rhetorical divide that has permeated many external engagements with Africa. Perhaps more problematic, it defeats the purpose of capacitating local security sectors in an efficient fashion and of addressing shared security conundrums. Increased coordination between existing cooperation approaches would therefore allow such goals to be met more effectively.

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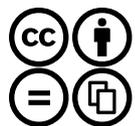
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