The Debate regarding Foreign Policy in the area of Brazilian Security in the regional context

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Abstract: The level of debate regarding Brazil’s Foreign Policy in relation to its security in South America has been increasing since the re-democratization process. The number of scholarly works on this subject have been increasing, due mainly to the increase in the number of Foreign Relations university faculty members in Brazilian universities needed to serve the growing demand for these courses over the recent decades. Scholars representing different schools of thought on this subject have analyzed Brazil’s regional Defense and Security performance in the international arena differently. This debate has led to new views with respect to the International Politics that the country is engaged in. Understanding each of these views becomes essential to understanding the debate and its evolution a propos the performance of Brazil on the international stage. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how scholars may offer analyses of policies adopted by Brazil in conducting its foreign policy as a regional leader in South America under the Cardoso (1995-2002) and da Silva (2003-present) governments, demonstrating how the scholars exchange dialogue, and present their ideas while considering their theoretical framework.

Key Words: Foreign Policy, Security, South America, Regional Leadership.


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“Sir, a span of land, in being Brazilian, should be defended by Brazilians through iron, fire, and blood!”

José Maria da Silva Paranhos Júnior – Baron of Rio Branco.

INTRODUCTION

The level of debate regarding Brazil’s Foreign Policy in relation to security, principally in South America, has been increasing due to the expansion of studies in International Relations in Brazil as a specific field. Since the 1970’s, with the creation of first undergraduate degree program in International Relations in the country, the process of institutionalization in the 1980’s by the IPRI, and in the 1990’s with the creation of the first post graduate programs in the field, the discussion vis-à-vis Brazil’s international performance had been based on the environment of production, characterized by the performance of its diplomats and their academic influence. In recent years, the growth in the labor market coupled with government incentive has favored growth in the field, largely due to the founding of new centers of study on the subject of security, as well as partnerships of the Ministry of Defense with educational institutions.

The growth in the number of studies regarding Brazilian Foreign Policy in the area of Security has caused an increase in debate concerning Brazilian performance in South America and has proven that academic faculty members share differing opinions regarding Brazil’s position as well as its policies and actions, especially in regards to its ambition of being the regional leader.


This article proposes to illustrate the academic debate, both Brazilian and foreign, attempting to comprehend Brazil’s performance in South America. First, the concepts of Regional Power, Average Power and Regional Leader will be explained in order to be able to comprehend the debate. These explanations will be limited to an outline of the ideas of how some authors explain and understand the measures of Brazilian Foreign Policy in regards to security and defense in the region. In this way, an analysis of each idea will not be made, and primary sources will not need to be utilized to outline the chosen subject-matter. Through an understanding of the authors’ ideas, they will be divided into analysis groups, and characterize them in accordance to their perspectives, in order to present the debate in a clear and comprehensive manner.

**BRAZIL AND REGIONAL LEADERSHIP**

The academic debate concerning Brazil’s role in South America has gained emphasis since the da Silva government assumed a more assertive posture in the region. (LIMA E HIRST, 2006, ALMEIDA, 2004, CEPIK, 2005) Since that time, the policy to view South America as a strategic importance became a part of various analyses of the new Brazilian government’s foreign policy. (ALMEIDA, 2004) In this way, it is essential to be able to understand that the strategic importance is linked to a larger goal of Brazil’s foreign policy, the ambition of regional leader. However, for this ambition to be understood, it is necessary to first comprehend the concepts of Regional Leader, Regional Power and Average Power.

The discussion concerning the concepts of Regional Leader, Regional Power and Average Power involves the authors NOLTE, 2006, PEDERSON, 2002, FLEMES, 2007, HURRELL, 2006 e SCHIRM, 2006, KEOHANE, 1969, among others. For these authors, the concept of Regional Power is related to the power of emerging states in relation to their
resources, such as geography, economy and military capacity. Schirm defines it as “(…) all countries discussed under the rubric of emerging or regional powers dominate their neighbors in terms of ‘power over resources’, this is, population, territory, military capacity and gross domestic product”. Keohane (1969: 298) defines an average power as “states whose leaders consider that they cannot act alone effectively, but may be able to have a systemic impact in a small group or through an international institution.”

Average power and regional power are independent concepts that describe distinct realities. An average power may act on either the global or regional level or both levels simultaneously. To define a country as an average power, it must be evaluated primarily on its global impact, and the condition of regional power refers to the influence it exercises in its proper region. (GRATIUS, 2007)

Meanwhile, the success of Regional Leader depends on relevant resources, ambition, and successful resistance. (NOLTE, 2006, PEDERSON, 2002) For these authors, leadership has to be accepted by the neighboring countries in order to offer the regional powers the base of power necessary to project this power regionally and globally, for instance, in the building of an international coalition. (SCHIRM, 2006)

The concept of Regional Leader understood by Flemes to be a state that:

“is part of region which is geographically, economically, and politico-ideologically bounded; articulates claim to a position of leadership in the region; influences the geopolitical boundaries and the politico-ideological construe of the region; is economically, politically, and culturally interconnected to the region; has a significant influence in regional relations; exercises its influence through a regional governing structure; defines the regional security agenda in a significant way; is recognized as leader state or at least respected by the other states, inside and outside the region; is

GROUP 1 – THE BRAZILIAN PERSPECTIVE OF SOUTH AMERICA.

In this first group will be discussed the authors who formulate an analysis of Brazilian foreign policy in relation to security and defense on the perspective of Brazilian interests in South America. In this way, authors LIMA e HIRST, 2006; CEPIK, 2005; ALMEIDA, 2004; OLIVEIRA, 2007; GRATIUS, 2007; SPEKTOR, 2008; SARAIVA, 2007; OLIVEIRA and ONUKI, 2000; argue that da Silva’s Brazilian foreign policy assumed a more assertive position regionally compared to Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s government. They argue that, for the new government, South America has strategic importance topping Brazil’s ambitions.  

This group characterizes itself by its more realistic analysis of regional relations in order to understand the real possibilities Brazil has as regional power to exercise its greater role as leader. In this way, the authors concentrate on the necessity of recognition by neighboring countries to Brazilian leadership, which they judge to not be explicit. For them, Brazil views itself as a Regional Power and is a self proclaimed leader, but “the neighboring countries don’t look to Brazil as a leader and it is not clear if they agree whether Brazil is capable to regulate regional order.” (SPEKTOR, 2008)

These authors affirm that Brazil encounters difficulties in effecting regional integration, emphasizing the country encounters problems to establish and consolidate a strategic relation of formulation and implementation of policies to contribute towards South American integration, in spite of having committed itself to MERCOSUL (The Southern Common Market), the USAN
(Union of South American Nations), and the IIRSA (Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America). To Brazil, these institutions are seen as essential factors contributing to stability in South America.

They also emphasize that Brazil acts as a mediator in regional conflicts in order to increase its power of influence over its neighbors, this soft power being necessary to counterbalance the North American hegemony in South America as it fears an intervention by the United States in the region and wishes to be guaranteed more influence in international relations. Lima and Hirst highlight:

> “Assuming the role of a regional power has generated unprecedented demands on Brazil and seems to require capabilities that go beyond Itamaraty’s unquestioned diplomatic skills. Since 2003 Brazil has intervened in political crises in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Haiti. Brazil led the ‘group of friend of Venezuela’ (which also included Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Portugal, Spain and the US). The aim was to try to bridge the misunderstandings between the Chavez government and the opposition groups and find a political solution that would not violate democratic principles. In Bolivia, Brazil, together with Argentina, helped mediate in the Lozada–Mesa transition and acted as a stabilizing force during the 2005 riots which finally led to a new presidential replacement and the call for general elections. In Ecuador, Brazil quickly became involved in the political turmoil which led to the sudden interruption of the Gutierrez administration. In Haiti, Brazil has led a UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSTAH), in which other countries have participated, since 2004”.

The United States represents a threat to Brazilian ambition and intention to make the region a part of its security agenda due to American pressure on certain neighboring countries. The authors also see Venezuela as a limiting factor to the Brazilian advances of plans to become a regional leader owing to similar aspirations from Chavez. “From the point of view of Brazil and Regional Security, a Colombia-Venezuela dyad constitutes the biggest problem towards achieving political and economic integration in the region, as they are the two countries with the largest capacity for interaction in the northern region of South America, whose current

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governments represent polar opposites – pro and anti-US – that are placed concretely in the event of failure of the most recent attempt at integration.\textsuperscript{8}

The authors of this group defend the idea that leadership in the region represents, accordingly, a way to strengthen Brazil’s bargaining power on the global landscape, principally in multilateral organizations like the UN and the WTO. In this way, they emphasize that Brazilian foreign policy makers believe that regional leadership is essential for their global ambitions, though they do not believe that this leadership has been consolidated.

**GROUP 2 – THE SECURITY INSTITUTIONS OF SOUTH AMERICA ARE BRAZIL’S ROLE**

In this group will be discussed the authors who formulate an analysis of Brazil’s role in the security and defense institutions in South America, represented by authors such as HERZ, 2004, 2008; FLEMES, 2004 and FARIA, 2007. These authors focus on the cooperation of the countries in South America with regard to the issue of security policy and defend a positive view about the concern to create a security doctrine in the region. To this effect, they believe that Brazil is considered as a representative of the underdeveloped and developing nations in the North-South security policy debate. Nevertheless, Herz defends that “Brazil’s foreign policy for the region has favored the cooperation between states and, at the same time, has complicated the strengthening of institutions of regional security as robust, collective mechanisms of security.”\textsuperscript{9}

For these authors, Brazilian foreign policy, jointly with US foreign policy is responsible for the lack of effectiveness of these regional institutions. Brazil’s foreign policy uses the


“institutionalism of the semi periphery” as an economic and political strategy to consolidate legroom to realize its own economic and commercial interests. (FARIA, 2007) Through an ambiguous foreign policy, the country possesses a preoccupation as much offensive as it is defensive. It tries to offset power structures that may damage Brazil’s development and influence in international regimes like the OAS (Organization of American States), at the same time as it attempts to neutralize the unilateral actions of the US, as well as taking a control of political processes regarding security and defense in neighboring countries, where there is danger of overflow into Brazilian territory, through conflict mediation.

The difficulty for the OAS to act may also be seen as a reflection of the non-intervention tradition of regional countries, which complicate the creation of a more robust institution. Military questions also inhibit this process. Flemes affirms that “military institutions chase their own interests, which can be opposite to those of the representatives of the government in the formulation of security policy, and eventually the military officials attempt, in secret or semi-public commissions, to co-opt political representatives.” In this sense, Flemes considers there to be “danger that the autonomy of the armed forces, existing with different levels of magnitude in the ABC (Argentina, Brazil and Chile) states carry, together with social and political deficits, non-cooperative security policies.” 10

The authors believe that there exists a divergence between the countries in the region regarding the security architecture. They consider that regional institutions such as USAN are weak, creating a necessity to have more trust between neighbors, like the development of meetings like that of the Conference of South American Defense Ministers. However, they affirm that institutions like the OAS are important for the resolution of regional conflicts by

pacific means, and for the creation of possibilities of conflict prevention inside the states, as Herz states:

“(…) the OAS has developed two new roles in norm generation: a leading role in supporting the confidence-building agenda in the hemisphere; and a central role in generating the hemispheric democratic paradigm that associates security and democracy, allowing the organization to have an active role in preventing intra-state conflicts. In addition, the OAS remains an important pillar of the norm of peaceful solution of disputes, which is an historical legacy of previous periods. Insofar as the states participate in norm construction and behavior is changed, one can see these norms functioning as preventive diplomacy mechanisms. Secondly, (…) the OAS prevented a number of international and domestic disputes from turning into violent conflict and was essential in diffusing several crises.”

The authors believe that trust between regional neighbors will be accelerated by the democratization of dialogue regarding politics and security, for example in organizations such as USAN, Defense Council, CASA and the like. In this effect, they claim that these divergences exist due to different positions regarding a continental security and defense system.

From the point of view of these authors, Brazil is a key member within the South American institutions. Brazilian foreign policy concerning security and defense in organizations such as OAS, USAN, CASA and Brazil’s responsibilities in relation to the effectiveness of certain ad hoc treaties, such as the Inter-American Reciprocal Assistance Treaty (Rio Pact), Rio Group, besides others, is seen as essential for regional stability. Likewise, cooperative actions, such as the peace missions to Haiti jointly with other regional countries, favor a Brazilian foreign policy seeking to be a leader on the subcontinent.  

GROUP 3 – BRAZIL AND MILITARY POWER IN SOUTH AMERICA

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This group of speaks about the military capacity of the region. Authors such as ALSINA, 2009; ALVES e HEYE, 2008; MITRE, 2009 and VILLA, 2008 debate about regional peace and the growth in number of armaments in neighboring countries. The subcontinent has enjoyed a considerable and growing peace, within which is distinguished and owing to the existence of international conferences and treaties to solve conflicts. The countries of South America are relatively successful on the foreign front, but on the other hand seem to be prone to domestic violence and civil war. (MITRE, 2008)

The existence of a reasonable normative consensus, the permanence of the equilibrium between power and pacific Brazilian diplomacy, relative stable too are primordial aspects for the formation of a zone of low incidence of wars in South America.

The debate concerning peace in South America is important and interesting because at the same time, one cannot escape debate regarding the possibility of a South American arms race due to the growing investment in military equipment. ALVES and HEYE, 2008 and ALSINA, 2009, disagree regarding an arms race, emphasizing the existence of equilibrium in regional power. ALVES and HEYE argue that the growing investment is related to the variation in prices of primary resources in the international market and not a consequence of an arms race headed by Venezuela. ALSINA believes that initiatives by Venezuela are the results of “a grand process of refitting concentrated in time – something that Chile has also been doing, but during a longer time frame and with less boasting.” 13

VILLA concludes that the empirical evidence is far from providing a consensus, since they cannot distinguish a “militarized zone” from a “calm ocean.” MITRE comments that “this is owed, in part, to the difficulty of establishing objective criteria which one may use to determine

with which conditions a process of refitting of the armed forces stops obeying a conventional
dynamic and passes to express the logic of an arms race.”  

The authors agree that there is not a state that could be pointed to as hegemonic; however, they diverge in regards to the capacity of the Brazilian military as the leader. ALSINA states that Brazil maintains a low military profile which does not distinguish itself from the other states of the region and adds that “in the real world, our forces are not capable of defending the sovereignty of the country in situations that are any longer than punctual.” ALVES and HEYE, however, state that Brazil is the biggest military power in the region, with the capacity to project aeronaval power in the open ocean.

“Taking into account material and immaterial aspects, it seems undeniable that Brazil has the most powerful military apparatus on the continent. It has competition and is certainly inferior in certain aspects – Argentine anti naval capacity, Chilean shields, Chilean and Venezuelan fighter jets – primarily, if you take into account the latest purchases in the area. Overall, the country is, still, relative to conventional war, positively the number one of the continent.”

The authors still discuss the significant role Brazil plays in the region, stating that its performance is decisive for the current peaceful situation to be maintained. All the same, they admit that the Brazilian “uni-polarity” in the subcontinent is unstable in face of the fragility of its military apparatus. (ALSINA, 2009) In this sense, in the aspect of military capacity, Brazilian leadership in South America possesses divergences, since there is not a consensus that Brazil military power superior to that of the surrounding countries of the region for the application of projecting power to the extent of defining regional order and achieving the ends of its foreign policy in regards to security and defense.

CONSENSUS AND DIFFERENCES

Inside the debate in academia regarding Brazilian foreign policy in the area of regional security, there exists consensus and differences. For the majority of the authors, Brazilian diplomacy in South America uses the region as a way to gain international influence. They agree that MERCOSUL has great strategic importance for Brazilian foreign policy, in the ambition to become a regional leader. The authors agree that the position of regional leader is not consolidated, although Brazil has an important role in the regional security and defense organizations and a great responsibility regarding the effectiveness of these institutions.

The differences with regards to the performance of Brazilian foreign policy in the area of security and defense refer to Brazil’s ability to interact regionally. Authors such as SPEKTOR believe that Brazil is not capable of implementing regional integration, due to the high costs that this process requires. Concerning the aspect of institutions, some authors emphasize the lack of effectiveness of regional organizations, stating that they are weak institutions, while others believe that these organizations are essential to regional stability. On the subject of perspective military policy, which finds itself in the middle of dissent in relation to its cooperative process, the authors disagree regarding the role which Brazil plays in the region. While some authors, like SARAIVA believe that Brazil assumes a role most similar to hegemony in South America, other authors, like GRATIUS, insist that Brazil is not a firm regional power.

CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, the academic debate with regards to Brazilian foreign policy in the area of security in South America is growing in Brazilian universities. More analysis, dissertations and theses within the Centers of Security Studies are essential, for even to improve the
development of Brazilian diplomacy in the region and in international relations. To understand and discuss national interests signifies to guarantee that our governments see different visions and perspectives concerning a subject. This article demonstrated how academics, both Brazilian and foreigners, analyze a complexity of the regional system. Through concepts and visions with regards to Brazilian performance, the regional institutions and the military evolution between the neighboring countries, the article discussed how Brazil is inserting itself into Latin America. This debate does not have a specific conclusion regarding Brazilian leadership on the subcontinent, however, it is valuable to understand each explanation of the authors who have presented different aspects of regional reality.

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