

Roadblocks and Avenues for Brazil-Europe Cooperation: Exploring a Wider Security Agenda

by Leonardo Paz Neves

ABSTRACT

Since 2013, Brazil and Europe have both been dealing with several crises that seem to have prevented them from advancing a common agenda. This apparent lack of interest contrasts with the track record of yearly bilateral summits, a practice started when the European Union granted Brazil the status of strategic partner. Despite this recent distancing, it is possible to identify a number of issues, especially in the security field, wherein Europe and Brazil share priorities and thus could benefit from cooperating. This cooperation could happen in issues related both to their bilateral agenda, such as combating drug trafficking and joint ventures focusing on military cooperation, and to international public goods, for instance climate change, food security and others.

Brazil | European Union | Security

keywords

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Introduction

The South American environment has been a determining factor in the establishment of the continent's security perceptions and institutional architecture. It is true that there were and still are some contentious relationships in the region, but they have either been largely solved or are no longer likely to lead to conflict. Most tensions have led at most to army mobilizations, rather than actual war. The Brazilian example illustrates this point well. Brazil has not engaged in a regional war for almost 150 years, and its last participation in a conflict occurred during the Second World War, when it fought alongside the Allies on the Atlantic and Italian fronts.

The fact that Brazil: (a) accounts for nearly half of the territory, population and gross domestic product (GDP) of the continent; (b) has been "free riding" in the British and later American hegemony in the Western hemisphere; (c) settled its borders to its satisfaction at the beginning of the 20th century;¹ has not only shaped Brazilian perceptions on defence and security, but has also influenced its foreign policy towards its neighbours – even committing to the non-intervention principle.

This Brazilian stance might have helped fuel one of the most distinctive characteristics of the region, the tendency to engage in peaceful settlement of conflicts. Latin America holds a "world record" in the number of disputes subjected to legal processes, with over twenty cases of adjudication and arbitration initiatives. This number surpasses by far the record for the rest of the world's regions, which

¹ Domício Proença Jr., "Forças armadas para quê? Para isso", in *Contexto Internacional*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (July/December 2011), p. 333-373, http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0102-85292011000200004.

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have a combined number of less than ten.²

As an enthusiastic supporter of multilateralism (and often minilateralism), Brazil, as other South American countries, has favoured collective initiatives rather than unilateral moves – which are in general associated with interventionism. This responsibility-sharing approach is associated with democratic practices and respect for other countries' sovereignty. Taken to an extreme, this approach has largely been responsible for the cautionary stance of the region towards the growing influence from "possible hegemons".³

Confronted with this historical environment, South American countries have had little incentive to develop a common security and institutional defence architecture.⁴ Apart from the Inter American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR), signed in the late 1940s, which is essentially a defence treaty that encompasses the whole of the Western hemisphere and has a questionable efficacy, issues related to security and defence in the region have been generally addressed by the Organization of the American States (OAS) or *ad hoc* endeavours such as the Contadora Group and Rio Group.⁵

The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), which includes a South American Defence Council (SDC), was established only in 2008. The SDC was conceived of as a platform for permanent dialogue.⁶ Its mission is to foster an environment of transparency, predictability and confidence-building. The first tangible results have been the creation of the South American School of Defence (ESUDE), where decision-making-level military officers from all member countries may interact, and the Centre for Strategic Defence Studies (CEED), which aims to "generate a strategic thinking at regional level that would contribute to the coordination and harmonization of defense policies in South America".⁷

This progress notwithstanding, critics of UNASUR argue that the institution has yet to become relevant, since its focus on high-level consultations delays its decisions. Indeed, it has not acted effectively in any given crisis in the region. Those who

² Andres Malamud and Isabella Alcañiz, "Managing Security in a Zone of Peace: Brazil's Soft Approach to Regional Governance", in *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (2017), http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0034-73292017000100211.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Antônio Jorge Ramalho, "South American Perspectives for Future Cooperation on Security Architectures: Arrangements, Processes and Challenges", in *The Policy Papers Collection. XIV Forte de Copacabana Conference*, Rio de Janeiro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, September 2017, <http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/23803-1442-2-30.pdf>.

⁵ The Contadora Group was created in the 1980s by Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela to address Central American crises in Guatemala, Nicaragua and Salvador. The Rio Group was another organization stemming from the 1980s that included most Latin American countries.

⁶ Antônio Jorge Ramalho, "South American Perspectives for Future Cooperation on Security Architectures", cit., p. 10.

⁷ See UNASUR website: *Center for Strategic Defense Studies*, <http://ceed.unasursg.org/English/01-CEED-eng/01-CEED-eng.html>.

defend the institution argue that the UNASUR/SDC is a long-term project whose goal is to strengthen political dialogue and create a defence identity, in order to consolidate the region as a zone of peace.

Be this as it may, one feature can be highlighted. As other South American organizations, UNASUR is fully intergovernmental, meaning that it does not have supranational procedures or the capacity to enforce its decisions. All these features clearly illustrate the importance of national sovereignty as a fundamental principle of the South American interstate interaction.

1. The Brazilian sense of insecurity

If, from an interstate perspective, the South American subcontinent is rightly perceived as a zone of peace, at the intrastate level there remain severe challenges. Taken together, Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries account for 8 per cent of the world's population and an astonishing 38 per cent of the world's homicides.⁸

Societal violence in Latin America has a wide array of root causes. There is a general consensus that it is a by-product of the combination of three factors:

1. *Deep inequality*: the region has one of the most inequitable levels of wealth distribution in the world, coupled with a large share of its population living below the poverty line. According to Oxfam, 70 per cent of LAC countries' wealth is in the hands of 10 per cent of the overall population in 2014.⁹
2. *Rampant crime*: most violence in the country comes from crime (as opposed to civil wars in other parts of the world), and from drug trafficking in particular, which has a knock-on effect on many different criminal activities and has also fuelled corruption inside the government of many countries. According to a study from the Inter-American Development Bank, the social cost of crime in LAC has reached the 261 billion-dollar mark in 2014, accounting for 3.55 per cent of the region's GDP and being twice as big as the developed countries' GDP average.¹⁰

⁸ Instinct for Life, *Latin America Can Reduce Homicide by 50 Percent in 10 Years*, July 2017, p. 1, <https://igarape.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/11-08-2017-Campanha-Instinto-de-Vida-EN.pdf>.

⁹ Alicia Bárcena Ibarra and Winnie Byanyima, *Latin America is the World's Most Unequal Region. Here's How to Fix It*, op-ed in the framework of the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum, 17 January 2016, <http://wef.ch/265GrYe>; Oxfam, *Privileges That Deny Rights. Extreme Inequality and the Hijacking of Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean. Executive Summary*, September 2015, <https://oxf.am/2FLiO05>. See also Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America 2016*, Santiago, United Nations, October 2017, <https://www.cepal.org/en/node/42719>.

¹⁰ Laura Jaitman et al., "The Costs of Crime and Violence: New Evidence and Insights in Latin America and the Caribbean", in *IDB Monographs*, No. 510 (February 2017), p. 5-6, <http://dx.doi.org/10.18188/510>.

3. *Institutional weakness*: although this factor varies greatly from country to country, a common feature is that the security institutions are ill equipped and/or corrupt. This is reflected in the high level of impunity towards crimes. In Brazil, Honduras and Venezuela, only 8 per cent of homicides are solved; in Colombia 4 per cent; Mexico 20 per cent. In contrast, in Europe 80–85 per cent of homicides are solved.¹¹ Moreover, the fact that in LAC public expenditure on domestic security is similar to that in countries such as the USA and UK (as a share of GDP) raises questions regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of public spending.¹²

The region's poor records in terms of both social development and control of violence have been a constant, occupying the top slots on the political agenda almost since the beginning of the various countries' independent history. Even the latest positive economic cycle, characterized by a "commodities boom", has not had a sustainable impact on either dimension. In this sense, these challenges, together with the reasonable stable defence environment in the region, have shaped the countries' perception (and approaches) towards defence and security.

There is a widespread assumption that sustained economic and social development are the underlining solutions for the region's main challenges. This perception has consolidated the tendency of seeing international security issues through a developmental lens and, in its turn, creates a paradox within the approach to societal violence challenges. The paradox is that Brazil, like other countries in the region, tends to favour diplomatic and developmental solutions and approaches to security issues on the international level, but policies aimed to combat societal violence (especially narco-traffic) are generally more aggressive, focusing on the use of force (and sometimes even using the military).

2. Brazilian track record on multilateral cooperation in security

Brazil is a multilateral animal. This matches well with the Brazilian background. There are many factors that enhance Brazil's position in multilateral forums: the country's satisfaction with its borders within the continent; its favourable asymmetry with its neighbours; its history of tackling rivalry with Argentina, its major security threat, through cooperation and other integration initiatives such as Mercosur or the ABACC programme to manage their respective nuclear programmes. Therefore, most of the initiatives carried out by Brazil regarding security are multilateral in nature.

[org/10.18235/0000615](https://doi.org/10.18235/0000615).

¹¹ Instinct for Life, *Latin America Can Reduce Homicide by 50 Percent in 10 Years*, cit., p. 4.

¹² Laura Jaitman et al., "The Costs of Crime and Violence", cit.

Regionally, as noted above, the South American security architecture is quite recent. Since Brazil lacks the economic means and/or the will to exercise leadership in the region, its initiatives generally focus on dialogue and confidence building. It is fair to acknowledge, though, that in respect of integration and commercial initiatives, Brazil's foreign policy has been more active, the country positioning itself as one of the major protagonists.¹³

Globally, Brazil is a regular member of cooperative regimes and conventions. One notable exception is the non-ratification of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) until the 1990s and, subsequently, the refusal to sign the Additional Protocol to its Safeguard Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN nuclear watchdog (the Additional Protocol expands IAEA's inspection powers). This refusal has its roots in the unequal logic of the NPT – which is based on an unequal exchange between officially recognized nuclear-weapon-states and non-nuclear-weapon-states – and the failure of nuclear-weapon-states to make significant progress towards disarmament.

Generally (self)perceived as a norm taker, it is worth noting that recently Brazil has engaged in two interesting initiatives acting as a “norm entrepreneur”.¹⁴

The first was the development of the Responsibility While Protecting (RWP) concept. Presented in early 2012 at the Security Council, in the aftermath of the Libyan conflict, the concept aimed to better regulate the use of force (and its possible excess) within the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle. Although this initiative was short lived, it was also an important effort that raised Brazil's profile in international security affairs.

The second was a partnership initiative with Germany, launched in 2013 in the wake of the scandal revolving around massive surveillance of foreign citizens and leaders by the US National Security Agency (NSA). The so-called Rousseff–Merkel initiative sponsored a UN resolution on online privacy. The aim was to identify virtual privacy as a basic human right. Even though the resolution was watered down to achieve consensus at the UN, it was passed and constituted an important normative achievement whereby electronic espionage could now be framed as a human rights issue and countries are encouraged to review their policies on the subject.¹⁵

¹³ Marcelo M. Valença and Gustavo Carvalho, “Soft Power, Hard Aspirations: the Shifting Role of Power in Brazilian Foreign Policy”, in *Brazilian Political Science Review*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2014), p. 66-94, http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1981-38212014000300066.

¹⁴ Adriana Erthal Abdenur and Carlos Frederico Pereira da Silva Gama, “Triggering the Norms Cascade: Brazil's Initiatives for Curbing the Electronic Espionage”, in *Global Governance*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (July-September 2015), p. 455-474.

¹⁵ UN News, *General Assembly Backs Right to Privacy in Digital Age*, 19 December 2013, <https://shar.es/1Leb9H>.

3. Roadblocks and avenues for Brazil–Europe cooperation

Countries are a by-product of their geography and history. Brazilians largely consider themselves as part of the West. On the one hand, Brazil and the European Union appear to be natural partners, since they share historical and cultural ties, are economic powerhouses, favour multilateral approaches, are supportive of international law and, at least on official rhetorically, foster democratic principles at home and abroad.¹⁶ On the other hand, Brazil and Europe perceive security issues differently and organize their agenda around different priorities, which may hinder cooperation efforts.

In 2016, the European Union Global Strategy highlighted the following challenges, amongst others: terrorism; the influx of refugees (and economic migrants); the rise of political extremism; intrastate conflicts (especially in Eastern Europe); relations with Russia; and even its own dissolution or step back on the European integration project.¹⁷

In turn, Brazil's priorities are more focused on societal violence; organized crime; widespread drug trafficking and consumption; and other issues that pose threats to human security.¹⁸ Defence wise, Brazil's main focus is the integrity of the Amazon region – with its fluid, hard-to-define borders – and, more recently, with the “Blue Amazon” (a maritime region where large oil reserves have been discovered), located outside Brazil's exclusive economic zone, but within its continental platform.

A group of secondary challenges should also be mentioned, such as vulnerabilities to infectious diseases; the possible influx of refugees from Venezuela; and issues concerning human rights.

4. Room for cooperation

Mindful of the close cultural-historical ties and its shared values, and at the same time aware of the asymmetries in power (military, economic, etc.) and different perceptions of security and defence, any initiative between Brazil and the EU should first concentrate on identifying spaces where both would be willing and are able to successfully cooperate.

¹⁶ Susanne Gratius, “From Soft to Hard Power? Security and Geo-Economics in Brazil-EU Relations”, in Jan Woischnik (ed.), *Might and Right in World Politics. XIII Forte de Copacabana Conference*, Rio de Janeiro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2016, p. 71-79, <http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/20546-1442-5-30.pdf>.

¹⁷ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger. Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016, <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/node/339>.

¹⁸ Leonardo Paz Neves (ed.), “Repensando a política externa brasileira: em busca de novos consensos”, in *Cadernos Adenauer*, Vol. XVII, No. 4 (December 2016), <http://www.kas.de/brasilien/pt/publications/47639>.

Listed below are fields or initiatives that could offer interesting opportunities, where both actors may be able to find a middle ground of mutual benefit, and possibly involve other countries. They are divided into two sets. The first set includes initiatives related to the traditional security and military field, the second set includes alternative themes related to a broader concept of security.

4.1 Traditional security and military themes

Drug trafficking: South America (and Brazil) currently finds itself at a crossroads: stuck between two set of approaches on how to deal with the illegal drug business and its impact on society. Traditional approaches to this matter are repressive in nature, towards both dealers and consumers. Recently, some countries (Uruguay being the main example) have advanced alternative regulatory efforts, more aligned with the “European model”,¹⁹ focusing on damage reduction and treating the consumer issue from a health perspective rather than a criminal one. In this area, the EU has a lot to offer to countries such as Brazil that seem to be still trapped by conservative actors favouring the repressive approach.²⁰ Helping each other cope with organized crime could aid efforts to avoid drugs reaching both shores (cocaine from Brazil and synthetic drugs from Europe). Beyond exchanging best practices, both actors could advance more in initiatives such as intelligence sharing, joint operations, development of combined strategies, facilitating the management of arrested criminals and so forth.

Military industrial sector: although some European countries have a more developed military industrial base than Brazil, the Brazilian base also has expertise in certain areas, especially concerning military equipment for tropical environments (such as light armoured cars and amphibious vehicles). Moreover, there are already important partnerships between Brazilian and European companies: Helibras-Airbus, Brazilian Army-Iveco and Andrade Gutierrez-Thales. The complementary expertise and the track record of successful partnerships have set an important pattern for further cooperation.

Peace operations: in the last decade, the Brazilian military leadership in MINUSTAH, the UN stabilization mission in Haiti, resulted in a significant improvement of Brazil’s peacekeeping operation capacity, with a considerable amount of resources channelled to building infrastructure to train peacekeepers. As MINUSTAH’s mandate expired in October 2017, the Brazilian leadership is studying where next to deploy Brazilian peacekeepers.²¹ This could be a very promising opportunity

¹⁹ Susanne Gratius and David Palacios, *Europe and Latin America: Combating Drugs and Drug Trafficking*, Brussels, EU Parliament, March 2012, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EXPO-AFET_ET\(2012\)457107](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EXPO-AFET_ET(2012)457107).

²⁰ Thiago Rodrigues and Carol Viviana Porto, “The South American View for Better Collaboration between South America and Europe against Drug Trafficking”, in *The Policy Papers Collection. XIV Forte de Copacabana Conference*, Rio de Janeiro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, September 2017, <http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/23807-1442-2-30.pdf>.

²¹ MINUSTAH has been replaced by the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti

for the EU to gain Brazil's cooperation on other hotspots. Naturally, the matter is also sensitive in view of differing perceptions on how to implement, for instance, the R2P paradigm. Nonetheless, this is a field where multilateral initiatives and collective security principles offer fresh cooperation potential.

Cyberspace: the cyberspace is the newest frontier of international engagement. In this semi-anarchic domain, new rules/regimes are required to foster its multiple benefits and confront bad practices. For that to happen, it is necessary that some key countries take the lead in building consensus regarding online practices and translate it into comprehensive, but flexible, regulatory regimes. Brazil and Germany have already had a successful experience that could inspire new endeavours.

4.2 Alternative themes

Democracy: currently, South America and Europe are both undergoing periods of political uncertainty. In South America the Venezuelan crisis and in Europe the secession movements demand intense political dialogue and solutions that should be anchored in democratic principles. Since both Brazil and the EU are defenders of democratic practices and values, they should explore ways to cooperate in that field, either sharing good practice or finding ways to support each other's political processes. Again, this issue requires sensitivity. Since certain approaches could be considered "intrusive" by some, cooperation could be affected by low political will and lack of engagement from some actors. An easier path should be found via multilateral institutions fostering human rights, freedom, empowerment and similar initiatives.

Food security: Brazil and the EU have complementary expertise that, together, through trilateral cooperation (EU–Brazil–poor country) could have a significant impact on fighting global hunger. The Brazilian South-South Cooperation experience and cutting-edge technologies on tropical agriculture coupled with European resources, network and institutional expertise could help vulnerable countries in developing agricultural capabilities.

Health: in the last couple of decades we have seen outbreaks and the global spread of infectious diseases such as SARS, swine flu, bird flu, Ebola and the Zika virus. This threat knows no boundaries and could start in any region and impact greatly on both Brazil and the EU. These two actors should cooperate in the spirit of the concept introduced by Richard Hass of "sovereign obligation", which concerns what one country owes to other countries.²² This area does not begin and end in bilateral cooperation; rather, here there is fertile ground for trilateral cooperation, in

(MINUJUSTH), which is composed by police and correctional officers and civilians. Anthony Boadle, "U.N. Asks Brazil for Peacekeepers for Central African Republic", in *Reuters*, 27 November 2017, <https://reut.rs/2Ac3PMs>.

²² Richard N. Haass, "World Order 2.0", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (January/February 2017), p. 2-9.

which Brazil and the EU could team up to help improve the resilience of vulnerable countries.

Climate change: in line with the health and cyber fields, climate change is one of the most important international public goods. Brazilian and European track records on the matter are extensive and relevant. Both are key players in the effort to advance an ambitious agenda to tackle global warming consequences. Beyond engaging in intergovernmental initiatives, both actors are able to cooperate in fostering sustainable technologies and practices, and engaging other crucial stakeholders, such as companies, that somehow have been marginalized in this process.

Conclusion

Brazil and the EU have both been dealing with their own crises, and that seems to have prevented them from advancing a common agenda. Despite this apparent “lack of interest”, there is enough common ground for these actors to cooperate. Indeed, there are a number of past and existing initiatives on which the two could build upon to expand collaboration. In 2007, the EU granted Brazil the status of strategic partner, and since then they have been organizing bilateral summits to build a joint agenda. The most recent bilateral summit was, however, in 2014. Renewing these efforts is likely to be key for further interactions. In 2014, economic issues were predominant, but it should not be difficult to extend the discussion to wider security issues of mutual concern.²³ A partnership on innovative forms of governance could even provide “a third way between the US and China”,²⁴ for both Brazil and the EU to foster multilateral governance of global challenges.

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²³ Renato G. Flôres Jr., “A EU Second Modernity Defence Strategy?”, in Jan Woischnik (ed.), *Might and Right in World Politics. XIII Forte de Copacabana Conference*, Rio de Janeiro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2016, p. 81-89, <http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/20547-1442-5-30.pdf>.

²⁴ Renato G. Flôres Jr., “Expert Opinion”, in Antonio Missiroli (ed.), *Towards an EU Global Strategy – Consulting the Experts*, Paris, EU Institute for Security Studies, April 2016, p. 83, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/1192>.

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