



Admiral Eduardo Bacellar Leal Ferreira on the Evolving Role of the Brazilian Navy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Brazil is home to a vast maritime region, from the waters of the Amazon River to the country's nearly 8,000 km of Atlantic coast. These areas play a central role in the Brazilian economy—from international trade to the deep water pre-salt oil reserves—but are also integral to Brazil's culture and national identity. The Brazilian Navy is the entity tasked with ensuring the safe navigation and use of this vast maritime expanse. A multipurpose force, the Brazilian Navy must be present in the most distant reaches of the country, charged with defense as well as other constabulary activities, as prescribed by law and the Brazilian Constitution.

In order to become an institution capable of fulfilling the nation's aspirations, the Brazilian Navy relies on cooperation with the naval forces of Brazil's allies and partners. The U.S. Navy has proved a constant partner in this regard, from the early days of the Brazilian Fleet to the present.

Commander of the Brazilian Navy, Admiral Eduardo Bacellar Leal Ferreira, spoke at the Wilson Center on September 25th on the Brazilian Navy's efforts to accomplish this wide range of responsibilities in Brazil's vast territory and adjacent maritime area.

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6th Floor, Woodrow Wilson Center

Paulo Sotero, Director of the Wilson Center’s Brazil Institute, began the conversation by emphasizing how important it is for allies to remain engaged, so that each side knows what the other is thinking, planning, and doing. In this sense, Sotero explained, Admiral Leal Ferreira’s presence in the United States is an indication of successful long-term cooperation and coordination between the U.S. and Brazilian Navies. In other words, the security and defense relationship between these two nations is a healthy one. Sotero urged upkeep of these close ties and thanked the Admiral for his willingness to participate in public dialogue at the Wilson Center.

Admiral Eduardo Bacellar Leal Ferreira, Commander of the Brazilian Navy, began his speech by offering a clearer definition of Brazil’s role as a maritime nation. The Brazilian Navy is faced with the daunting task of controlling ocean waters more than half the size of Brazil itself. Brazil’s economy relies heavily on maritime trade given its location far from major commercial hubs in North America, Europe, and Asia. Brazilian waters

are also home to many valuable natural resources, such as the pre-salt oil deposits. With all of this in mind, Admiral Leal Ferreira stressed the navy’s critical role in maintaining a stable maritime architecture that promotes national prosperity and global connectivity. The Brazilian Navy thus serves as a “multipurpose” force, by the Admiral’s characterization, fulfilling the roles of traditional navy, coast guard, marine corps, maritime authority, and hydrographic office all under one agency.

The agency’s first priority, Admiral Leal Ferreira explained, is national defense. Although Brazil is not known as a belligerent country, it participated in World Wars I and II, entering the second in support of the Allies after German submarines sunk Brazilian merchant ships in the Atlantic Ocean. The Admiral also emphasized that, though war in the region seems extremely unlikely, war is often unexpected until it breaks out. In particular, the 1982 Falklands War showed that Brazil and its neighbors must remain alert and prepared to defend their territory if needed.

Due to its multipurpose nature, however, the Brazilian Navy also handles many more nontraditional tasks. These tasks range from preventing environmental pollution and training merchant marines to social and health care services provided by riverboat-hospitals in the Amazon basin and other remote areas. Brazil’s Navy also plays a significant role in creating technology later used by the whole country—evidenced by Brazil’s first computer company in the 1970s, which used technology generated by the navy—and thus contributing to national development. Also notable is the navy’s hand in peacekeeping operations around the world, such as the former United Nations mission to Haiti and ongoing mission to Lebanon.

Among the Brazilian Navy’s new initiatives are plans to reduce the number of personnel, upgrade operational capabilities, and integrate women into various levels and positions in the naval forces. A law was passed in 2017, at the navy’s request, which opened up opportunities for



Admiral Leal Ferreira at the Wilson Center (9-25-2018).



women to become line officers and join the marines in Brazil. Admiral Leal Ferreira further explained that Brazil has continued to push forward with its development of a nuclear submarine, the first model of which—after some delays in the name of caution—is expected to be delivered by the end of 2020.

The Admiral maintained that “personnel is [the navy’s] greatest asset,” and therefore he supports extensive exchange programs with other countries’ navies and universities, including in the United States. Training exchanges between the Brazilian Naval School in Rio de Janeiro and the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis are well established and long running, said Leal Ferreira. The Admiral himself spent two years teaching in Annapolis as part of an instructors’ exchange.

Following his remarks, Admiral Leal Ferreira took questions from the audience.


When asked about the navy’s role in the ongoing military intervention in Rio de Janeiro, the Admiral objected to the use of the term “military intervention.” He insisted that the operation is civilian-based and works with a separate law-and-order enforcement operation to which the navy directly contributes more than a thousand marines. As such, the intervention is not a military intervention itself. Although its commander is a military general, he was chosen based on his competence in both security and institutional administration, the Admiral countered. By the same token, the naval personnel directly assisting the intervention were called to help because of their individual skills and does not reflect the navy’s involvement as an institution.

Regarding the implementation of the new gender policy and potential obstacles, Admiral Leal Ferreira assured the group that navy leadership is wholly on board with the idea of female integration—the challenge lies in adjusting the culture for a new kind of navy. The navy has already tested the integration of women on a small scale with individual ships and in training, and is now moving to broaden implementation through annually increasing naval school and training center enrollment rates for women. He noted it may take a decade for the first of these newly enlisted women to rise through the ranks and win command of a ship, but he fully expects this to happen.

As for the navy’s role in combatting drug trafficking, the Admiral admitted that, although the navy might prefer to view drug trafficking as someone else’s problem, anytime trafficking takes place over water, it is in fact their responsibility. Aside from container ships—which fall under the jurisdiction of port authorities—the navy deploys ships to catch drug trafficking vessels. However, given the vastness of the navy’s maritime jurisdiction, it bases these operations on prior intelligence rather than random searches, which makes them dependent on cooperation with intelligence services in the Federal Police.



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