

Defining Brazil's Security Agenda: From *Favelas* to the United Nations

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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

In recent years, the security agenda in Latin America has changed dramatically and become more complex due to a number of factors: the transition to democracy, the end of the Cold War, globalization, and the September 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States. All these extraordinary events—although tremendously different in scope and depth—made the pre-existing hemispheric security agenda obsolete and inappropriate to address present day security challenges. Today, the region struggles to redefine the concept of security, while incorporating the perspectives of several new actors that have emerged to take part in the policy debate.

The participation of Brazil is vital to reach a consensus about the concept of regional security. Besides being the biggest and richest country in the region, Brazil's transition to democracy has been a model success, and it has taken an active leadership role in the region, including in trade negotiations. In addition, during the current Lula administration, Brazil has demonstrated a marked interest in having a more active role in defining the security agenda, particularly in South America. It has intensified contacts with ministries of defense in the region and even proposed to design and build jointly a patrol boat suited to South American defense needs. Brazil is also taking a prominent role in advancing current initiatives for the reform of the United Nations and has argued vigorously for a seat on the Security Council.

To analyze new concepts of security in the region while fostering dialogue among Brazilian practitioners, scholars, and government and military officials, the "Creating

Community" project of the Latin American Program (LAP) organized two meetings in Brazil in May 2005, thanks to the generous support of The Ford Foundation. On May 24, 2005, in Rio de Janeiro, LAP teamed up with Viva Rio to organize the seminar "New Context, Concepts and Challenges for Latin American Security: Hemispheric Agenda, Local and Global Links," which focused on public safety and the links between national and international security threats. On May 25,

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2005, in Brasília, LAP worked with Brazil's Ministry of Defense and the University of Brasília to organize the seminar "Latin America in the International Security Context," which focused on Brazil's perspective on regional and global security issues.

At both meetings, Joseph S. Tulchin, Director of the Woodrow Wilson Center's Latin American Program, began by describing the context in which the new security agenda is being formed. "Understanding the resulting environment has become a harder task," he said, "not only because 'security' has lost precision as a concept but also because no single country can control the security agenda." Moreover, classic inter-state security interactions were replaced by a myriad of relationships involving not only state actors but also



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Alfonso Barbosa, Alcides Costa Vaz and Joseph S. Tulchin

various non-state actors, which have rapidly emerged, and continue to emerge, in response to perceived security threats. To overcome the resulting analytical difficulty, Tulchin proposed the use of a concept developed by Raúl Benítez Manaut, from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, which considers different levels of interaction—national, binational, sub-regional, hemispheric and international—when examining these increasingly complex security relationships. This model considers both formal or diplomatic relationships as well as informal institutional ones at the various levels of interaction since the intensity of intra-state institu-

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The **Latin American Program** serves as a bridge between the United States and Latin America, encouraging a free flow of information and dialogue between the two regions. The Program also provides a nonpartisan forum for discussing Latin American and Caribbean issues in Washington, D.C., and for bringing these issues to the attention of opinion leaders and policy makers throughout the Western hemisphere. The Program sponsors major initiatives on Decentralization, Citizen Security, Comparative Peace Processes, Creating Community in the Americas, U.S.-Brazilian relations and U.S.-Mexican relations.

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tional interactions often surpasses the usually controlled inter-state relationships. Current analysis of regional and global security challenges must be able to include these new and complex patterns of interaction, he said.

In an environment where the definition of security differs from country to country, Benítez asserted that it is necessary to overcome the deadlock over the concept of security to be adopted by Organization of American States (OAS). Indeed, the inability of country members of this regional multilateral organization to reach a consensus over the concept of security has prevented the OAS from finding ways to address the interests of both small and large countries in the region. It has also hindered OAS efforts to foster a more ambitious regional cooperative security agreement to address current threats in the region.

RIO DE JANEIRO

In recent years, crime in Brazil’s cities has increased dramatically, becoming more violent and highly international. This blurs the line between international or human security and internal or national security and makes the policy response to security threats more difficult. The meeting in Rio de Janeiro focused on public safety in Brazil and explored ways to address this problem.

Rubem César Fernandes, Executive Director of Viva Rio, a non-governmental organization whose mission is to reduce armed violence in Brazil’s cities, began the seminar by asserting that armed violence in major urban centers constitutes Brazil’s most critical security issue. He argued there is the need for a unified, national agenda to tackle the problem of public safety and defended the referendum on the ban of the sale of guns and ammuni-

tion to civilians scheduled for October 23, 2005. [Certainly to Fernandes' dismay, the referendum to which he referred was overwhelmingly defeated by a margin of almost two to one.] Fernandes also insisted on the need to laser-cut a serial number on all bullets for tracking purposes.

Brazil's current method of dealing with criminals, Fernandes argued, must be completely rethought to reflect crime-fighting improvements and innovations, while a regional "Mercosul hub" should be created to help combat the illicit transnational drugs-for-weapons trade, which recently has been gaining momentum in the Southern Cone. He went on to condemn the porous nature of Brazil's international borders, which enables the entry of weapons, drugs, and other forms of contraband.

Fernandes stressed the importance of creating a more regional concept of national security but also acknowledged the relevance of strategic cooperation with the United States on this matter. Clóvis Brigagão of Cândido Mendes University, however, saw security collaboration with the United States as less advantageous. He argued that because the United States resorted to unilateral measures following the attacks on September 11, the prospects for regional cooperative arrangements, if the United States were to be involved, have been momentarily thwarted.

Referring to Fernandes' call for consensus on the concept of security, Bernardo Sorj, of Rio de Janeiro Federal University and Viva Rio, questioned the need for a unified doctrine to emerge out of the multitude of dissenting opinions formulated by policymakers. The dialogue itself, he argued, must and will advance even in the face of divergent positions. Sorj shifted the focus of the discussion by calling attention to the issue of human security. He argued that national attention must shift away from traditional security threats to the nation state, to those threats endangering individuals and human rights.

According to Sorj, the old national security doctrine is inadequate for today's democratic needs and should be revamped just as the military needs to distance itself from the defunct military regime. Army Colonel Francisco Mamede de Brito Filho from the Army Staff Command School, Escola de Comando do Estado Maior do Exército, disagreed with Sorj's position by highlighting the profound

changes currently taking place in the military, which are demonstrated by recent achievements such as the definition of a defense policy, the creation of the Ministry of Defense, and the engagement of civil society in the definition of security issues. To deflect criticism that the military should be doing more in the fight against urban crime, he reminded the panel of the existing legal limitations that clearly limit the role of the military in this realm. Because Brazil is a highly decentralized federation, combating urban crime is the sole responsibility of state governments, not the central government. Governors may and do call on the military to assist them when urban crime gets out of hand, but this is done as a last resort. Nevertheless, Filho insisted that these limitations have not deterred the military from assisting in other ways, such as sharing intelligence with state governments.

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Providing a comparative analysis, Rut Diamint, from the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella and Argentina's Ministry of Defense, referred to the difficulty Argentina faces in redefining the institutional role of its military vis-à-vis the new democratic environment and the emergence of human security threats at the start of the 21st century. Diamint argued that Argentina's ability to coordinate foreign security policy as an instrument of the state is lim-

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ited, given other domestic demands that take priority such as domestic citizen security and poverty. She explained that following the military dictatorship, Argentines understood that internal pacification was a prerequisite for stabilizing the country and inserting it into the international community. Government agencies have not addressed new international security threats due to the lack of military capacity. In accordance with current legislation, the armed forces cannot intervene in cases of



narcotrafficking or terrorism, nor are they trained to confront these challenges. In addition, the Néstor Kirchner administration has not presented long-term foreign policy plans to avoid raising issues of human rights and military autonomy. Although the Ministry of Defense has acquired superior defense planning, she said, it has not yet achieved total command of the defense apparatus.

BRASILIA

As was noted above, Brazil is in a position to provide regional leadership on security matters and has shown an interest in participating in the development of both the regional and international security agenda. With this in mind, the meeting in Brasília, was organized to discuss Brazil's perspective on defense and international security and its approach to policymaking, focusing on the way in which Brazil's position can be integrated into the regional dialogue regarding hemispheric security.

Noting that Brazil has enjoyed more than 130 years of peaceful relations with its neighbors, Vice-Admiral Afonso Barbosa, Director of the Policy and Strategy Department of the Ministry of

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Defense, asserted that Brazil's national defense has grown to rely largely on soft, rather than hard, power. Despite this, Brazilian policymakers are well aware of the competitive nature of the world and the need to be prepared for unexpected challenges. The efficient use of soft power requires skilled and precise articulation of diplomatic, security, and strategic goals, a task that Brazil has not always been able to accomplish. Finally, Barbosa argued that, when defining Brazil's security and defense goals, special attention must be paid to three major strate-

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gic variables—bilateral relations with the United States, relations with Brazil's neighbors, and the amount of hard power necessary—and justifiable—for a country like Brazil, which has tremendous domestic demands in other sectors.

Brazil's new "Defense Policy" approved on June 30, 2005, Barbosa continued, is divided into two sections. The first section introduces the concepts related to and a description of both the national and the international security realms. The second section presents the following guidelines: Brazil's territory is bounded by clearly-defined and internationally-recognized borders; Brazil's relations both with countries of the region and the international community are based on mutual respect and confidence; Brazil rejects outright and will not pursue war for the goal of conquest; and Brazilian diplomacy seeks to resolve disputes through peaceful and negotiated means, and will only resort to the use of force in cases of self-defense.

The policy restates typical security objectives and concerns, such as the protection of the Brazilian Amazon as well as Brazil's territorial borders, Barbosa said. However, he added, it also focuses on less-traditional security objectives, such as "strengthening transportation, energy, and national communication systems; promoting scientific exploration of the Antarctic region; and incorporating civil society into the decision-making process." This defense policy is explicit in recognizing the relevance of civil society's support both for the legitimacy of Brazil's defense and security goals and for the methods used to accomplish these goals.

Addressing the conditions for instability in the region and the threats to regional security, Alcides Costa Vaz, from the University of Brasília, stated the most critical security issues in the region are in the Amazon basin, where Colombia still looms large as the most serious threat to regional stability. Terrorism, which has been the focus of the United States since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, is not considered an important regional threat, he said.

Vaz argued that Brazil's interest in security issues is minimal when compared to economic concerns. Thus, Brazilian policymakers are hesitant to engage in any situation that may involve the use of military force without international legitimacy and multilateral support. Yet, he added, in order to justify their call for a seat on the UN Security Council,

Brazil has recently demonstrated a desire for a more prominent role in hemispheric and multilateral security matters. The decision to participate in the UN mission to Haiti (MINUSTAH) was clearly motivated by this aim, he said.

Antonio Jorge Ramalho, from the Brazilian Ministry of Defense and the University of Brasília, discussed how Brazil relates to the international security environment. He agreed with Vaz that Brazil's lack of attention to defense issues, on the part of both civil society and policymakers, is frequently problematic for the definition of security interests. However, the Ministry of Defense has been working to change this attitude of indifference by engaging civil society in a dialogue on security issues. For example, the Ministry has been hosting a series of debates with representatives from the academic and private sectors with the objective of "rethinking" Brazilian security and defense.

Acknowledging the importance of these steps to encourage dialogue on security issues, Luis Bitencourt, from the Woodrow Wilson Center, underscored Brazil's progress on institutionalizing regional defense initiatives. He also highlighted two important paradoxes. First, while Brazil is developing an ambitious diplomatic security agenda, the dramatic inability of the state to curb domestic violence and to reform state organizations responsible for public safety persists. Although national plans to address the problem of urban crime have been introduced by both the current and the previous administrations, there is no indication that these plans have been implemented. Bitencourt argued, it is imperative that Brazilian authorities dedicate more attention to correct serious problems with the police apparatus, the judicial system, and the penal system. Moreover, he said, these goals should be pursued with urgency, and with full respect for human rights.

The second paradox relates to the political and strategic level of defense—while Brazil is entitled to pursue a position of regional leadership and even a seat on the United Nations Security Council, this aspiration stands in stark contrast with the chronic lack of resources for modernization of the Brazilian military. Bitencourt argued, "It is hard to understand Brazil's vigorous discourse fighting for a seat on the UN Security Council while at the same time a group of 'wives of the military' gathers in front of the Ministry of Defense to complain about the low salaries of their husbands."

Addressing the issue of civil-military relations in the face of "new threats" Rut Diamint suggested the adoption of a concept of human security to facilitate current security definitions in Latin America, as opposed to using the traditional concept based on notions of state sovereignty. Diamint added that a "generalized" engagement of the armed forces to fight these "new threats," such as organized crime and drug trafficking, would prevent the needed reform of the armed forces and, ultimately, could endanger and slow the strengthening of democracy in the region.

Raising doubts about Brazil's ability to address current security threats due to lingering problems related to Brazil's transition to democracy, Maria Helena de Castro, from the University of Brasília, argued that the Brazilian military has not yet accepted full civilian control and maintains prac-

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tices not consistent with the democratic model. In addition, Brazilian civil society has yet to demonstrate a more robust interest in engaging itself in security issues to effectively establish control over the military.



Maria Helena de Castro



CONCLUSIONS

The debate on the seemingly intractable urban crime problem in Brazil shed light not only on one of the thorniest security problems for Brazil but also on the inadequacy of some state institutions to face security threats in the relatively young Brazilian democracy. The ideas that surfaced at the meeting in Rio should motivate a deep reflection on the dangers faced by citizens living in Brazilian cities. Overall, the meeting in Rio de Janeiro demonstrated that prospects for a solution to the urban crime problem exist but depend largely on cooperative initiatives among states and institutions.

The debate on regional security and policy definition in Brasilia helped to promote a better understanding of Brazil's current position on regional security matters and its goals for the near future. It was clear that, although slowly, Brazilian institutions concerned with defense and security are moving in the direction of solid democratic modernization, including increasing the participation of civil society.

The two seminars in Brazil offered a variety of perspectives on the high stakes involved in the rapidly changing security environment in South America, in general, and Brazil, in particular. The linkages between national security and international security became abundantly clear. The formal distinctions between the two are blurred in the Brazilian case where huge areas and enormous numbers of people in the *favelas* of Rio are "governed" by organized international crime gangs trafficking in drugs, arms, and laundered money. It was also evident that the concept of Brazilian security, seen by geo-politicians in Brasília is markedly different from the same concept as envisioned by civil society groups or members of the police force in Rio.

The interaction between Brazilian, American, and Latin American scholars and practitioners, from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, enriched the debate on security matters and provided a framework for further exchange. Despite the variety of views presented at each meeting, all the participants agreed on the importance of maintaining a dialogue on security issues and keeping Brazil fully engaged in regional hemispheric security arrangements.

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