

U.S. Brazil Workshop on Global and Regional Security



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Introduction

A workshop on global and regional security was held in Brasilia on 13 and 14 August, 2012. This event was supported and executed by the Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering WMD (PASCC) of the Center on Contemporary Conflict at the Naval Postgraduate School. PASCC is sponsored by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency.

The participants included 9 Brazilian and 7 U.S. specialists in security, global proliferation, disarmament, and weapons of mass destruction policies. Also present were observers from the Brazilian Presidency's Secretariat for Strategic Affairs, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. Embassy in Brasilia.

Brazil's Position in the Region

Brazilian participants emphasized early on in the discussions that Brazil faces no regional adversaries. This allows them the maximum latitude to engage in international politics at the time and place of their choosing at low risk and cost. They noted that this differentiates them from other countries in the BRIC category (Brazil, Russia, India, China). They also candidly admitted that this provides many opportunities to 'free ride' on global security issues. They then reminded the group that Brazil is the only BRIC without nuclear weapons.

A Brazilian participant explained that for 150 years concern for the regional balance of power dictated Brazil's foreign policy. During this time, there was a fear that if Brazil had an activist policy in South America, then its South American neighbors would balance against it. That rationale died away as Argentina started to collapse in the 1960s and further collapsed in 1982, as explained by this participant. From that moment onward, the dominant policy view was that neighbors would support an increasingly powerful Brazil.

Some Brazilian participants downplayed the importance of the Organization of American States in enhancing regional security. They identified the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) as an example of a regional institution better fit for Brazil's preferred approach to leadership with the principle of dialogue and discussion based on mutual respect. However, one of the Brazilian participants pointed to the recent suspension of Paraguay from MERCOSUR (Common Market of the South) following the impeachment of President Lugo and the subsequent incorporation of Venezuela as examples of Brazilian 'realpolitik' that belie the stated preference for dialogue among equals. A Brazilian participant added that regardless of whether the region is inclined to facilitate or inhibit Brazil's ambitions, Brazil needs to work to win the region's support. Brazil has become even more important in economic and political terms due to mistakes

made by its neighbors. One participant contended that U.S. neglect of South America could present an opportunity for Brazil to gain more power in the region.

Brazilian participants also noted the particular alignment of domestic constituencies regarding issues such as MERCOSUR and UNASUR, which they saw as demonstrating that Brazil was a consolidated democracy that had to respond to domestic political and economic interests in much the same way that the United States government did. The United States and Brazil also look very similar in their relationship with the region, one participant said. If we actually look at the interests of United States and Brazil, they are very convergent. One Brazilian participant also added that, like the United States, Brazil is happy to retreat back to unilateralism.

Brazilian participants repeatedly emphasized that Brazil is uniquely qualified to play the role of international peacemaker due to their peaceful traditions, the strength of their diplomacy, and their experience in reducing tensions during international crises. Brazilians also stressed that as a consolidated free market democracy, Brazil is inherently a responsible power in the international arena. They disagreed with the characterization of Brazil as a 'spoiler', a position held by some U.S. observers of global nonproliferation efforts (albeit not by the U.S. participants in this dialogue). Again and again Brazilian participants emphasized their responsible and mature behavior in important international issues, including nuclear ones.

The dialogue participants from outside of the region agreed that Brazil has acquired a good reputation for its skilled diplomacy. One U.S. participant predicted that Brazil would eventually join the expanded UN Security Council as a permanent member.

Limits to the NPT

The Brazilians considered the U.S. and Brazil to be natural partners in international nonproliferation efforts, and both sides agreed that the international nonproliferation regime was in crisis. They offered different explanations, however, for the roots of the regime crisis. A participant from within the region added that it is difficult for Brazil and the U.S. to be on the same page or even debate nuclear issues because the two countries comes from very different ends of the nuclear spectrum.

Participants observed that the NPT regime is in the midst of a legitimacy crisis. One participant said that from an institutional point of view, the original design of the regime left it unable to adapt to changes that have taken place in the international system since the Cold War. Some U.S. participants expressed optimism that the NPT has been bolstered by the Obama administration's support for the NPT. A change in both attitude and policy from the administration has fostered a new sense of hope in the NPT's utility. This participant

added that only by fully engaging other members of the NPT can the U.S. and Brazil hope to make the non-proliferation regime stronger.

As part of their critique of the existing nonproliferation regime, Brazilian participants remarked that U.S. policy towards India and Israel rewarded bad behavior, while states that had complied with the NPT, such as Brazil, were ignored. They also raised questions on U.S. policy towards Iran since they believed that, circumstances aside, some of the criticisms leveled at Iran could be used in the future to target Brazil's nuclear program. U.S. participants observed that there was a considerable difference between the various cases. They pointed out that Iran (and North Korea) had violated treaty commitments under the NPT, and this justified the measures taken by the international community and the United States to bring them back into compliance. On the other hand, Israel and India had not signed the NPT, so while their role in nuclear proliferation might be regrettable, they were not guilty of treaty violations.

The Brazilian participants made it clear that it was highly unlikely that Brazil would sign an Additional Protocol (AP) to the NPT. They repeatedly stressed Brazil's principled opposition to the discriminatory nature of the NPT and the need to make further progress on disarmament. Some Brazilian participants considered the signing of the NPT in 1998 to be a mistake because Brazil had gained little from it, while countries that had not signed the NPT—India and Israel—had received assistance from the United States. On the other hand, one of the Brazilian participants observed that Brazil aspired to join another discriminatory international regime, permanent membership on the UN Security Council, so clearly its stand was not consistent. The Brazilian participants took great pride in their country's history of implementing safeguards through the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC) and the transparency provided by concluding the Quadripartite Safeguards Agreement (QSA) among Argentina, Brazil, ABACC, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Additionally, there was some discussion as to whether a set of amendments to Brazil and Argentina's existing safeguards agreement might be functionally equivalent to an AP and break the impasse over Brazil's refusal to sign.

A participant from inside the region insisted that the role of the NPT in the non-proliferation regime should not be overemphasized. Other actions could reinforce the regime without the NPT. From its inception, the participant contended, the NPT has not been a specific disarmament treaty. Different actions and instruments could be more effective and accurate in advancing nuclear disarmament. If the true intention is to achieve global nuclear disarmament, then the regime needs to explore more options.

Criticism of U.S. Policy and Perceived Intentions

Some Brazilian participants revealed that there is a perception of the United States as not sufficiently trustworthy to encourage significant global change regarding non-proliferation and disarmament in the international system. More specifically, a participant said that there is a view that the United States only promotes nuclear disarmament because of its overwhelming advantage over the rest of the world in terms of conventional military weapons. The presence of these views demonstrated the need for a greater fostering of trust in order to conduct successful negotiations on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament issues. It was argued that despite some skepticism, the United States is still the right actor to push these negotiations.

The Brazilian participants were highly critical of the U.S. reaction to the 2010 Tehran declaration announcing a Brazil-Turkey-Iran initiative to conduct a nuclear fuel swap. The Brazilians felt that President da Silva had acted with the tacit support and encouragement of the United States, only to have the rug pulled out from under him after he announced the deal. They believed that it would be a long time before Brazil would cooperate with the United States in this way again. However, one of the Brazilian participants noted that the Tehran declaration reflected shortcomings in the technical knowledge of Brazilian diplomats on nuclear issues.

Security Threats and Changes in the International System

There was considerable discussion during the workshop of Brazil's perceived security threats. In general, the Brazilian description of possible threats was quite vague, focused very much on the future rather than the present. Rather than 'naming' threats, the Brazilians preferred a capabilities-based approach to defense planning.

When pressed by some of the U.S. participants to be concrete, several Brazilian participants noted that Brazil and South America were rich in minerals, energy, water and agricultural lands, and that this could pose a temptation to outside powers at some point in the future when global scarcity became the norm. They argued that Brazil's frontiers were extensive (over 16,000 kilometers), crossed difficult terrain, and were porous. They also observed that Brazil's extensive maritime frontier was critical to national wellbeing and stressed the need to protect the "Blue Amazon," the area which houses the Brazilian Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf. The most concrete example of a possible threat offered by a Brazilian participant was that of an invading naval task force. The Falklands-Malvinas conflict was offered as an example of how the security environment could change quickly and traditional regional security regimes, such as the Interamerican Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, could be ignored by the United States during times of

crisis. They also highlighted the importance of submarines in countering maritime threats as a major 'lesson learned' from the Falklands-Malvinas conflict.

One Brazilian participant predicted that it would become increasingly difficult to understand the South American strategic environment without considering the role of China and the role of competition between the United States and China in the South American region. A U.S. participant added that as China and India become bigger players in the South Atlantic, that area would become marked by increasing competition. As the two compete, the South Atlantic would become less secure. A participant from outside the region argued that Brazilian officials would like to see an increase in multipolarity with the rise of China, but added that there is a fear of the uncertainty associated with such a shift.

Brazil's Nuclear Submarine Program

In the context of Brazil's perceived security threats, some Brazilian participants raised the topic of their nuclear submarine program. The Brazilians clearly saw this program as a centerpiece of their future nuclear development. Some U.S. participants questioned Brazilian perceptions of their threat environment and whether this justified a nuclear submarine program. Over the course of the dialogue, it became clear that Brazil's continuation of the nuclear submarine program was rooted in a historical legacy of the parallel nuclear program of the 1980s, the country's desire for status in the international community, and the Brazilian Navy's institutional interests.

There was some discussion amongst U.S. and Brazilian participants of the proliferation risk posed by enriching fuel for use in submarine nuclear reactors, but Brazilian participants noted that the main areas of concern (enrichment, fuel fabrication, and reactor fueling) were all associated with land-based facilities, which could be handled within existing international safeguard regimes. They also cited the French model of using fuel enriched to approximately 7% to power its submarines as a way of minimizing international proliferation concerns. One of the Brazilian participants with direct experience in their nuclear program described that the Brazilian Navy planned to build a land-based prototype of their submarine nuclear reactor. This prototype would be sited within a mockup of the planned submarine so as to practice operations, including loading and unloading fuel under international safeguards. Providing further reassurance, several Brazilian participants stated that Brazil was the only country that allows international inspection of military units. On the other hand, one Brazilian participant questioned the need for nuclear submarines at all, citing the lack of a cost-benefit analysis justifying the acquisition of nuclear submarines over a larger fleet of conventional submarines for the purposes of maritime security.

Role of Domestic Politics in Brazil's Defense Policy

There was considerable consensus among the Brazilian participants regarding the limitations of their defense capabilities and the lack of interest from the political elite and the public in defense issues. Despite potential increases in their defense budget, the Brazilians believed their capabilities were still quite weak due to the large amount of the budget consumed by salaries and pensions (approximately 75%). Participants believed that this deficiency undermined their credibility in the international security arena because their strong diplomacy was not matched by a strong defense. They made it clear that they believed that the human capital available in the armed forces was quite good, but that defense materiel had been neglected for too long.

The Brazilians also observed that it was rare to have defense and security discussions within Brazil, both amongst the general public and within the academic and policymaking community. They noted that their community of defense and security experts was still in a nascent stage, and that the relevant institutions in Brazil and South America were far from robust.

Brazilian participants spent some time educating their U.S. counterparts on how to distinguish concrete Brazilian state policies from political rhetoric. It was their view that nothing in Brazil was 'real' unless their Congress had passed it as a law. They noted that the recent Defense White Book and national defense strategy or *END* of 2008, while important first steps, were basically executive branch proclamations that lacked the backing of budgets and personnel that could only be provided by the Congress. They also stressed that treaty obligations could only be approved if both houses of Congress concurred, which they considered to be a high bar. Nevertheless, they pointed out that due to a lack of interest among politicians, many security and defense issues were handled and approved by a council of leaders in Congress rather than by the two chambers as a whole. This council of leaders had to weigh the political costs of various mechanisms for security approval of defense and security legislation, making the process highly time consuming, complex and unpredictable.

Conclusion

Brazilian and U.S. participants both agreed on the need to foster an emerging community of interest on security issues that involved both countries. The Brazilians also pointed to areas for further concrete exchanges, particularly on nuclear safety and disaster response. They believed that on the diplomatic front, there was a benefit from examining the Brazilian approach to international diplomacy.

All the participants stressed that, as a next step, there should be further dialogue on specific issues related to international security. The overall tone of the workshop discussion was very positive, open, and frank. Both U.S. and Brazilian participants stressed how much they had learned from the two days of talks. They also noted that such events were important to furthering mutual understanding and help fill a gap in structured dialogues between U.S. and Brazilian experts on security issues.