

## **Brazilian Perspectives on the Changing Global Order and Security Challenges**

**Alcides Costa Vaz**

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### **Abstract**

This study analyses the current picture and prospects for EU-Brazil relations in the political and security arenas. As actors experiencing relevant changes, albeit in different directions in their respective international status quo, the EU and Brazil have found some common ground for convergence at the macro level on some structural issues, such as the normative framework of a changing global order, the striving for a multipolar world and the relevance and desirability of multilateralism. At the same time, it is argued that they differ significantly as to the strategies pursued in the attainment of those shared interests, resulting in competing, or eventually divergent, policy preferences when addressing specific issues and developments at the international level, limiting the prospects for a deep mutual commitment and engagement in political and security dynamics at the global level.



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# Brazilian Perspectives on the Changing Global Order and Security Challenges

Alcides Costa Vaz\*

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## 1. A changing global order and the respective places of Brazil and the EU

The EU and Brazil are key international players whose respective international status quo has been changing in the course of the past decades, though in opposite directions. Europe – and Western Europe in particular – was for some centuries a core region and a leading actor in world politics, but since the rise of the US as a global hegemon, it has been continually challenged by economic, geostrategic and demographic developments, particularly after the cold war. The advent of the EU raised expectations regarding Europe's reassertion as a forefront global actor. With the end of the cold war, however, the US emerged as the sole and undisputed superpower and the only country able to project its interests and its power globally. At the same time, the major axis of the global economy shifted from the northern Atlantic to the Pacific with the rise of the Japanese and Southeast Asian economies in the late 1980s, followed by China and India in the last two decades. Finally, new emergent powers and economies have also been trying to find their way up in the international scenario.

Even so, the EU still occupies a very prominent position in global politics and in the world economy: it is the most important and closest ally of the US, a very influential actor in major multilateral institutions, and it accounts for 20% of global GDP and 37% of the world's total exports.<sup>1</sup> Yet its relative power and international influence have been largely perceived as stagnant or even declining amid the rise of new political and economic actors. These political and economic shifts encompass a process of power redistribution in which, according to Zaborowski (2006), the EU is becoming "a smaller part of a larger world". What matters for the sake of the present analysis in this regard is that the EU's changing international role and relative position bring about an impending need for it to face the simultaneous challenge of reasserting its own profile – currently in highly adverse circumstances – while reassessing the scope and the reach of its relations with the US and with other major, emerging global actors, Brazil among them.

Brazil, on the other hand, has experienced a process of international emergence that was especially noticeable in the past decade and underscored in its successful initiatives in i) addressing domestic challenges in social and economic development, ii) projecting its influence in its neighbourhood and iii) fostering some changes in major mechanisms of global governance. Unlike the EU, Brazil's share of world GDP is very small and its total exports comprise only 1.1% of world exports, but it has become the seventh largest world economy and a privileged destination for flows of foreign direct investment. It holds the largest and most diversified industrial base in Latin America and one of the world's greatest

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<sup>1</sup> See International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook*, IMF, Washington, D.C., October 2012; see also World Trade Organization (WTO), "Trade growth to slow in 2012 after strong deceleration in 2011", Press/658, WTO, Geneva, 12 April 2012.

endowments of biodiversity, natural and energy resources. In addition, it has played an increasingly active role in helping to shape the multilateral debate and decisions on important global issues.

Both actors, therefore, and from different perspectives and trajectories, have faced the common challenge of (re)framing their international strategies in the midst of new realities while dealing with the political demands and opportunity costs that their changing relative positions in the international system imply. This lays the ground for political convergence on some structural issues, such as the normative framework of a changing global order, the desired pattern of power distribution, the relevance of multilateralism, the reform of leading international institutions of global governance and the priority issues on the global agenda.

At the same time, they have differed significantly in their responses to immediate international developments and in how to advance in the short to mid-term in the attainment of shared interests and goals. These differences, it is argued here, reflect structural and immediate conditionalities that their different international trajectory imposes upon each of them, resulting in competing, or eventually divergent, preferences when addressing specific policy issues and developments at the international level.

Brazil approaches the contemporary global order from a pragmatic and realist-based view that emphasises its asymmetric character, its inherently unstable nature and the uncertainties associated with a growing number of sources of insecurity. The latter range from power concentration, a revival of geopolitical and strategic competition over territories and natural resources to the global diffusion of transnational organised crime and the challenges to energy, food, the environment, health and cyber security. Such a perspective leads Brazil's foreign and security policies to embrace a reformist bias concerning its own relative position in the international order and the major mechanisms of political, economic and security governance at the global level. It expresses a clear preference for multipolarity as a desired power structure and for multilateralism as its corollary, a preference that is underscored in four basic assumptions:

- i) multipolarity and multilateralism best express the complex and diffuse pattern of power realities across various issue areas in a highly interdependent world;
- ii) they provide a more favourable context to negotiate and accommodate tensions derived from power disputes, differing and often competing perspectives, and policy responses to the major global challenges in the political, economic and strategic realms;
- iii) they are more likely and suited to promoting and preserving stability at the global and regional levels; and
- iv) they provide a more favourable political context for countries willing to enhance their own international profile.

It is from this essentially normative background that Brazil's approaches to the changing global order and to its own international participation and aspirations as a rising global actor must be assessed.

## **2. Threat perceptions and broad security posture in an uncertain context**

Brazilian views on international security acknowledge the unstable character of the post-cold war order and the diversified and complex array of potential threats, from those associated with international organised crime, terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction to ethnic and religious conflicts, climate change, global pandemics and cyber crimes, among others. It is clear that Brazilian security concerns are quite encompassing and convergent on threat perceptions in the EU and the US, even though Brazil differs from both as to the

assessment of the priority to be assigned to specific issues. As to defence, Brazil's primary concerns are concentrated on more conventional issues of territoriality (continental and maritime) and the protection of resources. Even though it has no enemies and is not confronted by formal claims by its neighbours or any third country over its territory, it identifies in the international context an increasing potential for conflicts over territory and resources.<sup>2</sup> While it also acknowledges that a generalised conflict among states is not expected in the near future, Brazil's defence policy states that the dispute over maritime spaces, aerospace dominance and scarce sources of water, food and energy might lead to interference in domestic affairs, to disputes and eventually conflicts in areas not subject to the sovereign rule of any state.<sup>3</sup> It also expresses a concern about borders as objects of international disputes, as the last continental spaces available are being occupied.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on these aspects display a relevant difference in relation to the approaches of the US and the EU, whose chief concerns regarding food and energy security in particular are related to the proper and safe provision of and access to (re)sources they must necessarily seek abroad. Being a major food exporter and holding vast reserves of energy sources (gas and oil in particular), fresh water and biodiversity, Brazil is sensitive to eventual disputes over these resources, even if its own assets are not immediately at stake. This helps explain the orientation of its strategic defence policy to prepare Brazilian armed forces to be able to successfully dissuade and eventually react by coercive means to any eventual attempt perpetrated by a foreign actor with the aim at acquiring or controlling any part of Brazilian territory, its resources or its population. Therefore, Brazilian armed forces are not structured or positioned taking into account any specific enemy; on the contrary, they are expected to be able to be present, in due time and with sufficient power resources, in any part of its territory to dissuade and to respond to any sort of aggression to its integrity.

The primary concern with its territory and the protection of resources is a core element in understanding Brazilian sensitivity and its cautious approach to another key contemporary and contentious security issue: international intervention. Throughout the post-cold war period, Brazil's foreign policy and defence establishments have been coming up against the need to reconcile their traditional nationalist and sovereign-biased approaches to international affairs and to development, on the one hand, with the impending need to address global issues from a cosmopolitan perspective, on the other. For quite a long time, the Brazilian military, especially those from the Army, have been voicing their worries about the prospect of international intervention in the Amazon – dismissed as unreal by many segments of Brazilian society and others abroad. Meanwhile, Brazilian diplomacy has faced the task of aligning Brazil with the evolving multilateral debate on human security, the responsibility to protect (R2P) and humanitarian intervention. Brazil ultimately endorsed the principle of R2P based on the clearly stated objectives of protecting populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, but continued to voice its preference for preventive measures and mediation as well as its concerns about insufficient awareness and assessment within the United Nations and the international community at large of the dangers associated with the use of force during and after military interventions. The underlying element of such a position is the fear that R2P might be instrumental in legitimising military interventions carried out for the pursuit of vested political, economic or strategic interests other than those strictly related to humanitarian concerns. President Dilma Rousseff, in her speech at the opening of the UN General Assembly in September 2011, addressed these concerns and launched the concept of

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Defense, National Defense Policy, Section 3.1, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem* ([www.defesa.gov.br/arquivos/2012/mes07/pnd.pdf](http://www.defesa.gov.br/arquivos/2012/mes07/pnd.pdf)).

“Responsibility while Protecting”, which would be further developed in a concept paper that Brazil asked the UN Secretary-General to circulate among member states with the aim of fostering a wide debate on the implementation of international interventions under the aegis of the UN. Basically, this new conceptual framework intends to prevent missions mandated by the Security Council to protect civilians from causing more harm than those they are supposed to prevent. It also intends to lay the grounds for a responsible and accountable resort to military force under the aegis of R2P based on some fundamental principles and procedures, like the prominence of preventive policies over military action, the exhaustion of all peaceful means available to protect civilians under the threat of violence, the judicious, proportionate and limited use of force in strict accordance with the mandates granted by the Security Council and enhanced procedures to monitor and assess the interpretation and the implementation of the Security Council’s resolutions.<sup>5</sup>

The Brazilian proposal was articulated in consultation with the other BRICS<sup>6</sup> and was, to a large extent, a response to the implementation by NATO of UNSC Resolution 1973 of March 2011 authorising the use of force in Libya. There were different reactions to the proposal by the members of the UN and within the Security Council in particular. Among those who share apprehensions about the fragilities of the Security Council in overseeing military operations mandated under the aegis of R2P, the proposal was a welcome and opportune development; some European and US officials, on the other hand, took a more cautious position, as they regarded it as an effort to impose constraints on the Security Council in the use of military force.<sup>7</sup> These alternative assessments somewhat illustrate the different approaches of Brazil and EU members in the Security Council regarding humanitarian intervention and the roles of the Security Council. Brazil, along with the other BRICS, has emphasised the need to strengthen preventive diplomacy and the Security Council itself as a crisis management mechanism by subjecting the implementation of resolutions authorising the use of force to stronger and more effective controls – a proposition that provokes resistance by Western powers, including many EU members, as mentioned above.

Nevertheless, the EU’s rejection of the use of force in handling the crisis in Syria in the aftermath of the operation in Libya has allowed convergence with Brazil in that regard. But differences re-emerged when the EU, along with the US, decided to resort to economic sanctions to force the Syrian government to start conversations with the opposition to find the terms for a political transition without rejecting an eventual resort to force. Brazil and its IBSA<sup>8</sup> partners, in turn, have favoured mediation and not sanctions as a primary step and seem unwilling to support the use of force. As important as these differences might be, the EU and Brazil are poised, at least circumstantially, to exploit their still narrow path of convergence on humanitarian intervention, and the debate on “Responsibility while Protecting” provides a starting point.

Still, it is important to highlight that such a possibility might be severely constrained, from a Brazilian perspective, by the outcome of the ongoing debate among European countries on NATO’s overstretch. Even though Brazil and the EU share basic premises and the diagnosis as to the uncertainty and instability of the global order and the importance of multipolarity and multilateralism in addressing them, NATO’s actions on behalf of the Security Council

<sup>5</sup> Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, “Responsibility to Protect”, Statement at the United Nations, 21 February 2012.

<sup>6</sup> BRICS refers to Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Gowan, *The Security Council Credibility Problem*, Perspective/FES New York, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, New York, NY, December 2011, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> IBSA refers to India, Brazil and South Africa.

beyond the borders of its member countries does hold great potential to trigger political divergences with Brazil and its BRICS partners. The Treaty of Lisbon reaffirms the central relevance of NATO for transatlantic relations and for Europe's security and the need to reform it, but the fate of the alliance is still an open question, which is subject to the assessment of critical threats in the long-term, its functionality in addressing them, and ultimately, the prospects for US-Russia relations in particular. The influence of emerging powers in this regard is very limited. Yet, as they are likely to become increasingly important partners of the EU in countering impending transnational threats, there will be a possibility of the EU considering some restraints on an interventionist NATO for the sake of forging a broader and more favourable political context for security cooperation, for reform of the global security framework and for greater global stability.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, there are issues on which the relative political weight of the emerging powers is not to be neglected: the reform of global governance mechanisms, the changing circumstances of the US as a global hegemon, the rise of China and other issues of mutual concern, such as the environment, energy, health, food and cyber security. It is of utmost relevance that the EU finds the political grounds to work together with the emerging powers, and with Brazil in particular, on these issues if an effective, multilateral global order is to be envisaged. In this sense, a crucial question is the extent to which both the EU and Brazil are really willing to make mutual concessions with respect to highly valued but not necessarily shared political perspectives on global politics and security for the sake of fostering a truly multipolar but concerted world order.

### **3. The approach to mini-lateral settings (G-20, IBSA and BRICS) and global governance**

As seen in the previous sections, the perception of ongoing changes as to international power distribution and the pursuit of a more pragmatic and universalistic approach to its partnerships has led Brazil to distance itself from the formal, traditional approach to foreign policy anchored on the northern Atlantic axis (US and Western Europe) and to diversify its political and economic ties to other countries and regions. Thus, South America and Africa along with China, India and Russia to a lesser extent, have become the key targets for political dialogue, trade partnerships and the promotion of South-South cooperation.

Aside from growing bilateral relations with those countries and regions, Brazil has actively promoted and resorted to mini-lateral coalitions as a core dimension of its international strategy. Historically, Brazilian interest in international coalitions had been directly linked to the importance assigned to the strengthening of multilateral institutions as a means to reduce power asymmetries and to channel the demands and concerns of the developing world in both political and economic instances, such as the G-77 in the UN General Assembly, or even the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs.

At present, however, a whole new generation of international coalitions – the WTO G-20, the BRICS and IBSA – has gradually emerged, introducing new important referents in the multilateral debate on governance issues as well as the international strategies of individual countries in both the developed and the developing world. As novel elements in the context of contemporary world politics, they have served as privileged frameworks for articulating the interests of a small, but heterogeneous group of rising powers and are themselves expressions of a rapidly changing world order.

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<sup>9</sup> Klaus Neumann, "Security Perspectives for Europe", in "VII Conference of Forte Copacabana, A European-South American Dialogue", Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Rio de Janeiro, 2011, p. 17.

IBSA, BRICS and the G-20 have also become important fora through which to advance Brazilian interests at the global level and have helped enhance its profile as a global actor in unprecedented ways, as they have allowed Brazil to foster initiatives in such issue areas as multilateral trade negotiations, incremental South-South relations, development assistance, global economic governance and the reform of international regimes and political institutions.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, as controversial and sensitive as it might be, they have provided Brazil more room to manoeuvre at the global level independently of its neighbours without necessarily hampering its own regional interests and initiatives. Finally, they have proved to be useful for Brazil to voice its interests and concerns in improving its own international standing, along with the other emerging powers, and in fostering multipolarity.

It is therefore important to highlight how these international coalitions also respond to various issues and possibilities connected with Brazil's international interests. The WTO G-20 has been important for effectively bringing the development agenda to the core of multilateral trade negotiations. It has also been successful in shifting the balance of power in trade negotiations on a very sensitive issue, but its importance has quickly waned, like the Doha round itself.

IBSA, in turn, has become a forum for focusing on South-South political dialogue regarding global issues, namely the reform of the UN, the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals and development assistance, along with security, fighting poverty and social policies among others. Largely perceived with some degree of scepticism as to its long-term viability, IBSA has managed not only to subsist but also to exploit niches of opportunities to consolidate itself as a channel for South-South cooperation. Despite its diffuse agenda and the lack of effective content in many of the areas it has embraced, IBSA has proved to be an initiative that can provide political leverage at relatively low costs at the multilateral level (including in the Security Council, as seen in the previous section). Its relevance and effectiveness cannot be assessed in relation to either the existence of a formal trilateral agenda that grants it a programmatic sense or through the ability of the three countries in pursuing and carrying out common strategies in response to the most pending issues of the global agenda. Rather, the relevance of IBSA and its international credibility derives from the ability of the three countries to capitalise on opportunities for working together (including piecemeal ones) and translate these into outcomes. In this regard, one cannot easily escape the idea that IBSA – and the BRICS as well – is still valued differently to a great extent by each of its three members. Yet notably, India, Brazil and South Africa seem willing to sustain IBSA, even after South Africa joined the BRICS. IBSA shall remain a useful initiative for Brazil's quest for a more assertive international profile and enhanced standing on the global stage. It is functional for Brazil in conveying a sense of compromise with the ideals, concerns and objectives of the so-called 'Global South' in the realm of international cooperation, and IBSA represents an alternative path, especially when working together or converging with China and Russia within the BRICS is not feasible.

The BRICS, in turn, has emerged for Brazil as a forum from which it might eventually accede to the status of a recognised international actor in the framework of a selected grouping that might respond to global governance challenges in various issue areas, from the Security Council to the G-20. While IBSA and the WTO G-20 touch upon issues related to economic development and South-South cooperation, the BRICS offers the possibility of bringing the country closer to hard-core issues of international politics either multilaterally, where it may find its proper context, or eventually through other mechanisms and more flexible arrangements.

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<sup>10</sup> Maria Regina Soares de Lima and Monica Hirst, "Brazil as an intermediate state and a regional power: Action, choice and responsibilities", *International Affairs*, 82(1): 28, 2006.



This possibility is not automatic, however, as it depends to a great extent on the willingness of China, Russia and India to work together on such issues as international security, climate change and international finance, among others. Still, despite the scepticism of many politicians and experts as to the ability of the BRICS to do so, it has made advances in some important realms. It acted decisively in favour of the consolidation of the G-20 as the main forum for the political debate on economic and financial issues, thus replacing the G-8 and its expanded version (G-13), and in restructuring the decision-making criteria of the International Monetary Fund. It supported Brazil in framing its concept of “Responsibility while Protecting” and its partners worked together in the Security Council during the Libya crisis. More recently, it decided to move towards the creation of its own development bank. The BRICS is certainly, nowadays, much more than an acronym or an incidental source of influence in some multilateral fora. It is gradually becoming an important referent in world politics. At this point, it is not yet clear that it will play a relevant role in negotiations on politically divisive issues like international security, reform of the UN Security Council and climate change, on which there are competing interests and discrepant positions among its members. Even so, the achievements in forging new structures for economic and financial global governance are of utmost importance for Brazil given their immediate political implications and the greater influence they allow Brazil to have in shaping international norms, institutions and decision-making.

As to the G-20, as mentioned above, it has been the most influential initiative that Brazil has helped to forge and spur, as it has emerged as the single most relevant sign of change in the pattern of the highly concentrated decision-making power on economic issues that has prevailed since the Breton Woods institutions were set forth. So far, the G-20 is the only instance of governance that has succeeded in challenging the prominence of the G-8 and in asserting the greater political importance of emerging powers in the current landscape of the international political economy. As the epicentre of the ongoing economic crisis is now located in Europe, the G-20 has temporarily been pushed aside by the European institutions and governments in its management. Nevertheless, most of the issues that triggered the economic crisis in 2008 – exposing severe and concrete weaknesses and failures of economic governance mechanisms – have not been adequately addressed if judged from the necessity of forging new instruments and parameters to correct and prevent private economic institutions and governments from engaging in the behaviours and policies that jeopardise the world economy at large. Therefore, we should expect the G-20 to re-emerge as a major referent in the debate and promotion of global economic governance.

The principal liability regarding the functionality of these groupings is that they all rely heavily on the incentives and the political willingness of individual countries to privilege them in their respective economic and foreign policy strategies. Even though the signs have been positive in this regard so far, it is important to bear in mind that neither IBSA nor the BRICS or the G-20 are bound for a natural process of consolidation. On the contrary, all of them are still subject to political setbacks whenever the incentives for one of its actors to play alone are stronger than the benefits and the costs of collective action. Apart from IBSA, where Brazil may be able to persuade its two other partners to keep investing political capital in its development and consolidation, the other groupings – the BRICS in particular – are largely dependent on the uncertain and unpredictable political reasoning of individual actors that, like Brazil itself, are driven by a strong sense and value of independence in their international behaviour. If, on the one hand, coalitions like IBSA and the BRICS derive their political appeal from the individual attributes of their members and from the potential transformations they may induce in the international system by working together, on the other, they are highly vulnerable to the uncertainties about each country’s commitment to

collective action when competing national interests or differently valued outcomes come to be at stake among them.

So far, there seems to be no strong incentives for Brazil to deviate from its reliance on these groupings, limited though they are, as to date it has benefited from the possibilities they have brought about for it to manage different agendas in various settings, taking advantage of the flexibility they provide.

#### 4. Concluding remarks: Prospects and scope for cooperation with the EU

In a context marked by the diversification of options for Brazil to enhance its international participation and by the quest for greater independence in the realm of its foreign and security policies, more immediate efforts intended to reverse perceptions of the declining importance of Europe as a political and economic partner for Brazil are crucial for the sake of defining the prospects of bilateral relationships in the mid-term. There are actual incentives for Brazil to take advantage of the difficulties that the US and EU face with regard to their relative international positions to favour its own political ambitions as a global actor. Although there is not any unavoidable conflict between these ambitions and the deepening of its relations with the EU in particular, a decisive political investment in strengthening bilateral relations is still required. The framework of the bilateral partnership is a favourable one, even though it still lacks genuine impulse<sup>11</sup> and provided that it opens the way for concrete advancements in the contending areas and issues at the multilateral level, namely in the UN and in other major institutions such as the G-20 and the WTO; otherwise, it will certainly be subject to progressive deterioration and loss of political appeal. In the near future, there might be more similarities and possibly more convergence of Brazil and Europe on global issues and governance mechanisms, but such convergence will not be a spontaneous outcome of shared interests and priorities. On the contrary, Brazilian concerns with the protection of territory and resources, the EU's with the necessity of reassuring its relevance to the US, its reliance on NATO in countering its most immediate threats to its own security, as well as the reconciliation of the sustainability of food, energy and environmental security are all sources of discrepancies between the EU and Brazil. The willingness to advance the political dialogue on these issues is a determinant of the scope and fate of the bilateral partnership.

Even so, opportunities in some issue areas can also be envisaged, as Brazil's regional actions in the security realm raise prospects for cooperation with the EU, particularly in relation to countering the traffic of illegal drugs and the prevention of terrorism. The intensification of triangular cooperation in development assistance also emerges as a promising area for further progress as, due to the economic crisis, the major donor countries are trying to maximise the ever more limited resources they may continue to provide in development assistance.

On the other hand, regional integration in the scope of UNASUR and Mercosur may provide limited opportunities for EU engagement with Brazil. The reasons for this are that Brazil's commitment to regional integration mechanisms is constrained by sovereignty considerations, by the actual political and economic conditions in the neighbourhood and by the stronger presence of extra-regional players, namely China. Moreover, Brazil has decoupled its regional and global strategies, as pointed out in a previous section. Finally, the

<sup>11</sup> Susanne Gratius, "La Unión Europea y Brasil: entre el birregionalismo y el bilateralismo", in Estevão C. de Rezende Martins and Miriam Gomes Saraiva (eds), *Brasil-União Europeia-América do Sul: Anos 2010-2020*, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Rio de Janeiro, 2009, pp. 42-43.

economic crisis and the uncertainties of European integration and Mercosur make the inter-regional strategy unattractive in more immediate terms.

Therefore, given the limitations of inter-regionalism to provide a broader framework for bilateral relations, the prospects for forging an enduring and encompassing partnership will rely increasingly on the possibility of working together on the global agenda. In this regard, a more open and flexible perspective will be required from the EU to exploit opportunities for addressing the contending issues – particularly those referring to climate change, food, energy and environmental security – on which a Brazilian nationalist bias is expected to endure, though increasingly tempered by evolving cosmopolitan tendencies.

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