Brazil

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the end of the Cold War, Brazil has emerged as a regional leader that has at times actively defended democracy and human rights. However, Brazil's support for these values has not been consistent, particularly over the past two years. Brazil generally has not spoken out against violations of human rights and civil liberties, nor does it attach political conditions to its foreign assistance. Venezuela is a prime example of Brazil remaining silent in face of systematic human rights abuses. Although Brazil supported suspending Paraguay from regional bodies in 2012 in response to the president's questionable impeachment, this controversially enabled Venezuela's unlawful inclusion in Mercosur, a move opposed by Paraguay.

Outside of the region, Brazil has regularly condemned democratic ruptures, though regime type does not determine its relations with other nations.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Brazil has quietly become a cautious supporter of democracy and human rights. Brazil's low-key approach has been criticized at home and abroad. Yet when compared to other rising democracies, Brazil has taken some principled stances, dissuading unsatisfied generals from staging coups and taking punitive action against illegitimate governments. Brazil also has condemned the disruption of democratic processes, although it has refrained from making regime type into a key determinant of its relations with other nations or consistently criticized authoritarian governments.

While Brazil's policy has been relatively clear regarding attempted coups in the region, it generally has not taken a forceful stance on violations of human rights and civil liberties. In early 2014, when the Venezuelan government cracked down severely on protesters, Brazil's foreign minister insisted that it was not Brazil's role to send a message to Venezuela's president, Nicolás Maduro. In the same vein, its aid projects are generally free from human rights or political conditions.

Outside of its own region, Brazil's stance has often been ambiguous, as in the cases of the civil war in Syria and Russia's unlawful annexation of Crimea. Brazil has taken the position that external pressure is rarely constructive. Therefore, it is reluctant to openly name and shame international miscreants and strongly opposes military interventions to address humanitarian crises.
The most frequent outside criticism of Brazil's foreign policy is that it betrays a leftist bias. While President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva did express personal sympathy for left-wing leaders such as Cuba’s Fidel Castro and Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez, ideology alone does not explain Brazil's stance, as foreign policy changed relatively little when President Lula took office in 2002. Brazil’s close ties with Venezuela during the past decade and its reluctance to criticize human rights abuses there derive more from economic interests than ideology. Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff disliked former president Chavez’s abrasive style and is said to be highly critical of current president Maduro’s economic management.

Brazil’s increased international influence brings with it a responsibility to more assertively stand up for democracy and human rights. Brazil’s rise also means that, like other major powers, it has broader economic and strategic objectives that sometimes conflict with defending human rights and democracy.

**Foreign Policy Objectives**

Brazil’s foreign policy goals have become more sophisticated and ambitious since it successfully dealt with its most urgent internal challenges: inflation, economic instability, and high poverty rates. From the time of Fernando Henrique Cardoso's presidency (1995–2002), Brazil has assumed regional leadership, taking the initiative in the creation of a network of regional rules and commitments that have strengthened cooperation among South American countries. Brazil has realized that the political unrest from neighboring countries that cannot provide basic levels of public order is likely to affect many of its own core interests. Protecting democratic norms and stability in the region has thus become an important foreign policy goal.

Although South America remains Brazil’s priority, a second important objective is the transformation of international institutions by increasing the influence of emerging powers. It is in this context that Brazil frames its global engagement, calling for a stronger G20, reformed Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank and International Monetary Fund), and a permanent seat for itself on the UN Security Council.

Over the past two years, Brazil has placed increasing importance on the BRICS grouping (consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) at the expense of the IBSA grouping, which is made up of democratic India, Brazil, and South Africa. Created as an investment category by Goldman Sachs in 2001, the BRICS gained a political dimension in 2006 when their foreign ministers (initially without South Africa) gathered for the first time. However, the grouping remains relatively informal and the countries do not coordinate their foreign policy positions in any systematic way. IBSA is an informal grouping created in 2003 that has led to a series of working groups and several presidential summits. Brazil has favored the BRICS mainly because China, Brazil’s largest trade partner, has become too important—both economically and strategically—for Brazil to focus on a group that excludes it.

**Development Assistance and Trade**

Brazil’s aid program was only recently established, and its ideas about foreign assistance are still evolving. Brazil’s transformation into a donor country occurred against the backdrop of two important trends. First, its newfound economic strength and political stability have given it significant global ambitions, a position reflected in its membership in the BRICS grouping and its growing economic and diplomatic presence around the world. Second, Brazil is undergoing a profound domestic transition, symbolized by decreasing levels of inequality and poverty and the emergence of a new middle class. These development trends have led to a series of new ideas about poverty reduction that shape the way Brazilian policy makers think about Brazil’s role in international development.

One of the flagship projects Brazil cites frequently is the IBSA Facility Fund for Alleviation of Poverty and Hunger, which was created in 2004 and became operational in 2006. Financed and coordinated by the IBSA governments, the fund finances projects submitted by governments of developing countries. The primary goals are capacity building among project beneficiaries, built-in project sustainability, and knowledge sharing among experts and institutions from the Global South. The fund is small, with each country contributing only $1 million. In 2012, the fund earned the UN South-South and Triangular Cooperation Champions Award for its innovative approach. Nevertheless, IBSA’s contribution to democracy support in recipient countries could not be described as meaningful.

The Brazilian government reported that $400 million in aid was disbursed in 2010, although this number is difficult to verify given the lack of transparency.
regarding what counts as aid in Brazil's budget.\(^5\) Brazilian aid—both development and humanitarian—is still not well institutionalized. Yet, it is clear that Brazil does not seek to emulate the traditional practice of attaching human rights conditions to foreign assistance. This reflects skepticism that outside intervention can meaningfully affect domestic policy. As a result, Cuba is an important recipient of Brazilian aid and investment projects with no political conditions attached.\(^6\) In the same way, the new BRICS development bank, set to become operational in 2016, is highly unlikely to lend money based on human rights or democracy conditions.

Nor has Brazil imposed bilateral economic sanctions on any country during the two-year period covered by this report. It only reluctantly agrees to UN-imposed sanctions on countries such as Iran and North Korea. Brazil mostly applies targeted sanctions, such as restrictions on banks involved in human or drug trafficking or visa denials for individuals suspected of terrorism. As a rule, the broader the sanction, the more skeptical Brazil is likely to be.

Ultimately, Brazil's stance regarding most sanctions is based on the perception that economic sanctions only rarely change a country's policies and disproportionately affect the poor.\(^7\) This position was best displayed during U.S. efforts to tighten UN sanctions against Iran. During Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's meetings in Brazil in March 2010, President Lula said that it was "not prudent to push Iran against the wall," and Foreign Minister Celso Amorim said that sanctions could be "counterproductive."\(^8\) In fact, Brazilian policy makers may see sanctions as a prelude to undesirable military intervention. Key decision-makers in Brazil have said that the 2003 intervention in Iraq was the result of a Security Council vote on the basis of inconclusive evidence, undermining the principle of collective security.\(^8\)

The U.S. economic embargo on Cuba, which has failed to affect human rights policies, is largely seen by Brazilian policy makers as a Cold War anachronism and a result of internal U.S. politics, rather than a well-thought-out pro-human rights policy.

Reflecting Brazil's position on sanctions, the BRICS foreign ministers issued a joint statement in March 2014 expressing their opposition to Australian foreign minister Julie Bishop's threat to bar Russian president Vladimir Putin from participating at the G20 Summit in Australia as punishment for Russia's annexation of Crimea. "The custodianship of the G20 belongs to all member-states equally and no one member-state can unilaterally determine its nature and character," the BRICS statement said.\(^9\)

As in other instances, Brazil's unwillingness to criticize Russia had less to do with its opinion on Russia's annexation of Crimea—privately, Brazilian diplomats disapproved of Russia's move—than Brazil's concern about Western attempts to turn Russia into an international pariah. Brazil was also disturbed by what it saw as the West's tacit support for attempted coups against democratically elected governments, including in Venezuela in 2002, in Egypt in 2013, and in Ukraine in 2014. The final document of the BRICS meeting also stated that "the escalation of hostile language, sanctions and counter-sanctions, and force does not contribute to a sustainable and peaceful solution, according to international law, including the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter."\(^10\)

China became Brazil's largest trade partner in 2009, symbolizing a greater shift of Brazilian interests toward Asia. China's share of overall trade with Brazil is likely to continue to grow, and a consensus in Brazil believes that Chinese demand for its products saved the country from recession during the global financial crisis that began in 2008. Brazil does not make any attempts to influence China's internal affairs, and in 2011 President Rousseff chose not to meet the Dalai Lama personally after the Chinese government had openly criticized Mexico's president for doing so.

**Elections**

Brazil is generally reluctant to comment on the quality of other countries' elections; its primary concern is political stability. Under President Cardoso, Brazil occasionally reacted to situations in which governments blatantly falsified results, such as in 2000, when Brazil's president boycotted President Alberto Fujimori's inaugural ceremony after the latter had allegedly rigged the outcome of the election in Peru.\(^11\) Yet in most notable regional cases of flawed elections—such as in Venezuela, where the 2013 presidential election was free from fraud but media control heavily tilted the election toward the ruling party—Brazil has been largely silent.

Over the past few years Brazilians have participated in several electoral monitoring missions, such as in Haiti and Guinea-Bissau, though less so in South America.\(^12\) Brazil's proactive role in Guinea-Bissau, which is a fellow member of the Community of Portuguese Language Speaking Countries, was notable. Brazil made democracy and human rights promotion...
a key component of its cooperation with that country, working both in support of the 2014 elections as well as to strengthen democratic institutions, such as through the donation of voting machines. However, it would be an exaggeration to say that this example symbolizes a larger pattern of Brazilian democracy promotion outside of its region.

Disruptions of Democratic Processes

In recent years, Brazil has regularly condemned disruptions of democratic process in Latin America. It pressured the Paraguayan military not to oust then-president Juan Carlos Wasmosy in 1996 and 1997, it contributed to reinstalling President Hugo Chavez after a coup in 2002, and it actively sought to isolate and pressure Honduras after a coup against President Manuel Zelaya in 2009. In the latter case, Brazil was originally one of the most critical voices, suspending aid and military projects and canceling a visa-waiver agreement signed previously. Partly thanks to Brazil's regional engagement and the introduction of institutional mechanisms to strengthen democracy—such as the democracy clauses applied by Mercosur and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR)—coupes and other democratic disruptions have become increasingly rare in South America.

The only recent such case took place in June 2012 in Paraguay, which is economically dependent on Brazil. Within a mere 36 hours, Paraguay's Senate moved to impeach President Fernando Lugo, whose election in 2008 ended decades of one-party rule and marked a peaceful transfer of power. While the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate can, in principle, impeach the president, this is supposed to occur only under specific circumstances, such as when a crime has been committed. In this case, Brazil took the position that the impeachment was unacceptable. However, rather than coming to a unilateral response—something it could easily have done given its dominant size—Brazil exerted pressure on Paraguay through regional bodies. While the United States swiftly recognized Paraguay's new government under Federico Franco, Brazil—together with its neighbors—decided to suspend Paraguay from both Mercosur (a customs union consisting of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay) and UNASUR until fresh elections were held. The speed of the decision to exclude Paraguay from Mercosur—a first in the organization's history—showed that Brazil can play an active leadership role when its values are aligned with its interests. Although it is possible to question whether a disruption of democratic process had indeed taken place in Paraguay, no vocal observers in Brazil argued that the country should simply stay out of Paraguay's affairs. This suggests that Brazilian society has accepted the notion that Brazil has a special responsibility in promoting and defending political stability and democracy in the region.

On the other hand, Paraguay's suspension was succeeded by a quick vote to accept Venezuela into Mercosur. Venezuela's inclusion had previously been blocked by Paraguay (though supported by all other members) for unclear reasons that were not strongly related to human rights; Paraguay's temporary suspension gave President Rousseff a window of opportunity to push through ratification of Venezuela's membership. This made Brazil appear opportunistic and unconcerned about violating Mercosur's rule of consensus for adding new members, thus weakening the grouping's institutional foundations. In addition, Paraguay rightly criticized Mercosur for not giving it an opportunity to clarify its position during the suspension debates.

Brazil has traditionally condemned democratic ruptures outside of the region as well, such as in the 2014 events in Thailand and the 2013 overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi in Egypt. In the case of political instability and violence in Guinea-Bissau, Brazil led an effort to bring the issue to the UN Security Council's attention in 2012. With strong Brazilian support, the Community of Portuguese Language Speaking Countries also issued a statement of condemnation and called for a UN-authorized military intervention.

Gross Human Rights Violations

Brazil seldom presses governments outside Latin America to honor their human rights obligations. Brazil regularly condemns and expresses concern about large-scale human rights violations in places like Syria, the Central African Republic, and Sudan and South Sudan. Yet while the Lula administration sought to play a more active role outside South America, President Rousseff has kept a lower profile, and only rarely has Brazil done more than issue an official condemnation.

Brazil's UN voting record on North Korea has been the subject of much domestic debate, since at several points Brazil has been one of the few countries that did not condemn the regime in Pyongyang for its human rights abuses. Similar to several examples
above, this choice was made because Brazil believes that universal condemnation will cut off all channels of communication at the expense of dialogue that could lead to liberalization. In accordance with this goal, Brazil has financed agricultural cooperation projects that brought North Korean scientists to Brazil in the hope that people-to-people exchanges can bring change to the country.

In April 2011, Brazil undermined the effectiveness of regional human rights bodies when President Rousseff cut all relations with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. This came in response to the court’s decision to request that the construction of the Belo Monte dam in the Brazilian Amazon be suspended, following an appeal from indigenous groups. Brazil has gradually returned to its previous engagement since then.

Civil Liberties
The 2013 political crisis in Venezuela served as a litmus test for Brazilian regional leadership in respect for civil liberties. Since the start of the crisis, more than 30 people have been killed and more than 1,500 detained, resulting in a paralyzing standoff between the government and the main Venezuelan opposition parties. Reporters have been arrested, beaten, and robbed, and opposition figures have been held on trumped-up charges. However, rather than making hard-hitting statements on the violations of both the government and the opposition, Brazil initially co-issued three bland communiqués through UNASUR, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, and Mercosur. The latter was particularly controversial, as it was interpreted as soft on the Maduro government and characterized protesters as antidemocratic forces. As a consequence, many influential voices strongly criticized Brazil’s reluctant stance on the deepening political crisis. Criticism has come from within Brazil as well; former president Cardoso wrote in early March that Brazil’s current government was acting with “incredible timidity” in the face of human rights abuses in Venezuela.

As the crisis progressed, Foreign Minister Luiz Alberto Figueiredo became a key actor in UNASUR’s attempt to restart a constructive dialogue between President Maduro and the opposition. In mid-April 2014, after the first UNASUR-facilitated meeting between the government and the opposition in Caracas, Figueiredo expressed optimism, stating that both sides seemed willing to talk. In early May, he attributed lower levels of violence in Venezuela to UNASUR’s efforts. Nevertheless, the situation has deteriorated since the beginning of the talks. Brazil’s unwillingness to exert more pressure on the Venezuelan government and the protesters to cease violent acts and respect human rights will hamper its ability to exert regional leadership going forward.

Regarding the long-term challenge of human rights violations in Cuba, like other Latin American countries Brazil has taken a notably noncritical stance. While Brazil’s foreign minister under President Cardoso insisted on meeting opposition figures during a visit to Cuba, this policy was not continued under presidents Lula and Rousseff, both of whom have been friendly with the Castro regime. From Brazil’s perspective, isolating and openly criticizing Cuba is unlikely to bring change to the island. At the same time, Brazil has no clear policy to apply pressure on the Cuban government to respect human rights and civil liberties. Given regional dynamics and the respect the Castro regime enjoys in Latin America, even diplomats who are critical of Cuba’s government are skeptical of Brazil’s capacity to make a difference. In this context, Brazil’s Cuba policy is mostly motivated by economic interests.

In the absence of U.S. companies in Cuba, Brazil has sought an economic foothold, as symbolized by Brazil’s significant investment in Cuba’s Mariel Special Development Zone. Regarding human rights abuses outside of its region, Brazil has usually taken a cautious—its critics would say passive—stance. In the cases of violence against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and ethnic violence in Myanmar, Brazil frequently voices its “concern” and “consternation,” yet this generally does not translate into an active policy of isolating governments. In addition, most statements criticize violence in general without blaming any side specifically.

Marginalized Communities
In 1966, Brazil hosted the first major UN seminar on apartheid, an event that fed into an initiative in the General Assembly to diplomatically isolate South Africa’s regime. Despite considerable challenges at home, Brazil has often spoken out against racism on an international level over the past decades, and has consistently voiced support for marginalized communities. In 2011, it cosponsored a resolution in the UN Human Rights Council on human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender
identity, a key achievement for upholding the principles of the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Brazil originally tabled the historic resolution on human rights and sexual orientation in 2003 at the UN Commission on Human Rights (now the Human Rights Council) in Geneva with the support of 19 other countries. It calls on all UN member states to promote and protect the human rights “of all persons regardless of their sexual orientation.”

This positive trend continued in 2012 when, during a vote in the UN General Assembly regarding extrajudicial killings, Brazil condemned the proposed amendment to remove reference to sexual orientation and gender identity. However, the country’s position was weakened when, despite civil society pressure on Rousseff to speak out against antigay laws in Uganda, Brazil did not issue any statement.

ENDNOTES
10. Ibid.
13. Ibid.


