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RESEARCH BRIEF 4/2019

Security Institute for Governance and Leadership in Africa

[SIGLA @ Stellenbosch](#)

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Series Editor: Professor F. Vreÿ (SIGLA)

Brazil and peacemaking operations in Africa

The twentieth century saw Brazil not only becoming a military dictatorship, but also emerging as the largest and most populous country in South America. This state of demagogic democracy endured until 1985, when the military regime peacefully ceded power to civilian rulers. Having successfully weathered a period of global financial difficulty in the late twentieth century, Brazil stepped forward as one of the world's strongest emerging markets and a contributor to global growth. With the awarding of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympic Games, the first ever to be held in South America, an ambitious government blessed with natural resources and new-found markets also became a democratic participant on valued multilateral fora such as the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) and the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) platforms. Many believed that Brazil was set to be one of the most successful countries of the twenty-first century. These and other actions were seen as symbolic of the country's rise; much of this occurring during the [period of benign socialism under the presidency of Inácio Lulu's Workers' Party \(PT\) from 2003-2010](#).

However, from about 2013 to 2018, [Brazil was subjected](#) to a flagging economic environment, joblessness, excessive inflation, exposures of corruption at high political level, and an impeachable action by an incumbent president, followed by a caretaker president with dubious credentials amid serious domestic dissent. In October 2018, Jair Bolsonaro won the presidency with 55 percent of the votes and assumed office on 1 January 2019. In his inaugural address, the new president vowed to rid Brazil of socialism, political correctness and doctrine that shielded dacoits. He made it clear that his government represents a definitive break from its leftist predecessors. An adherent of the United States of America's (US) president Trump and a retired military officer himself, Bolsonaro harks to the period of the Cold War in his proposed defence against communism. Indeed he espouses an own version of '[Make Brazil Great Again](#)', to the extent that he may limit Brazil's sovereignty [by being open to hosting a US military base](#); a position that would constitute a marked shift in foreign policy. Such a marked shift in foreign policy on sovereignty matters could hypothetically even see that Brazil may support UN Security Council sanctioned peacemaking incursions into African states should dire conditions exist. From his media utterances and speeches, it becomes clear his ideological position represents the [growing emergence of neo-nationalist world political leaders](#), an inchoate realist position.

Brazil's relations with [Africa](#) have been strong and growing with the Lusophone countries of Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, and Sao Tome and Principe. Angola in particular became a stepping-stone in Brazil's expansion into the South Atlantic off the West-African seaboard

as [Lusophone worlds are exploited](#). Under Bolsonaro, economic links with the continent may – on one hand - take a different turn, as he advances [agro-business expansion](#). South Africa and Namibia completes the Atlantic seaboard within the Brazilian focus. Indeed the [Brazil Africa Institute](#) recognises the urgent need for Brazil to regain recent lost ground, to reinvigorate and actualise the potential that Africa presents, not only as a market, but as a process that may enhance various aspects of human security development. This drive into Africa does not stand isolated from Brazil’s larger international objectives that includes [closer cooperation with Africa](#).

In line with a more assertive thrust, Brazil’s Bolsonaro-led government may become more active in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping on the African continent, should a deep policy shift become a reality, and [the military officers in his cabinet given more authority](#). To execute its foreign policy aims, Brazil executes a parallel set of actions. Firstly, it forms interstate coalition blocs that buttress coordination of political positions and concerns; and secondly, it conjoins greater commitment to UN peace missions, while simultaneously engaging in a range of bilateral and multilateral engagements with the developing world. Hence, the country’s [contribution to the UN’s peace missions](#) and its diplomatic, economic and environmental relations with the developing world in general and specifically Africa, play a key role in its international standing and posture; it therefore flows naturally that it is a crucial element in the planning and pursuit of its foreign policy. In reality, for Brazil the pinnacle objective has become the rapid consummation of its long-standing vision of a permanent, veto-endowed seat on a reformed United Nations (UN) Security Council.

When it comes to peace missions, Brazil strikes a different chord though with its assumptive implementation of the liberal peace model for UN peace missions. With respect to peace missions Brazil commits to the peaceful resolution of disputes and negotiation only; thus by logical extension, it – hitherto – does not support military interventionism. Chapter VII of the UN’s scope for or room for allowing robust operations as well, could be deemed potential intrusions onto the sphere of non-intervention. Brazil interprets sovereignty as sacrosanct, and the country commits to democracy and human rights. Further, it supports multilateral arrangements for peace missions and strives for a peacebuilding diplomatic niche role. In recent years, as it has moved from the regional to the international scenario, Brazil’s normative commitments have come under criticism. Since 2004 an emerging Brazil has had to confront the notion of responsibility-to-protect (R2P), attempt to reconcile it with its own internal history of over a million lost to armed violence over the past three and a half decades, and re-consider its international R2P obligations on an enlarged stage. Brazil has indeed suggested a compromise position, that it calls “Responsibility while Protecting”, or RWP.¹ This attempt at a common position has not always been received favourably by Brazil’s developed nation partners, including the United States and remains a mere Brazilian concept to augment R2P. Hence, Brazil continues to offer its strength at peacebuilding, such as in [Haiti where it took a leadership role](#) and views this as an example of what it could achieve in Africa.

In its quest for a seat at the high table of nations of an expanded United Nations Security Council, Brazil may do well to review its RWP position. Now is the time for Brazil and its professional military to pursue an R2P policy; one that may well be the right arrow in its quiver to assist in the achievement of this country’s internationalist aim. This R2P path may be a viable route to expand its role as a good global citizen and Africa could well become a building block, as well as beneficiary in this endeavour.

¹ See United Nations, “A/66/151–S/2011/701: Letter Dated 9 November 2011 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations Addressed to the Secretary-General”, UNDOC, November 2011. Available at: <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/POC%20S2011%20701.pdf>, accessed 20 February 2019.

Recommended further reading

Kenkel, K.M., 2013. Brazil's Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding Policies in Africa. *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 17(3-4), pp. 272-292.

Hirst, M., November 2009. "An overview of Brazilian foreign policy in the 21st century". *South African Institute of International Affairs' Policy Briefing 6*.

Serrano, M., 2011. Responsibility to Protect and Its Critics: Explaining the Consensus. *Global Responsibility to Protect*, Vol. 3 (2011), pp. 1-13.

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