Managing Uncertainties Abroad with Uncertainties at Home?

Economic decline and domestic politics on stormy waters are present circumstances that raise questions as to Brazilian commitments abroad, and even cast considerable doubts as to the country’s not so long ago praised status as a rising power on the global stage. Further, the conclusion of the impeachment process in August – leading to the removal of President Dilma Rousseff and to Vice-President Michel Temer taking over as Brazil’s head of state – did not come without challenging tasks on the foreign policy front. In his inaugural speech, Temer’s Foreign Minister José Serra, focusing prominently on the country’s struggling economy, reinforced a global strategy centered around trade and economic-related matters. While not explicitly mentioning UN PKOs, Serra suggested that Brazil’s international role should avoid engagements that generate scarce economic gains at the expense of international role should avoid engagements that generate scarce economic gains at the expense of international stability. Structural shortcomings contributing to developing knowledge, to balancing the strategic importance of a key political and military player on the global stage.

Nevertheless, sustained attention and disposition to contribute to UN PKOs in the future should remain part of Brazil’s foreign policy portfolio. Brazil takes a lot of pride in its contributions to the UN, and the organization has brought into effect many principles and values that guide the country’s international role. Similarly, Brazil’s proactive engagement with PKOs is crucial for a rich and more comprehensive debate on global security issues, contributing to developing knowledge, to balancing Western dominance and to finding solutions to international instabilities. Structural shortcomings and uncertainties at home may temporarily restrict Brazil from expanding its participation, but at the same time they should not prevent the country from contributing to current and future missions.

Moreover, Brazil’s continued engagement in UN PKOs is not only desirable from a foreign policy perspective, it is also expected by Brazilian constituencies, primarily the Army, but also by key international actors, especially the UN (mainly the Secretariat). Western countries and several developing countries, particularly those who already contribute with troops or police, Brazil has been able to overcome other domestic challenges before, such as in the economic and political economies of the 1990s, and it is much more qualified and mature to do it again in present times. While not necessarily leading to immediate economic and material gains, Brazil’s continued participation in UN PKOs remains desirable to showcase the country’s capacity and willingness to engage internationally. Continued Brazilian participation would not only be good news for Brazil’s strategic interests, but also for global governance and the future of peacekeeping operations.


Notes

1. The only exception is between late 1966 and early 1989. when Brazil did not participate in any international mission, including peacekeeping. This period more or less coincides with the military regime (1964-1985).

2. MONUSCO received a new Force Commander in December 2015.


References


Background: The State of UN Peacekeeping

The recent 70th anniversary of the United Nations, the upcoming selection of a new Secretary-General and last year’s release of the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) all provide timely opportunities to reflect upon how actors engage with one of the UN’s most visible and long-standing activities: peacekeeping operations (PKOs). Throughout their existence since the late 1940s, and with mixed successes, PKOs have varied in mandate and size, reflecting the changing political dynamics of the international system, and they have largely evolved based on empirical experiences and technological advances.

Although peacekeeping decision-making and mainstream approaches remain largely influenced by the great powers, the complex demands and expectations facing UN PKOs since the end of the Cold War have progressively led to a more pronounced and assertive engagement of actors outside the West (Bellamy & Williams, 2010). Under these circumstances, and reflecting the significant transformations in both the dynamics and power relations within the international system, peacekeeping has been increasingly perceived by many Southern countries, including Brazil, as a fundamental tool with which to seek a greater international profile, to gain prestige, and to highlight their support and commitment to multilateral institutions (Renkel, 2005). With their growing involvement, Southern countries have also sought to break the North-South divide in which “problems” are restricted to the South while “solutions” are brought by the North, contributing to put forward alternative ideas and options and challenging mainstream peacekeeping footprints.

Brazil’s Evolving Role in Peacekeeping

Brazil has played a key role in UN peacekeeping since the 1990s. During the Cold War, the country also contributed with a constant, albeit small, number of military and police forces to most of the missions in the past 25 years – which similarly corresponded in the vast majority (87%) being deployed in the past 25 years alone (Hannam, 2016). In other words, it is only recently that Brazil has started to organize its engagement in UN peacekeeping as a tool of its foreign policy. It is doing so not only to contribute to international order, but mainly to promote its interests regionally and globally, and to expound its role in the international system.

This recent engagement can be directly associated with the priorities of Brazilian foreign policy, as confirmed by disaggregated data on each UN mission that received Brazilians between 1990 and 2015. During that period, when the host countries and regions were a high priority for Brazil, the UN mission received large numbers of Brazilian troops, thus sustaining Brazil’s specific interests. Conversely, when the host countries/regions were a low priority for Brazilian foreign policy, the UN missions still attracted Brazilian troops, but with small numbers of professionals in the field supporting Brazil’s general interests in promoting global public goods, such as international peace and security, yet in a more limited way. More specifically, between 1990 and 2015, Brazil only deployed high numbers of military and police to missions in: (i) Haiti (78% of all Brazilians deployed in 1990–2015); (ii) Lusophone countries (14%); and (iii) Lebanon (8%). Graph 1 clearly demonstrates this proportion.

MINUSTAH has been Brazil’s most prominent deployment in terms of personnel, duration and political priority. Since the mission’s establishment in 2004, Brazil has been in charge of its military component and contributed the largest number of troops throughout the mission’s existence (Renkel, 2015). Besides evidencing Brazil’s growing engagement as a key player in UN PKOs, MINUSTAH also brought more visibility to Brazil and contributed to the emergence of a Brazilian profile for dealing with instabilities and peace efforts. By attaching credibility and legitimacy to its own identity as a Southern nation, Brazil has sought to shape, challenge and add to conventional Western practices associated with conflict management in multifaceted socio-political environments such as Haiti. Moreover, the Brazilian diplomacy has been keen to underscore the country’s autonomous and non-aligned posture in international politics, and thus its ability and comparative advantage in providing conciliatory approaches and promoting the marriage between security and development in peace missions’ settings.

Apart from investing more resources, financial and human, in UN peacekeeping, in the past few years Brazil has also made efforts to current debates on the use of force, both in operations in the field, and in normative discussions in New York, Brazil and elsewhere. In the field, Brazilian peacekeepers have been observed to act in a behavior during combat operations that led to the pacification of hotspots in Haiti’s capital (between 2005 and 2007), and in New York and Brasilia, Brazilian diplomats carefully elaborated and launched the concept of “responsibility while protecting” (in 2013), which promotes the idea that the use of force, on behalf of the international community, should not be read as a blank check.

The UN Secretariat has clearly understood these new approaches and actually welcomed Brazil’s demand to play greater rules in peacekeeping. For example, in December 2011, the country had two Force Commanders, of MINUSTAH in Haiti and of MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the Commander of the only UN Maritime Task Force, UNIFIL in Lebanon, thus leading military troops in three of the 16 UN peacekeeping missions. At the same time, the two retired Brazilian generals have played unprecedented roles in the UN peace and security system: General Paul Cruz has been leading strategic planning at the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Field Support (DFS), since 2010, and General Flaviano Peixoto was a member of the High-Level Panel appointed by the UN Secretary-General to review UN peace operations and recommend ways to improve it (2014–2015). These appointments can be understood as a strong recognition of Brazil’s contribution to UN peacekeeping.

Once holding a marginal position in the realms of international peace and security, Brazil has since found more spaces to contribute to and engage in peacekeeping. Nevertheless, structural shortcomings still persist. First, there is no comprehensive domestic space to orient the country’s participation in peace missions. This effectively constrains its ability to expand contributions, as decision-making is domestic-oriented, context-specific and politically costly. Second, while peacekeeping is a source of revenue for many troop contributors due to the minimization of peacekeeping missions and mission’s operations in the field. To adequately meet demands, substantial changes are required for smarter and better resourced UN PKOs, including Security Council mandates that are structured and tailored to the situation on the ground, and peacekeeping actors that are willing and able to enable the UN to deliver on the mandate.

Against this backdrop, the UN peacekeeping approach has continuously attempted to engage in reforms and reviews to strengthen its capacity. The most recent effort has been the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), launched in June 2013 (UN, 2013). Contributing to a renewed global momentum in responding to the challenges of PKOs, and concurrent with the UN-wide reviews on the Peacebuilding Architecture and on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325, the HIPPO report highlights major gaps between the established peacekeeping doctrine and the conduct of current missions on the ground. It has exposed fundamental UN doctrine limitations that confronted with increasingly complex and volatile conflicts. Similarly, the HIPPO recommendations have laid out as underlying aspirations the need for reaching consensus regarding the use of force in peace operations and the importance of strengthening the credibility of the UN among those who are directly affected by its operations. Correspondingly, the HIPPO’s key recommendations are based on the necessity of four shifts: (i) operations need to be more politically sensitive (prima- cy of politics) to the specific circumstances of each case rather than template-driven; (ii) operations should be designed to adapt and flexibly respond to the context on the ground; (iii) stronger and more inclusive peace and security partnerships should be built in order to address the tensions in operations’ division of labor whereby some states tend to design and fund operations while others engage with troops; and (iv) deployments have to be people-oriented and field-focused, thus carried out in consultation with recipient societies at a broader level and for their benefit (UN, 2015; Stammes & Osland, 2016).

The momentum generated by the HIPPO report needs to be expanded, and utilized by the UN system and member states, to better prepare and deliver UN peace operations, ranging from more comprehensive assessments of threats and geographic conditions, to providing more effective infrastructure and technological capabilities. Brazil’s peacekeeping approaches can both contribute to and benefit from the recommendations of the HIPPO report. In fact, these recommendations are very much aligned with the principles, values and approaches that currently guide Brazil’s foreign and defense policy. As a consequence, the HIPPO report in many respects ended up reinforcing several of Brazil’s interests and positions on the matter. Moreover, the Brazilian government has taken the initiative of political engagement and emphasis on conflict prevention and mediation, the interdependence between security and development, greater engagement of troop-contributing countries in decision-making, and the explicit concern of not incorporating counter-terrorism among the peacekeeping tasks.
Apart from investing more resources, financial and human, in UN peacekeeping, in the past few years Brazil has also contributed more to current debates on the use of force, both in operations in the field, and in normative discussions in New York, Brazil and elsewhere. In the field, Brazilian troops have been praised for their behavior during combat operations that led to the pacification of hotspots in Haiti’s capital (between 2005 and 2007), and in New York and Brazilia, Bra- zilian diplomats carefully elaborated and launched the concept of “responsibility while protecting” (in 2013), which promotes the idea that the use of force, on behalf of the international community, should not be read as a blank check.

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Economic decline and domestic politics on stormy waters are present circumstances that raise questions as to Brazilian commitments abroad, and even cast considerable doubts as to the country’s not so long ago praised status as a rising power on the global stage. Further, the conclusion of the impeachment process in August – leading to the removal of President Dilma Rousseff and to Vice-President Michel Temer taking over as Brazil’s head of state – did not come without challenging tasks on the foreign policy front. In his inaugural speech, Temer’s Foreign Minister José Serra, focusing prominently on the country’s struggling economy, reinforced a global strategy centered around trade and economic-related matters. While not explicitly mentioning UN PKOs, Serra suggested that Brazil’s international role should avoid engagements that generate scarce economic gains at the expense of high diplomatic and material costs. Bringing the economy back to terms and increasing the country’s competitiveness and productivity are understand-able and much-needed moves under current cir-cumstances. However, in and of themselves, they fall short of promoting the interests and reinvigorating the strategic importance of a key political and mili-itary player on the global stage.

Nevertheless, sustained attention and disposition to contribute to UN PKOs in the future should remain part of Brazil’s foreign policy portfolio. Brazil takes a lot of pride in its contributions to the UN, and the organization has brought into effect many principles and values that guide the country’s inter-national role. Similarly, Brazil’s proactive engage-ment with PKOs is crucial for a richer and more-comprehensive debate on global security issues, contributing to developing knowledge, to balance-Western dominance and to finding solutions to international instabilities. Structural shortcomings and uncertainties at home may temporarily restrict Brazil from expanding its participation, but at the same time they should not prevent the country from contributing to current and future missions.

Moreover, Brazil’s continued engagement in UN PKOs is not only desirable from a foreign policy per-spective, it is also expected by Brazilian constitu-encies, primarily the Army, but also by key international actors, especially the UN (mainly the Secretary), Western countries and several de-veloping countries, particularly those who already contribute with troops or police. Brazil has been-able to overcome other domestic challenges before, such as in the economic and political oscillations of the 1990s, and it is much more qualified and mature to do it again in present times. While not necessarily leading to immediate economic and ma-terial gains, Brazil’s continued participation in UN PKOs remains desirable to showcase the country’s capacity and willingness to engage internationally. Continued Brazilian participation would not only be good news for Brazil’s strategic interests, but also for global governance and the future of peacekeep-ing operations.

Notes

1. The only exception is between late 1966 and early 1989, when Brazil did not participate in any international mission, including peacekeeping. This period more or less coincides with the military regime (1964-1985).
2. MONUSCO received a new Force Com-mander in December 2015.
3. The National Policy of Defense and National Strategy of Defense were both revised and updated in 2012 (see www.defesa.gov.br/arquivos/estad/17/1/0/6/PND.pdf). Both documents refer to peacekeeping on only five occasions, to determine that Brazil should have more responsibilities in UN missions (without details) and to em-phasize that its participation should be based on national interests.


References


BRAZILIAN PEACEKEEPING: CHALLENGES AND POTENTIALS IN TURBULENT LANDSCAPES AT HOME AND INTERNATIONALLY

Over the last decade, Brazil has taken a more substantial role in international peace and security, and has become increasingly involved in UN peace operations. Particularly through its participation in Haiti, leading the military component of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), Brazil has underscored its growing engagement in shaping, challenging and adding to conventional practices of conflict management and peace processes. Now, the prospective withdrawal of MINUSTAH, coupled with a current domestic scenario in Brazil of politi-cal and economic instability, raises a number of questions about the future of Brazil’s participation and role in peacekeeping. To contribute to critical and well-informed con-versations on the challenges and potentials of Brazil’s engagement in peacekeeping amid turbulent landscapes at home and internation-ally, this policy brief revisits the country’s evolving role and strategic use of peacekeeping, and reflects upon its implementation in light of the normative developments brought by the current international process to review UN peace operations. The brief concludes that a continued peacekeeping presence, despite current difficulties, remains desirable for Brazil.

Brief Points

• Brazil has increasingly taken on responsibilities and claimed more proactive roles in handling crises through UN missions.
• Despite Brazil’s increased ability to contribute to and engage in peacekeeping, a series of structural shortcomings constrains the country’s ability to advocate for normative change and aspire to more influential roles at UN platforms.
• Brazil’s peacekeeping approaches can both contribute to and benefit from the recommendations of the HIPPO report.
• Notwithstanding the political and economic downturn currently affecting the country, sustained attention and disposition to contribute to UN peacekeeping operations should remain part of Brazil’s foreign policy portfolio.

The project ‘Brazil’s Rise to the Global Stage: Humanitarian Peacekeeping and the Quest for Great Powerhood’ (BraGS) is funded by the Norwegian Research Council’s Latina-merka program, and aims to understand Brazil’s international ambitions through its contributions to international cooperation, peace and security.

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a non-profit peace research institute established in 1959 whose overarching purpose is to conduct research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people. The institute is independent, interna-tional and interdisciplinary, and explores is-ues related to all facets of peace and conflict.