

BRAZIL'S ROLE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM

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Abstract

Although Brazil has accomplished all international obligations on terrorism, strategic and executive measures are still to take place. Diplomacy does not seem to be an insurance policy against terrorism. Brazilian foreign policy on terrorism is a necessary but not a sufficient tool against the threat. Additionally, domestic legislation does not guarantee institutional readiness.

Resumo

Embora o Brasil tenha cumprido todas as obrigações internacionais quanto à prevenção e ao combate ao terrorismo, medidas de cunho estratégico e institucional quanto à matéria são ainda necessárias ao País. O cumprimento de acordos diplomáticos não representa imunidade à ameaça terrorista. A política externa brasileira acerca do tema é instrumento necessário, mas não suficiente contra tal ameaça. Ademais, leis domésticas não garantem eficiência nem eficácia às instituições.

I The perception of the threat in Brazil

Brazilians in general, and even most Brazilian authorities, consider terrorism as an exogenous threat. It is something distant from the Brazilian mindset. As Salvador Raza (2006, p.61) argues, this state of mind is not derived by specific government's policies, but by national culture.¹ Brazilians view terrorism as something intrinsically and geographically associated with the Middle East and, in terms of its targets, with Israel and the United States of America (US).

There is no empirical data concerning terrorism in Brazil's territory. As a result, any attempt to analyze terrorism strategically in Brazil is more related to policy-making *per se* than any other approach taken by the US, the United Kingdom (UK) or Spain, countries that were attacked by terrorism and, as a consequence, have different and more developed tools to face it. Certainly, Brazil has a lot to learn from them.

Although international terrorism has not taken place in Brazil, Brazilian citizens have been indirect victims of it. Brazilians

¹ In respect of terrorism, Raza relates this Brazilian cultural trait as a cognitive break.

were among the victims of the World Trade Center (WTC) terrorist attacks in 2001;² of the bombings of tourist sites in Bali in 2002; of the United Nations (UN) office in Baghdad in 2003³, and of the bombings in Madrid in 2004. More recently, in July 2005, following the bus bombings in London, a Brazilian, Jean Charles de Menezes, was mistakenly killed by a British counter-terrorism officer. No authority in the country, therefore, should ever consider terrorism as something distant from Brazilian reality.

Brazilian authorities are not totally unaware of the fact that no country is immune to the potential threat posed by international terrorism.⁴ It is not, however, a perception shared by some of the highest authorities in the government. This misperception reflects a pattern not only present in Brazil, but also in other Latin American countries, if one takes the current threat posed by terrorism into account. As Salvador Raza (2005) points out, the recent terrorism is strategic, distinct from the conspirational terrorism typical of the seventies and mostly associated with the leftist movements of that period. This work focuses on the former, not the latter. Based on two hundred interviews made in Latin America, Raza (2006, p. 43) argues that Latin American businessmen, students and *politicians* are not prepared to comprehend the instrumental use of violence, such as terrorism.

In general, there is not much strategic thinking on the subject in Brazil (SILVA, 2006). Despite the overall lack of concern, it is worth mentioning the efforts of the Committee on Monitoring and Institutional Studies (SAEI) and of the Brazilian Intelligence Agency (Abin), both subordinated to the Institutional Security Ministry (GSI) of the Presidency of Republic. The former promoted two meetings on terrorism. One took place in July 2004, and the other in september 2005. More recently, on november, 30 and december, 1, 2006, Abin promoted its Second Seminar on Intelligence (State, Media and Terrorism).⁵

At the Sixth Summit on National Strategic Studies (ENEE), held in Rio de Janeiro, at the Naval War School (EGN), from november 8 to november 10, 2006, Aldo Rebelo, then president of the *Câmara dos Deputados* of Brazil, the equivalent of the US House of Representatives, addressed the interaction between the Legislative Branch of the Federal Government and the Armed Forces. He stated that Brazil is not a territory currently subject to international terrorist acts. His opinion is very significant due to two reasons: first, under the Federal Constitution, the President of the House of Deputies (*Câmara dos Deputados*) assumes the Presidency in the absence of the President and the Vice-President of the Republic;

² One hundred and sixty citizens of thirty different countries lost their lives in the attacks against the WTC.

³ Sérgio Vieira de Mello, the UN Special Representative for Iraq, was killed in a bomb attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad in October, 2003. He was well-known for his work in East Timor.

⁴ Therefore, the Federal government, under the National Defense and Foreign Affairs Chamber (CREDEN), elected terrorism as one of the most prominent issue on its agenda.

⁵ Several officials and experts participated in the Seminar. Among them, Israeli and American Intelligence officials, diplomat Carol Fuller, Secretary of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism of the Organization of the American States (CICTE) and Steven Monblatt, former Secretary of CICTE, Professors Daniel Pipes and Thomas Bruneau.

therefore, Rebelo was at the time one of the highest authorities in the country⁶; and, second, he is a politician not out of the circle of national strategic thinking. For instance, his very participation in the event mentioned above and his writings on security and defense prove the opposite.⁷ He is not only a high political (legislative and potential executive) authority, but someone whose ideas are accepted by scholars and experts in international relations, security and defense studies. Moreover, Aldo Rebelo seems not to agree with the ideas of imbalance underlined in this work. Asked about Brazilian intelligence and defense capabilities to fight terrorism, he does not notice any discrepancy or gap between Brazil's international obligations and accomplishments, and its institutional capabilities.

Even when security and defense are taken into consideration in a broad, strategic perspective, most Brazilian civil and military strategic thinkers contemplate a general strategic approach to security and defense, related to the classic guarantee of national sovereignty and multilateralism. This approach can be associated with two

specific aspects: first, a minor perception of interstate threat since the settlement of all disputes on international borders⁸ and the development of confidence-building and a strategic alliance with Argentina, through several mechanisms, such as the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC) and the Common Market of the South (Mercosur)⁹, and, second, the potential spillage over Brazilian territory of the conflict between the Colombian Armed Forces and the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC)¹⁰, which could ultimately represent a threat to Brazilian territorial integrity and institutional stability. Due to the potential threat posed by FARC and mainly by the great strategic relevance to Brazil, the major Brazilian strategic vulnerability is the Amazon (VIDIGAL, 2004, v.2, p.25). The implementation of the Surveillance System of the Amazon (SIVAM)¹¹ and of the Destructive Shooting Law (BRASIL, 2004), nicknamed '*Lei do Abate*' is a result of this threat perception.

Two arguments serve the interests of those who perceive the country out of the reach of international terrorism: first, the general

⁶ The current President of the House of Deputies was Arnaldo Chinaglia, a member of the same Party of President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, the Worker's Party.

⁷ See Rebelo (2003, 2004); see also SEMINÁRIO DE POLÍTICA... (2003).

⁸ In this sense, for over 100 years Brazil has considered itself a 'geopolitically satisfied' country. See Lima & Hirst (2006, p. 21-40); see also Vizentini (2007) and Cervo (2002). Particularly regarding the Baron of Rio Branco and his role on Brazilian foreign policy, especially in respect of Brazil's peaceful settlement of its borders, see Lins (1995) and Ricupero (2000).

⁹ Currently, the Mercosur is comprised of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Venezuela was accepted by the other members as a full member of the Bloc, though it still awaits the ratification of its membership by the Brazilian and Paraguayan Parliaments. Bolivia, Chile and Peru are associate members of the Bloc; Mexico is an observer. In respect of the perspectives of Brazil and Argentina concerning nuclear weapons, see the Treaty of Tlatelolco (1967), which established the region as a nuclear-free zone. For a brief history of Argentine-Brazilian relations, that comes back to the Portuguese and Spanish Empires in South America, see Jaguaribe (2005, p. 42-52).

¹⁰ For security and defense issues, see Vidigal (2004, v.2, p.13-36). For an overview of security in South America, see Rojas Aravena (2005, p. 53-77).

¹¹ A project developed by Raytheon, worth of US\$ 1.7 bi.

and traditional perception that Brazil is a peaceful, hospitable, tolerant, happy and united country.¹² The second is the very nature of Brazilian foreign policy,¹³ a product of the values and principles of Brazilian society. Brazilian foreign policy traditionally seeks peace by peaceful means¹⁴.

Several arguments confront the previous perception, which ultimately seems to be a misperception of the threat posed by terrorism. The perception that the country and its people are traditionally peaceful and open to different cultures does not necessarily imply that Brazil's society and state are immune to terrorist attacks against interests and nationals of countries frequently taken as targets, such as the US and Israel. The very possibility of being a stage of terrorism, due to the existence of visible and vulnerable spots in its territory and the presence of American and Israeli interests in the country, augments the magnitude of the threat to Brazil's homeland security and to Brazilian foreign policy. Vulnerability and visibility are the most basic and important elements for a terrorist action to take place. In this sense, the stage where the target is located is not necessarily relevant. Any country has sites of great visibility and symbolism that if targeted by terrorists would cause great repercussions throughout the world

(DINIZ, 2004, p.30). For instance, in 1998, when a suicide bombing of the US Embassy took place, was Tanzania a particular target of terrorist acts? It does not seem so. The fact that Brazil was never threatened by any terrorist individual or organization does not necessarily mean that acts of terrorism will never occur in the country. Hope is not a method.¹⁵

Brazil's role in the fight against international terrorism has focused on international cooperation, the signing and ratification of international conventions on terrorism and the adaptation of national laws to these instruments.

The problem seems to be graver if one considers some specific vulnerabilities Brazil faces. It is quite impossible to supervise and control 16,884.4 km of land boundaries, with nine tri-border areas, and 7,491 km of coastline.¹⁶ Besides, as then Director of Abin, Márcio Paulo Buzanelli, highlights, intelligence actions, even if international cooperation is taken into account, are limited (by nature).¹⁷

¹² For Darc Costa (2004, v.2, p.40), former vice-president of the Brazilian Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES), this is the true (*sic*) Brazilian discourse.

¹³ A brief overview of the current Brazilian foreign policy, even when considered the date published, can be found in Amorim (2004, p. 40-47). See also Lima & Hirst (2006). For an overview of Brazil's international agenda, see Souza (2002).

¹⁴ As stated by Lima & Hirst (2006, p.38), Brazilian political and intellectual circles do not value military deterrence as a source of international and/or regional prestige. Since the nineteenth century, Brazil's presence in South America has represented for the most part a factor of stability and peace that has contributed to the region's profile as a zone of relative peace. Brazilian pacifism, nevertheless, as the current Brazilian Ambassador to the US, Antônio de Aguiar Patriota (1998, p.193), states, does not exclude the engagement of troops and materials in the troubled conflict theaters of Southern Africa, Central America and East Europe. The Peacekeeping operation in Haiti (MINUSTAH), under the military command of Brazil, also corroborates to this fact.

¹⁵ Although it seems to be an American *cliché*, especially in military circles, it also seems to be an appropriate idea here.

¹⁶ For an assessment of the vulnerability of Brazilian ocean waters, see Medeiros (2006).

¹⁷ For instance, by law (Law nº 9296/1996), Abin cannot do eavesdropping (BRASIL, 1996).

Brazil also lacks material, technological, financial and human resources. In addition, the very inexistence of an effective body to coordinate the actions of the different sectors of the Brazilian government responsible for fighting terrorism is a gap to be considered. (BUZANELLI, 2004, p. 7-13)¹⁸.

Even when all measures taken by Brazilian foreign policy are taken into consideration, terrorism does not seem to be a priority for the Brazilian authorities. When compared with economic issues, such as trade, for instance, it is quite clear that security and defense, in general, and terrorism, in particular, have a disproportionately reduced role in Brazilian foreign affairs (DINIZ, 2004, p.38). If social and economic development is one of the pillars of Brazilian foreign policy, it is reasonable that trade has a crucial role in the international agenda of the country. It would be, nevertheless, one of the greatest strategic mistakes if the misperception of terrorism as a threat prevented a more pro-active role in the fight against terrorism, consistent with the global threat the international community currently faces. Would not a terrorist act in Brazil be a tremendous setback for its social and economic development and other permanent aspirations of its foreign policy? It seems so.

2 A reflection on some international challenges posed by Brazil's role in the fight against terrorism

Brazil's role in the fight against international terrorism has focused on

international cooperation, the signing and ratification of international conventions on terrorism and the adaptation of national laws to these instruments. The feeling that the international and legislative roles are very pro-active could potentially reduce interest in further steps, such as the development of a national strategy and structures to fight terrorism. Although Brazil has accomplished all international obligations on terrorism, strategic and executive measures are still to take place. Diplomacy does not seem to be an insurance policy against terrorism. Brazilian foreign policy on terrorism is a necessary but not a sufficient tool against the threat. Additionally, legislation does not guarantee institutional readiness (CEPIK, 2004).

In respect to international cooperation, intelligence sharing has improved the perception of the threat and the possibilities to fight terrorism. Doubts, however, persist. Are they a reasonable – not to say sufficient – tool to address the potential threat?

In the absence of a national strategy and an effective institutional apparatus for preventing and combating terrorism, the accomplishment of international obligations and the improvement of international cooperation do not guarantee a rational deterrent against terrorism. Given the potential threat terrorism poses to the international community and to Brazil, despite recent institutional efforts and improvement in international cooperation, Brazil still lacks two elements in its fight against

¹⁸ Eugênio Diniz (2004, p.35) also states that difficulties in the Brazilian security and intelligence apparatus augment the vulnerability of possible targets. In this sense, he argues, the inexistence of any terrorist acts in Brazil so far could be a result of low probability of occurrence or a low detection capability, i.e., a greater vulnerability.

international terrorism: a national strategy and a better institutional apparatus for fighting it.

Being prioritized as they have been in the Brazilian fight against terrorism, diplomatic and legislative decisions can generate a sense of security and a feeling that the job of preparing for the threat is done. As Marco Cepik (2004, p.58) argues, in the debates on international security matters in Brazil, there is a persistent trend to restrict the issues to normative and legal aspects.

The imbalance between international and national components can pose at least two international challenges to Brazil: first, the absence of a national strategy and an effective institutional apparatus for preventing and combating terrorism could negatively affect Brazil's aspirations to a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and second, the imbalance could jeopardize Brazil's bilateral and multilateral relations, particularly with the US, the EU and the other members of the Mercosur.

Brazil has historically pursued a permanent seat in the Security Council, and this goal has been one of the major objectives of its foreign policy. This aim is not recent¹⁹. Being the non-permanent member that participated in UNSC more than any other non-permanent member, Brazil sees the permanent membership as a democratic shift in the international arena. The very

active participation of Brazil in the UNSC highlights its pro-active role as a player at the UN. For Brazil, the current UN system should not reflect the Cold War politics. To achieve its aim, Brazil has fully engaged in strategic diplomatic talks with countries that support its candidacy to a permanent seat, such as Germany, India and Japan (with Brazil, they comprise the so-called G4).

The G4 seeks to increase the number of UNSC members, from fifteen to twenty-five in total. Six would be permanent, and four would be non-permanent members. Regarding the veto power, the group has proposed not to have the right to veto for fifteen years. Additional discussions concerning reforms of the UNSC will take place in the end of 2007.²⁰

This work has sought to emphasize the potential challenges Brazil could face due to its foreign policy on terrorism, and the implications of its actions for Brazil's aspirations to UNSC permanent membership. Since the emphasis here is on the need for a national strategy for combating terrorism and not the UNSC permanent membership, all international geopolitical and geo-economic conditions and implications related to Brazilian candidacy are not being considered. The main point here is that given the current threat to international peace and security posed by terrorism, Brazil could strengthen its candidacy for a permanent seat on the UNSC by adopting a more pro-active role in the fight against

¹⁹ See Lampreia & Correa (1995). The book is a collection of all statements made by Brazil at the UN General Assembly, from 1946 to 1995. It is particularly useful to see the consistency of Brazilian foreign policy. Brazil aims a better position at international organizations in general. See Garcia (2000).

For an additional account of the Brazilian aspiration to UNSC permanent membership and a sharp analysis of the changes the Council has undergone since the Gulf War (1991), the humanitarian intervention in Somalia, in the ex-Yugoslavia, in Rwanda and in Haiti, see Patriota, (1998).

²⁰ For a more comprehensive analysis of all proposals for reforms of the UNSC, see Souza (2007).

terrorism, particularly concerning the development and adoption of a national strategy and an effective coordinating body for preventing and combating terrorism.

All current permanent members (the US, China, the UK, France and Russia) have adopted a national strategy for fighting terrorism. Although the development and adoption of strategies by the so-called P5 reflect an obvious response to terrorism by the majority of the most threatened states in the international community, it could indicate a gap in Brazil's aspiration to a permanent seat in the Council. Since the US is a permanent member of the UNSC, it is particularly important regarding Brazil-US relations.²¹

Another challenge Brazilian foreign policy faces is the frequent perception of the supposed existence of terrorism in the Tri-Border (TB) region (Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay) by the international community.

Taken Brazil's aspiration to a permanent seat in the UNSC into account, besides its economic and political influence globally and regionally, concerning its role on international security and peace, a pro-active role in the fight against terrorism domestically could be added to, for instance, Brazil's participation in the UN peace operations, such as the current Mission of the United Nations for Stabilization of Haiti (Minustah). More than addressing its own homeland security,

Brazil would give an important signal to the international community.

Moreover, two other points should be considered regarding Brazil's aspirations for a permanent seat in the UNSC: first, according to Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the UNSC is the very body that addresses threats to international peace and security and, second, members of the UNSC, especially the permanent ones, take part in the specific committees created to confront international terrorism, such as the Committee against Al Qaeda and the Taliban (1267 Committee), the Counter Terrorism Committee (CTC), the 1540 Committee and the 1566 Working Group. Hence, under the Charter, by definition, permanent membership in the UNSC implies a very pro-active role in the fight against terrorism, which is ultimately and practically a threat to international peace and security. Furthermore, membership also implies participation in the Committees mentioned before, which were established due to the increased perception of the threat after September 11, 2001.

As Brazilian Ambassador Rubens Ricupero (apud RAZA, 2006, p.59) emphasizes, Brazil, as an aspirant to a permanent seat in the UNSC, has to have a pro-active role in the conventions and strategies on terrorism developed in the UN. However, he does not take the lack of a Brazilian strategy into consideration. Therefore, concerning its aspirations, Brazil should not only actively participate in all developments taking place in the UN on terrorism, but also consider the very fact that it has no strategy to counter terrorism.

²¹ So far, the US supports only Japan.

The argument advanced herein thus goes beyond that of Ambassador Ricupero.

Another challenge Brazilian foreign policy faces is the frequent perception of the supposed existence of terrorism in the Tri-Border (TB) region (Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay) by the international community. There has been a plethora of studies that take the existence of terrorism in the region for granted.²² Fortunately, most are based on mere speculation and wishful thinking. They lack one of the most important tools of any analysis, namely, good sources, and thus analytical value. Dogma and political interests seem to play a role here.

Instead, two official documents, among several others, are important in relation to what has been discussed about the region in the 3 + 1 Group on Tri-Border Area Security, particularly related to US-Brazil relations. One is the US Department of State (DOS) *Country Reports on Terrorism*, 2005, released in April 2006 (UNITED STATES, 2006). The other is the Resolution 338 proposed in February 2006 by US Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, among others.²³ The DOS Report underlined that “the United States remained concerned that Hizballah and HAMAS were raising funds among the sizable Muslim communities in the region and elsewhere in the territories of the Three, *although there was no corroborated information that these or other Islamic extremist groups had an operational presence in the area*” (UNITED STATES, 2005, p. 157-158). The proposed resolution, in turn, states that “Whereas since at least the AMIA

bombing in 1994, *Hezbollah has maintained networks in the tri-border area of Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina—primarily focusing on fundraising and recruitment*” (Ibid).

The two statements above reflect an apparent contradiction. All joint statements by the 3 + 1 Group underline that there is no evidence of any terrorist activity in the TB area. All members of the Group agreed to share intelligence that could lead to any evidence of terrorist activity in the region. In addition, it is worth mentioning that all statements made by the Group are binding. Thus, while common people, scholars and even authorities claim that terrorist individuals or organizations have been acting in the region, intelligence and diplomatic officials of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and the US deny vehemently that there is any evidence related to terrorist activities in the area. Authorities of those countries have consistently denied the existence of terrorism in the TB through the 3 + 1 Group since 2002.²⁴ Given all authorities that participate in the Group, it seems to be a much more prudent and rational, although political, approach than dogmatic statements made by scholars with no realistic information on what is really happening in the TB.

The very fact that the Group has not provided any evidence related to terrorism in the area, however, does not represent, in any way, a guarantee that there will not be terrorism in the region. Because of that, even though the 3 + 1 Group represents the very forum to address the problem politically based on intelligence, its

²² As one of several works on the TB and its supposed association with terrorism, see Raza (2005).

²³ The Resolution was sent to the Senate and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations in June, 2006. (UNITED STATES..., 2006).

²⁴ The Group meets once a year.

declarations should not be considered insurance policies. Brazil should avoid any possibility of confronting the dogmatic arguments made by common citizens, scholars and even authorities with similar dogmatic approaches. All institutional measures yet to be taken, should be taken,

because Brazil is not only fighting unreasonable comments on one of the most important regions for its international trade and tourism, but also terrorism, an international threat that seeks to kill and destroy its targets by exploiting vulnerability and visibility.

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