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## Brazil's Haiti drawdown: reflections on global aspirations

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After only a few months in political retirement, former Foreign Minister Celso Amorim was suddenly brought back by President Dilma Rousseff to replace Defense Minister Nelson Jobim, who was forced to resign over his own public comments regarding other Cabinet colleagues. Still, Amorim did not lose time in his return to Brasília and made sure to start his new assignment with a particular set of news: Brazil is now officially planning an exit strategy for its extensive military contingent in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Since June 2004, Brazil has been in charge of MINUSTAH, thus commanding over 7.000 men on the ground – including an average of 1.300 Brazilians – in an effort to provide some stability to the beleaguered Caribbean island nation. Unsurprisingly, the massive earthquake that devastated Haiti in January 2010 brought the mission into a new realm, with the distribution of humanitarian assistance and the need for a national reconstruction process quickly topping every other priority. For its part, Brazil stood by its previous commitments and even doubled its troops on the ground in a bid to reinforce security while disbursing millions in emergency aid.<sup>1</sup>

However, a year and half later, from a Brazilian perspective, the situation has apparently improved to a

point in which a drawdown should now be considered. Indeed, according to Amorim, the time has come to discuss an organized exit, given the improvements of the Haitian democratic process in recent months.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that this move did not exactly come as a surprise given the indications that had previously been provided by other Brazilian officials. For example, former President Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva – still very much involved with daily domestic politics – took the opportunity during a recent lecture at the *Escola Superior de Guerra* (ESG) to address this issue, stating that, regarding Haiti, “[w]e don’t want to stay forever. We have to correctly analyze whether it is not time to undertake our exit”.<sup>3</sup> Even Foreign Minister Antônio Patriota himself appeared to express similar views when he mentioned that “[...] at the current stage, we can contemplate a gradual reduction of military personnel”, most likely next October when the Security Council will review the MINUSTAH mandate.<sup>4</sup>

At the top of Brazilian policymakers’ concerns is probably the total cost of this endeavor to date: recent estimates

1 For an overview of Brazil’s efforts post-earthquake see, for example, Monica Hirst, “Brazil in Haiti: the challenges ahead” [*Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre*, Report No. 5, February 2010].

2 Eliane Cantanhêde, “Amorim rebate críticas e defende general do Exército” [*Folha S. Paulo*, 10 August 2011].

3 “Ex-Presidente Lula defende que próximo passo do país deverá ser a África” [*Jornal de Notícias*, 29 July 2011].

4 Rui Nogueira and Lisandra Paraguassu, “‘Não existe país que esteja acima do bem e do mal’, diz Patriota” [*Estado de S. Paulo*, 16 July 2011].



point to nearly R\$1 billion spent with MINUSTAH since 2004, with R\$426 million allocated for 2010 alone. When these costs are coupled with the longevity of the mission, as well as with the ongoing mood of austerity in Brasília, which hit defense spending hard,<sup>5</sup> it is not too difficult to grasp the official reasoning behind such a decision.

However, the truth is that for much of the duration of Brazil's contribution to MINUSTAH, money or an exit deadline was never exactly a core issue since other political considerations clearly took precedence over any other operational factors. Indeed, it was no secret that Brazil immediately saw Haiti as an opportunity to showcase its growing regional gravitas and express its legitimate global aspirations for inclusion in the world's decision-making elite. In other words, by stepping up and providing thousands of Brazilian troops to a challenging scenario such as Haiti, Brazil unmistakably sought to send a sign to the region and to the world that it was ready to assume its fair share of responsibilities in a supposedly reformed global order. Unsurprisingly, this envisioned role would have to inevitably include some kind of permanent representation in the UN Security Council, a goal essentially understood as the ultimate aspiration of contemporary Brazilian foreign policy.

Still, as noted back in February 2010, "[c]ampaigning for a position of power in the Security Council is one thing, but to actually compromise the country's foreign policy and resources for the stability and safety of a nearly destroyed and underdeveloped nation, is a completely different matter, especially when such commitment comes, at times, with a heavy human cost".<sup>6</sup> In that sense, Brazil's swift reaction in the aftermath of the earthquake appeared to serve as a confirmation that the country had come to terms with the burdens of international responsibility and inherently assumed them as a part of its growing international role.

With that in mind, one must then wonder if Brazil's aspirations in the world at large do not end up in some form curtailed by this latest decision to withdraw the country's contingent from Haiti. A quick analysis of Brazil's current contributions to peacekeeping operations can probably shed some light on this issue. According to UN numbers, as of July 2011, Brazil had 2,239 police, military experts and troops allocated to the organization's peacekeeping operations. Of these, 2,185 were assigned to MINUSTAH, which leaves a mere 51 personnel

distributed through other six missions.<sup>7</sup> As such, even if Brazil maintains some kind of presence on the island – the possibility of more engineering brigades to help with the ongoing reconstruction has been suggested before – it is immediately manifest that the country's contribution to UN missions will be significantly reduced to a level only on par with the likes of Madagascar or Greece.

Perhaps the crudest deduction available from the analysis of such numbers, though, emerges when other heavyweight international contenders, such as Brazil's IBSA partners, India and South Africa, are brought into this equation. Together, these three countries have been extremely vocal over the past few years regarding their expressed desire to join a reformed UN Security Council. To that end, all three countries have tried their best to elevate their respective international profiles in several meaningful venues, including through active participation in international peacekeeping operations. Therefore, it is possible to find India presently contributing 8,423 personnel and ranking as 3<sup>rd</sup> among overall top contributors to UN peacekeeping operations, while South Africa provides 2,187 men and women, securing a 14<sup>th</sup> place in the list.<sup>8</sup>

Subsequently, one cannot fail to notice the discrepancies that are bound to deepen when Brazil puts its announcement regarding a MINUSTAH withdrawal into practice. Indeed, while still staking its claim for a seat on the UNSC, Brazil will surely find it harder to present its case as an engaged global security partner in current international affairs when its track record is compared to that of its peers, who remain fully committed to peacekeeping missions. Moreover, it is not as if the seven years in Haiti will be suddenly washed away into oblivion by the remaining international community, but they are certain to provide increasingly poor arguments in the face of consistent commitment to peacekeeping by other countries like Bangladesh or Rwanda, who regularly respond to the manpower needs of the UN's wide range of operations in the field with contributions of over 10,000 and 3,000 troops, respectively.

True, the current UNSC permanent members do not reach anywhere near the top ten contributors to peacekeeping missions, so a simple question could be asked: why should Brazil have to step up in this area when the other world powers do not? The answer is self-evident: since Brazil is the one demanding for a seat at the table, gathering enough support for these claims will

5 Pedro Seabra, "New challenges and opportunities for Brazil's defense policy" (*IPRIS Viewpoints*, No. 45, March 2011).

6 Pedro Seabra, "Brazil: A long-term commitment with Haiti" (*IPRIS Lusophone Countries Bulletin*, No. 4, February 2010), pp. 1-2.

7 These include the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). See "UN Mission's Summary detailed by Country" (*UN Peacekeeping Statistics*, 31 July 2011).

8 "Ranking of Military and Police Contributions to UN Operations" (*UN Peacekeeping Statistics*, 31 July 2011).



inevitably require significant tokens of commitment to global stability and security. Despite several other means of demonstrating this disposition – financial support for the multitude of UN-based organizations, for example – contributing to peacekeeping operations remains notwithstanding the most high-profile option available, earning sufficient dividends in terms of international recognition and prestige to justify *a priori* the investment made.

Still, it would be unreasonable to argue that Brazil should stay in Haiti solely for the Machiavellian purpose of expanding its global reach or carrying out its foreign agenda. Or that it should stay in Haiti simply for the sake of its campaign for the reform of the UNSC. For all the praises and plaudits that they received, the fact is Brazilian troops also had to deal with a number of criticisms, both in Haiti and at home, of their prolonged presence in the island.<sup>9</sup> At the end of the day, however, it is possible that doubts will arise once more about Brazil's overall commitment to international security operations as its physical contributions eventually begin to dwindle.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly enough, in his own inauguration speech – although not directly addressing the MINUSTAH issue – Celso Amorim stated that “[w]e shall continue to give our contribution to UN peacekeeping operations, within the limits of international law, especially in those areas of greater interest to Brazil and where we hold a clear comparative advantage”.<sup>11</sup> In that sense, perhaps what we are witnessing is nothing more than the first sign of a more balanced approach in the works, in which national

participation in such missions will be more carefully selected from now on. But still, even if that is indeed the case, Brazil would do well to remain aware that any path to the higher echelons of global representation invariably requires a willingness to engage with the perils and crises that frequently comes with such a responsibility. Calls for a greater Brazilian involvement in such issues are therefore only bound to grow while at the same time becoming harder to ignore.

9 See for example, Fábio Zanini, “Mobilização anti-Brasil ecoa no Haiti após terremoto” (*Folha S. Paulo*, 31 January 2010).

10 As a contrast, one needs only to search for news headlines and editorials of early 2010 to acknowledge the level of recognition given to Brazil's post-earthquake efforts in Haiti. See, for example, Rachel Glickhouse, “Brazil's Opportunity in Haiti” (*Foreign Policy Blogs*, 15 January 2011); Joshua Keating, “Brazil's moment to lead” (*Foreign Policy/Passport*, 15 January 2011).

11 “Íntegra do discurso do ministro Celso Amorim ao tomar posse como ministro da Defesa” (*Brazilian Ministry of Defense*, 8 August 2011).

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