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Is There Room for a CPLP Contribution to the International Security Context?

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The Defence Ministers of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) met in May 2015, in what may have been one of the most interesting gatherings in the Lusophone world in recent times, as suggested by the numerous proposals from different participants, which were placed on the table. Naturally, Portugal is not indifferent towards this debate and CPLP's progression in this field. In fact, the Portuguese government has taken a clearly favourable stance towards strengthening defence and security cooperation.

During the meeting, Portuguese Minister of Defence, José Pedro Aguiar-Branco, proposed moving forward with the establishment of a CPLP military contingent within the framework of UN peacekeeping operations. That would certainly be a potentially advantageous initiative for Lusophone countries, to the extent that it would enhance their collective value as international security providers. In fact, Portuguese-speaking countries have much to gain from deepening cooperation within the UN framework: cooperating in peacekeeping missions, while also, among many other examples, jointly coordinating application for non-permanent seats in the Security Council, or even supporting candidacies by Lusophone citizens to positions and institutions at the UN.

CPLP's assertion as an influential and strong organization, particularly in the defence and security field, requires fast and effective responsiveness in crisis situations. In other words, a CPLP contingent could, and should, take the form of a rapid reaction force. Due to its experience as a security provider and relevant political actor in the military cooperation field, Portugal would certainly be interested and capable to make a positive contribution.

The role of international security provider could, in fact, go further. The Gulf of Guinea is the obvious example. As emphasized by Aguiar-Branco, it would surely be interesting to advance towards a "more structured cooperation" among the various Lusophone navies. The need to consequentially and effectively fight maritime insecurity — piracy, illegal fishing, drug trafficking, and other forms of organized crime — particularly in the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Guinea, becomes increasingly relevant and urgent. In theory, there is also a common interest among CPLP member-states in this domain. Aside from Brazil and Portugal, no other Lusophone country enjoys the real capabilities and resources to monitor and ensure the security of their territorial waters. Thus, creating a common maritime force under the aegis of the CPLP would be potentially beneficial for the different parties involved.

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Lusophone cooperation in the field of maritime security would also be an asset from the point of view of the international community, and the US and European Union in particular. In fighting the various illicit acts afflicting the Gulf of Guinea and in protecting natural resources and maritime communication routes, CPLP would also position itself as a relevant interlocutor in regards to US and EU strategic interests.

Having said this, if there is a common interest, what then explains the lack of progress in this field?

The answer is the absence of political will, namely from Brazil, which has never regarded the CPLP as a central element in its foreign policy. That is clearly illustrated by the repeated absences of President Dilma Rousseff from the organization's summits of heads of state and government. The problem, however, does not restrict itself to the

current president. Over the last 20 years, Brazil never saw potential added value in CPLP that could justify a diplomatic commitment in a different scale. Therefore, Brazil, in its relations with Portuguese-speaking countries, has always given preference to bilateral engagements.

I believe it will be a matter of time before Brazil faces the need to reassess its approach. As a candidate to a permanent seat on the Security Council, sooner or later Brazil will have to assume a different stance and set of responsibilities in the international context, namely in the defence and security field. Then, the synergies produced by CPLP will certainly become more interesting from the point of view of Brasília's government. Far from having been an isolated event, the debate that took place during the latest gathering of CPLP Defence Ministers is here to stay.

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