

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 political 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 conversations on the challenges and potentials of Brazil's engagement in peacekeeping amid turbulent landscapes at home and internationally, 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 downtrend currently affecting the country, sustained attention and disposition to contribute to UN peacekeeping operations should remain part of Brazil's foreign policy portfolio.

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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 (Kenkel, 2010). With their growing involvement, Southern countries have also sought to break the North-South paradigm 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 since the very first UN operation, in 1947.¹ Altogether, Brazil has participated in 43 of the 71 peacekeeping missions authorized by the UN Security Council, or 61% of the total. Throughout these seven decades of engagement, the past 25 years – which similarly corresponded to peacekeeping's post-Cold War quantitative and qualitative expansion – have been the most significant period. This is reflected in the number of missions that included Brazilian peacekeepers, but also in the total number of Brazilians actually deployed

to UN missions. In December 1990, for example, Brazil participated in only three UN peacekeeping missions, while in December 2015 this number had increased to ten (out of the 16 existing missions at the time). In terms of the numbers of troops and police, Brazil has sent almost 50,000 uniformed personnel to UN peacekeeping missions since 1947, the vast majority (87%) being deployed in the past 25 years alone (Hamann, 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 expand 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: (a) Haiti (78% of all Brazilians deployed in 1990–2015); (b) Lusophone countries (14%); and (c) Lebanon (6%). 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 (Kenkel, 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 operations' settings.

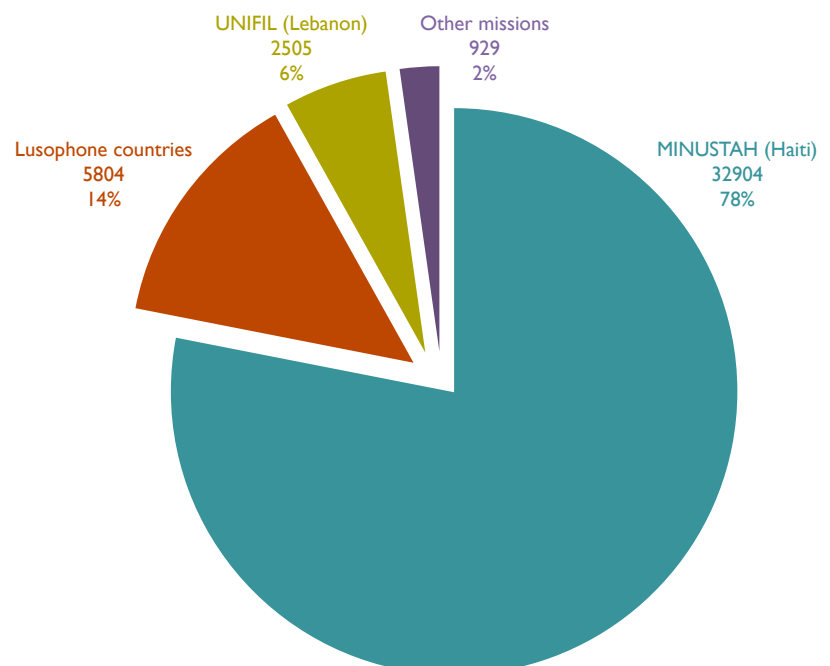


Figure 1: Distribution of Brazilian military and police, November 1990 – December 2015. Total: 42,142 professionals (Hamann, 2016).

Apart from investing more resources, financial and human, in UN peacekeeping, in the past few years Brazil has also made substantial contributions to current debates on the use of force, both in operations in the field, and in normative discussions in New York, Brasília and elsewhere. In the field, Brazilian military have been highly 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 Brasília, Brazilian diplomats carefully elaborated and launched the concept of "responsibility while protecting" (in 2011), 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 roles in peacekeeping. For example, in December 2015, 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.² At the same time, 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 Floriano 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 policy orienting the country's participation in peace missions. This effectively constrains its ability to expand contributions, as decision-making tends to be slow, burdensome and politically costly.³ Second, while peacekeeping is a source of revenue for many troop contributors due to the reimbursement provided by the UN, the compensation corresponds to less than 40% of the total costs for Brazil in the operations it participates in. Consequently, the country has to draw on domestic budgets, which require governmental allocation of funds for that specific purpose and subsequent parliamentary approval. Hence, it is not uncommon

that budgetary commitments to missions abroad are questioned by political actors or the broader domestic public given Brazil's own domestic issues, especially when taking into account the current economic downturn affecting the country. Third, there is scarce civilian and police participation, and female participation has been timid despite increases in the last years; a noticeable drawback for a country that supports multidimensional PKOs in its diplomatic discourses. Fourth, Brazil is currently the second largest debtor to the UN regular budget and, as of 2015, possessed a debt of US\$121 million to the organization's peacekeeping budget (Ninio, 2015). This constrains the country's ability to advocate for normative change and aspire to more influential roles in UN fora.

Given the prospective withdrawal of MINUSTAH by mid-2017,⁴ the above-mentioned challenges render future expressive troop deployment by Brazil uncertain. In fact, while the UN has been trying to convince the country to deploy elsewhere, the current political and economic turbulence at home poses further obstacles for significant Brazilian contributions in the near future.

Peacekeeping at the Crossroads

On top of domestic constraints in Brazil, the current international arena is marked by a mounting sense of disorder, with the presence of hotspots and increasing radical extremism, particularly in the Middle East and Northern Africa. This further contributes to placing contemporary operations at a challenging crossroads. The quantitative and qualitative expansion of UN peacekeeping in the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s has led to a series of under-achievements as well as an overload and fatigue in the UN system. In far too many situations, mismatches in terms of resources and capabilities from the very beginning end up posing considerable challenges for the effective performance and continuation of missions 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 apparatus 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 2015 (UN, 2015). Contribut-

ing 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 when 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 (primacy of politics) to the specific circumstances of each case rather than template-driven; (ii) operations should be designed to be able 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; Stamnes & Osland, 2016).

The momentum generated by the HIPPO report needs to be optimized 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 geographical 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 Brazilian foreign policy. As a consequence, the HIPPO report in many respects ended up reinforcing several of Brazil's interests and positions on the matter. Noticeable examples include the primacy of politics 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 caution of not incorporating counter-terrorism among the peacekeeping tasks.

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,⁵ 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 understandable and much-needed moves under current circumstances. However, in and of themselves, they fall short of promoting the interests and revamping 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, Brasília's proactive engagement with PKOs is crucial for a richer 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 the Navy, and 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 recessions 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.
3. The National Policy of Defense and National Strategy of Defense were both revised and updated in 2012 (see www.defesa.gov.br/arquivos/estado_e_defesa/END-PND_Optimized.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 emphasize that its participation should be based on national interests.

4. The latest report (31 August 2016) of the Secretary-General on MINUSTAH recommended the mandate to be extended until 15 April 2017 (see www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/753).
5. Full speech available at: www.itamaraty.gov.br/en/press-releases/14048-speech-by-minister-jose-serra-on-the-occasion-of-the-ceremony-in-which-he-took-office-as-minister-of-foreign-affairs-brasilia-may-18-2016.

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THE PROJECT

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