Brazil´s South-South Humanitarian Actions: Paradigm Shift and Domestic Consequences

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The high magnitude earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010, devastating much of the country's already fragile infrastructure, became the greatest challenge for the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in the country, the MINUSTAH. The tremor, which killed more than 316,000 people, with an equal number of wounded, also produced more than [600,000 Internal Displaced Persons (IDP)](#) and affected virtually the entire country, which is under foreign intervention since 2004.

At the centre of this complex situation, Brazil was the leader of the military component of the mission and thus responsible for coordinating the security actions in the country.

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With already 2,200 soldiers on the island, Brasilia sent, a few days after the disaster, 100 additional soldiers, justifying the increase as a "humanitarian effort". At the same time, the United States mobilized over 16,000 marines to Haiti, stating that although the decision could be inferred as a violation of the MINUSTAH mandate, the situation demanded this mobilization. This step was not well accepted by the Brazilian government: although not officially addressed, interviews conducted by the authors two days after the quake in Haiti demonstrated a clear and profound discontent on the side of Brazilian officials regarding the new scenario on the island. In this sense, Brazil and the U.S. were effectively in a soft contest to determine which country should determine the security policies on the Caribbean island.

Despite this dispute, one should not naturalize the profound change that this discussion represents to the Brazilian foreign actions. Historically, the country has been reluctant to any kind of international intervention, well represented by a constitutional provision that points out that Brazil should not interfere in other nations' affairs. Nevertheless, Brazil was, at that moment in Haiti, effectively discussing whether to increase its military presence on the Caribbean island. These new considerations started mainly in the government of President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva (2003-2010), with Brazil, thenceforth, pursuing a more participant position in international issues. Paradoxically, the country has maintained, to a large extent, the *sovereignist* discourse – making unclear, so far, how it will resolve the contradictory equation "Sovereignty vs. Intervention," even though some political actions may assist in this task.

The first major position relates to the way Brazil presents itself internationally. In the last years, the country has undertaken great efforts to be considered a differential member of the "Global South" – it has common challenges with developing nations, but at the same time is a growing economy, the sixth largest in the world, and a regional leader. This would provide, at least discursively, Brasilia with unique characteristics for humanitarian intervention, especially the ones performed by developed countries. These considerations are crystallized in the application of the "non-indifference" principle by Brazilian authorities: adapted from the concept developed by the African Union, it indicates that Brazil is concerned about critical problems of friendly nations and may intervene if the state in question accepts or demands help. This form of activism, allegedly, would be distinct from the classical intervention led by countries of the "North", since it is not being motivated by economic or geopolitical interests disguised as humanitarianism. The legitimacy of this argument is still dubious, but most importantly to the discussion proposed in this article is the centrality of this discourse as a justification for the recent Brazilian foreign movements.

Another point to be considered is the discourse that the Brazilian humanitarian actions are based on preceding domestic experiences. This is clearly perceived in Haiti, where Brazilian troops point out that the success of the mission can be largely explained by an alleged cultural proximity of the countries, facilitated by a Brazilian declared flexibility to deal with cultural differences. Moreover, the army uses previous experience acquired in humanitarian actions in Brazil, such as the construction of roads, bridges, wells and relief actions in natural disasters.

It is interesting to note, however, that the alleged similarities between the two countries have provoked unexpected consequences. The most controversial, both politically and socially, is the potential use of military experience acquired in the Haitian slums for

internal missions in similar contexts in Brazil. The involvement of the military in public security issues in Brazil is contentious – the recent past of repression against the "internal enemy" during the military dictatorship (1964-1985) is a sore point, present until today. Nevertheless, the military deployment has grown since the 1990s, with the participation of the armed forces in actions against organised crime, especially drug trafficking. This gradual increase reached a new level when two large sets of slums – *favelas* – in Rio de Janeiro, 'Alemão' and 'Penha', were occupied by the army in a concerted action with the local and federal police between December 2010 and July 2012. A significant portion of the troops who acted in the so called 'Pacification Force' were MINUSTAH veterans, and had been trained and deployed in the Haitian slums, like 'Cité Soleil'. This new scenario, namely the enmeshment of Peacekeeping training and internal security missions, raises new and important issues for further discussion.

For instance, one has to question the degree of coordination between these initiatives to comprehend if they express a new security policy in Brazil, especially on the subject of the use of regular military personnel to deal with issues of public safety. In this specific case, there would be a *dual employment* of the military – prepared both for multidimensional peacekeeping missions, such as the MINUSTAH, and for public security missions inside Brazil.

In this case, it would be necessary to analyse the impact of this potential militarization of public safety, especially when associated with a larger Brazilian activism on the international stage. This could represent a possible interconnection between domestic security policies and Brazil's new global projection, with potential impacts on Brazilian society and on the development of new management models related to conflict resolution initiatives.

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