

## Syria Shows Brazil Has a Long Way to Go to Become a Political Power

Written by Stacey Berger

Tuesday, 04 September 2012 12:04

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On July 20, 2012, Brazil's Foreign Minister, Antonio Patriota, announced the withdrawal of all Brazilian diplomats from Syria due to the intensified fighting and violence throughout the country. Though, for Brasília, this was a note-worthy step, it should not be regarded as a clear political move intended to condemn the Bashar al-Assad regime.[1]

While the situation in Syria worsens with each passing day, Brazil has yet to apply any sort of pressure on Damascus. Brazil certainly is a rising economic superpower, but the foreign policy dictated by Brasilia disappointingly indicates it has yet to achieve a similar status in the diplomatic arena.

When Brazil originally served on the 15-member United Nations Security Council in 2011, it abstained from voting on the first draft resolution condemning Syria, while 9 of 15 members of the council members voted in favor.[2]

Brazilian officials have provided various reasons as to why the government abstained from voting, one of which involves the concept of "Responsibility while Protecting."

Brazilian President, Dilma Rousseff, developed this notion to express concerns within the framework of the associated but substantially different "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine.

This concept espouses that Brasilia understands its responsibility to protect civilians in armed battle abroad, but must think of its own civilians first and foremost.[3]

Although it is a priority for Brasília to protect the highest interest of its populace, Brazil sees itself as rising into a role of global leadership, and therefore must face up to conflicts such as the one encountered in the Syrian uprising.

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And if Brasília truly wishes to see itself gain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council - a desire frequently heard in Brasilia - it will have to take a hard stance on Syria, especially because President Assad has committed a deplorable level of UN human right violations, "from arrests of political activists to torture and killings on a massive scale." [4]

The ability to strike a severe posture toward the Assad regime should come easily enough for President Rousseff, due to her history as a leading political adversary against Brazil's military dictatorship.

In 1970, the government jailed Rousseff for three years where interrogators tortured her on numerous occasions. Despite her harsh personal experiences, Rousseff still claims to be unashamed of her past as a guerrilla. [5][6]

Therefore, Rousseff, due to this evolutionary background, does not seem like the leader that would readily shirk from conflict, particularly when a possible outcome could relate directly to Brazil's strategic interests. Yet, Rousseff first introduced the "Responsibility while Protecting" concept, and then has adhered to the policy of silence. [7]

Alongside the notion of "Responsibility while Protecting," some Latin American experts have justified Brazil's abstention on the Syrian vote by claiming the draft resolution will lead to foreign intervention. Regarding Syria, this type of direct action has been off the negotiating table, as many worry that the vote can be seen as just another instance of imperialist motivation that might generate anti-Western sentiments and conjure up a negative backlash from Russia and China, both important trading partners for Brazil. [8] But the Brazilian concept to preserve westernization in a noble light as well as to maintain strategic alliances pays the price of countless lives lost.

In August of 2011, the India-Brazil-South Africa dialogue forum (IBSA), composed of the nations with non-permanent seats on the U.N. Security Council in 2011, sent a delegation to speak with the Syrian foreign minister and president.

This discussion proved to be unfruitful and Nadim Houry, Deputy Middle East Director of Human

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Rights Watch, observed, "Their efforts at private dialogue have achieved nothing, and hundreds more Syrians have died in the meantime."<sup>[9]</sup>

Shortly after the Security Council vetoed the draft resolution, IBSA engaged in a Heads of State and Government Dialogue Forum on October 17, 2011, but failed to even mention Syria.<sup>[10]</sup>

As of now, Brazil has only reduced trade with Syria; the Brazil-Syria trade volume decreased by US\$ 178 million from 2010 to 2011. But this figure does not include the indirect trade Brazil has been able to maintain with Syria.

The president of the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce reported, "from experience, some Brazilian companies have sold to Lebanon, and from there, follow the goods to Syria."<sup>[11]</sup>

The Brazilian government has condemned the violence in Syria, but actions speak louder than words. In that sense, the most bold action Brazil has taken has been voting in favor on the most recent resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/66/253 B, which demands an end to violence in Syria, a completely unenforceable initiative.<sup>[12]</sup>

It is clear by now that Brazil has maintained nothing but a passive position toward the Syrian regime, but it still has a chance to prove itself as a rising global leader, obtain a spot on the U.N. Security Council, and help mend the desperately tangled situation in Syria.

In October of this year, the third ASPA summit, composed of the heads of state and government from South America and Arab nations, will be in Lima, a forum where a discussion on the catastrophic Syrian situation is scheduled to take place.<sup>[13]</sup>

Brazil should lead by example by cutting off all diplomatic and trade relations with the Syrian government, and urge other countries to do the same.

This would be a great chance to send the Syrian government a strong message about their

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human rights violations as well as positively influence Brazil's reputation as a serious rising power.

Notes:

[1] Jordan, Lucy. "Brazil Removes Diplomats from Syria." The Rio Times, June 24, 2012. Accessed August 16, 2012 <http://riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/front-page/brazil-removes-diplomats-from-syria/> #

[2] Charbonneau, Louis. "Russia, China veto U.N. resolution condemning Syria." Reuters, October 4, 2011. Accessed August 16, 2012. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/05/us-syria-un-idUSTRE7937M220111005>

[3] Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti. "Responsibility while Protecting: Elements for the Development and Promotion of a Concept." Paper presented to the U.N. Security Council, November 11, 2011.

[4] Mohamed, Saira. "The U.N. Security Council and the Crisis in Syria." Insights 16.11 (2012) Accessed August 16, 2012. <http://www.asil.org/pdfs/insights/insight120326.pdf>

[5] O'Shaugnessy, Hugh. "Former Guerrilla Dilma Rousseff Set to be the World's Most Powerful Woman." The Independent, September 26, 2010. Accessed August 16, 2012 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/former-guerrilla-dilma-rousseff-set-to-be-the-worlds-most-powerful-woman-2089916.html>

[6] Romero, Simon. "Leaders Torture in the '70s Stirs Ghosts in Brazil." The New York Times, August 4, 2012. Accessed August 16, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/05/world/americas/president-rousseffs-decades-old-torture-detailed.html?ref=world>

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[7] Foley, Conor. "Welcome to Brazil's Version of 'Responsibility to Protect.'" The Guardian, April 10, 2012. Accessed August 16, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2012/apr/10/diplomacy-brazilian-style>

[8] Spektor, Matias. "The Arab Spring, Seen From Brazil." The New York Times, December 23, 2011. Accessed August 16, 2012. <http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/23/the-arab-spring-seen-from-brazil/>

[9] "IBSA: Push Syria to End Bloodshed." Human Rights Watch, October 16, 2011. Accessed August 16, 2012 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/10/16/ibsa-push-syria-end-bloodshed>

[10] "Africa: India-Brazil-S.A (IBSA) Dialogue Forum Fifth Summit of Heads of State and Government Tshwane Declaration." All Africa, October 18, 2011. Accessed August 16, 2012. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201110190947.html>

[11] "Brazilian Trade with Syria Declines." Nuqudy, February 2, 2012. Accessed August 16, 2012. [http://english.nuqudy.com/Levant/Brazilian\\_Trade\\_wit-1065](http://english.nuqudy.com/Levant/Brazilian_Trade_wit-1065)

[12] "Brazil Slowly Moves Towards Condemning Syria Violence." Ya Libnan, February 10, 2012. Accessed August 16, 2012. <http://www.yalibnan.com/2012/02/10/brazil-slowly-moves-towards-condemning-syria-violence/> ; "General Assembly, In Resolution, Demands All in Syria 'Immediately and Visibly' Commit to Ending Violence That Secretary-General Says is Ripping Country Apart." Resolution Presented to the U.N. General Assembly, NY, New York, August 3, 2012.

[13] "Peru Will Host Leaders' Summit of Arab and South America Countries in October." Mercopress, August 11, 2012. Accessed 16, 2012. <http://en.mercopress.com/2012/08/11/peru-will-host-leaders-summit-of-arab-and-south-america-countries-in-october>

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