

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BRIEFING PAPER

CONFIDENTIAL

BRAZIL'S FOREIGN POLICY


Brazil is still searching for a suitable role in world affairs. Its foreign policy is a reflection of its aggressive pursuit of economic development and its aspiration to become a global power. It is already the strongest of what might be termed "LDC powers," with an economy (now the eighth-largest in the free world) that exceeds many developed countries in aggregate size.

Brazil's level of development as measured by other indices gives it a perspective very different from that of the developed industrialized countries, however. Brazilian diplomacy frequently uses Third World rhetoric and shares such goals as differential treatment in international trade and improved market access in the developed world for all LDCs. Brazil is acutely aware of its dependence on external sources for technology and investment capital. It sees concrete economic advantages in insisting on Brazil's LDC status and disadvantages in accepting the concept of "graduation."

The Brazilian mentality is shaped, however, by a sense of upward mobility. The Brazilian elite, both civilian and military, identifies culturally with the Western developed countries and seeks to join that group rather than challenge it. Nevertheless, Brazilians often accuse the US and other major powers of wanting to inhibit Brazil's rise to greatness.

This ambivalence, in addition to the right-wing, capitalist-oriented nature of the present regime, has kept Brazil from seeking to become a spokesman for Third World interests, despite its membership in the Group of 77 and observer status in the Non-Aligned Movement. Brazil usually votes with the LDC consensus in international organizations, but it stays out of the spotlight and has surprisingly little influence with other LDCs.

The peculiarities of Brazil's situation have led it to concentrate on bilateral relations, with a heavy emphasis on economic interests. In particular, Brazil has developed its ties with West Germany, Japan, France, and Great Britain as a counterweight to US predominance. Western Europe and Japan have begun to assume a dominant position not only in trade and investment, but also in technological cooperation (e.g., West Germany on nuclear development, France on space technology). This emphasis on multi-polarity has given Brazilian diplomacy an almost Gaullist cast.


(GDS - 2/15/85)

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

-2-

Energy questions will be a major factor in Brazilian foreign policy for some time to come. Brazil imports more than 80 percent of its petroleum, mostly from the Middle East, and is therefore very sensitive to increases in OPEC prices or disruptions in supply. Since the 1973 embargo, Brazil has assumed a distinctly pro-Arab position on Middle East political issues. Brazil also has paid increasing attention recently to Africa.

Traditionally Brazil has made relatively little effort to develop ties with Latin America, looking instead toward Europe and the US. Relations with its largest neighbor, Argentina, have always been characterized by a sense of rivalry and suspicion, though rarely by outright hostility. Brazil's smaller neighbors fear--perhaps not entirely without reason--that Brazil has hegemonic designs. Brazil's expansionism is mainly economic in nature, and it does not harbor territorial ambitions. In 1977 Brazil sponsored the Amazon Pact (signed in 1978) largely to reassure the seven neighboring states with which it shares this vast river basin that issues will be pacifically resolved.

Brazil participates--without great enthusiasm--in the major hemispheric organizations. This defensive attitude shapes Brazil's activities in most multinational organizations--rather than undertaking any bold initiatives, Brazilian representatives typically concentrate on defeating any measures that would inhibit Brazil's freedom to pursue its own interests in bilateral relations.

Despite the strict anti-communism of Brazil's domestic policies, it has good relations with most communist countries (Cuba being the most notable exception) and carries on a profitable (but still modest) trade with them. Brazil has, however, been a strong supporter of hemispheric security, and the Brazilian military has shown signs of increasing concern over Soviet activity in the South Atlantic.

The new administration is not expected to bring any fundamental shifts in Brazil's foreign policy. The Brazilian goal of grandeur will remain, and Brazil will retain the determination to acquire advanced technologies whether or not they have potential military applications, to pursue its trade interests aggressively and pragmatically, and to resist intervention in its domestic affairs.

Department of State
February 1979

CONFIDENTIAL