In Post-Conflict Haiti, Brazil Consolidates Its Status as Regional Actor

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Changing Landscape of Assistance to Conflict-Affected States: Emerging and Traditional Donors and Opportunities for Collaboration Policy Brief # 6

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Introduction

Haiti, the most fragile and poorest state in the Americas, is plagued by recurring political conflicts and a vicious cycle of instability and violence. After 30 years of a transition from dictatorship to more open and inclusive governance, the democratic process in Haiti remains very unsteady. Although the country adopted a constitution in 1987 that safeguards fundamental human rights and lays the framework for a liberal democracy, there is no widespread consensus among Haitian elites to apply the rule of law. Basic concepts that constitute the cornerstone of democracy – such as accepting the results of free and fair elections – seem hard to swallow for many political actors. As a result, political competition tends to go beyond the ballot box, spilling over in street protests and armed clashes. Politically motivated violence and recurring natural disasters are among the main contributing factors to insecurity, poverty, and destabilization in Haiti.

The end of the Cold War ushered in a new era of democratization in the Americas. Haiti was one of the countries that, having endured dictatorship and other forms of autocratic regimes, moved toward democratic forms of rule. In 1990, for the first time in history, Haiti elected a president through free and fair elections. However, only a few months later, he was deposed during a bloody coup that undermined the country’s democratic principles. These events led to the first U.N.-mandated peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations in Haiti.

To respond to Haiti’s multifaceted challenges, the international community, led by the United States and its Western allies, such as France and Canada, has provided development aid, implemented democracy-support projects, deployed peacekeeping missions, and provided humanitarian assistance during natural disasters such as the 2010 earthquake.
More recently in 2016 they have provided assistance when Hurricane Matthew devastated the southern parts of the country. Brazil also offered assistance, quickly bolstering its military presence following the earthquake (from 1,287 to 2,190 personnel deployed), and expanded humanitarian support. In other words, foreign interventions have become a fixture of Haiti’s history either to restore peace and democratic order or to provide development aid and humanitarian assistance. Haiti has become one of the major recipients of official development assistance (ODA) in the region.

Despite significant investments by the international community, Haiti remains a fragile state with low levels of human development and security. The U.S. is at the forefront of both development aid and security cooperation. On the one hand, this prominent American role underscores the solidarity between the two countries. On the other hand, it strengthens and amplifies the perception among Haitians that the U.S. has a hegemonic, unilateralist, and Western-based military interventions agenda and pursues its own geopolitical and economic interests.

Scholarly debates and informal discussions among Haitians reveal dissatisfaction with the lack of impact of foreign aid, especially following the 2010 earthquake. Organized groups within civil society – students, academics, unions, and farmers associations – express frustrations with what they perceive as Western dominance over a country that has proudly called itself the world’s “First Black Republic,” having won its independence from France in the 1804 revolution.

Calls for more multilateralism and changing the global order, decreased influence of the West, and strengthened ties with the Global South have resonated in Haiti. Brazil, for its part, saw these calls as aligning well with its worldview, strategic objectives, and global ambitions. Brazil has seen its involvement with the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) as an opportunity and a turning point to solidify its status as an important global voice. Brazil provided the largest number of troops and played a leadership role within the Mission. This involvement allowed it to flex its muscle as an influential regional actor, and be seen as a reliable partner in international security mechanisms and a consequential emerging donor.

This policy brief analyzes the motivations and the drivers of Brazil’s growing involvement in post-conflict reconstruction assistance. It also examines the consequences of these changing assistance patterns for reconstruction and peacebuilding mechanisms. Moreover, it identifies areas of cooperation, synergy, and convergence among traditional and emerging donors while pointing out areas of divergence as well as the value added of this new set of actors. Brazil’s pivotal role in the U.N. Security Council-approved peacekeeping mission to Haiti is at the center of this analysis.
Traditional Donors: Promoting a Western-based Agenda or Protecting Global Order?

Over the last 25 years, the U.N. has deployed five peacekeeping and stabilization missions to restore democratic order and foster peace and security in Haiti. Historically, the U.S., France, and Canada exert significant diplomatic and political influence on Haiti both in multilateral settings, such as the U.N. and the Organization of American States (OAS), and as bilateral partners. For instance, in 1994 the U.S. led a multilateral coalition, under the umbrella of a U.N. Security Council mandate, that deployed 20,000 troops (mostly U.S. military personnel) to re-instate President Jean-Bertrand Aristide after three years in exile. Former President Bill Clinton, flanked by U.S. troops, equipment, and heavy artillery, came to Haiti to re-install the president. This intervention followed a historical pattern of Western powers, led by the United States, having an influential voice in global decision-making regarding Haiti’s security and development. The mission that was underway when Aristide was returned to the presidency, UNMIH (1993-1996), and subsequent peacekeeping missions, UNSMIH (1996-1997), UNTMIH (1997) and MIPONUH (1997-2000), all followed the same pattern, with traditional donors playing a significant role both in the decision-making process and in terms of financial and troop contributions to the missions.

After the 2010 earthquake that destroyed the infrastructure and killed more than 300,000 people, the U.S. deployed 10,000 troops to restore security and strengthen Haiti’s ability to absorb humanitarian aid. As a traditional donor and Haiti’s most influential neighbor, the U.S. has been at the forefront of both development aid and security cooperation here.

However, this relationship with the West has been marred by Haitians’ suspicions that what is motivating the West is a desire to dominate and exploit the country. U.N.-mandated peacekeeping operations are perceived as a veiled strategy to exert political control under the guise of multilateralism. According to this perspective, development aid, security cooperation, and diplomacy are various pillars of a synchronized strategy of Western dominance on the global stage. The “3D Approach” (Defense, Diplomacy, Development) promoted by the U.S. and its allies reinforces the perception that self-interest – and not altruism – is the driving force of international cooperation.

In Haiti, there is widespread cynicism regarding foreign interventions in the form of international aid, peacekeeping missions, and humanitarian assistance. These are seen not as benevolent support but rather as “suspicious packages” of structural dominance and “Trojan horses” of modern-day exploitation. For their part, traditional donors express frustrations with the lack of progress in Haiti and blame the country’s elites for their lack of leadership in tackling deep-seated development and democratic governance challenges.
This sense of donors’ fatigue was clearly articulated after the earthquake as recovery efforts fell short. On the Haitian side, there is also a sense of recipients’ fatigue as Haitians blame traditional donors for the lack of a positive impact from foreign interventions.

This context creates a conducive environment for a new actor such as Brazil to raise its profile as a regional leader. As Celso Amorim, one of Brazil’s most influential foreign policymakers over the last decade, points out:

_Brazil was experiencing excellent international projection and this was an opportunity…..Hitherto, actions in Haiti had been led by the major powers, usually the United States…But no Latin American country or specifically a South American country had ever led such an operation. The U.S. difficulty in engaging militarily created the opportunity for Brazil and other South American countries to participate._

Emerging Donors: How Brazil Flexes Its Muscle in Haiti

_U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH): The Rise of Brazil as Regional Leader_

Brazil’s participation in U.N. peacekeeping missions dates back to 1956 when it took part in the first U.N. Emergency Force (UNEF I) deployed to the Sinai Peninsula. In the following years, Brazil participated in missions in the Congo (ONUC), Western Guinea (UNSF), Cyprus (UNFICYP), the Dominican Republic (DOMREP), and India-Pakistan (UNIPOM). Early on, Brazil’s participation in peacekeeping operations was very limited and low profile. This engagement, albeit modest and symbolic in most cases, nonetheless remained steady during the 1990s, with Brazil participating in 20 peacekeeping missions between 1990 and 2002. Overall, the country has contributed to almost half of the 60 peacekeeping missions that the U.N. has mounted. Brazil has also participated in all of the U.N. peace operations deployed in Haiti. However, its remarkable leadership within the 2004 MINUSTAH marks a dramatic shift in this country’s history of engagement in peace operations.

In June 2004, the United Nations deployed a peacekeeping mission (MINUSTAH) to stabilize Haiti in the wake of a worsening armed conflict that threatened to transform into a civil war. Brazil’s troops were the first to arrive. As a major troop-contributing country, from the outset Brazil took the leadership role of that mission by deploying the biggest proportion of troops (2,170); and sending top military personnel, including generals, to fill the highest military leadership positions. Brazil has also been providing financial contributions that went beyond traditional funding patterns of peacekeeping operations in which traditional donors usually focus on funding the missions and developing countries contribute troops.
Brazil’s robust participation in MINUSTAH signaled a dramatic shift in the country’s foreign policy and was a testament to its dedication to playing a consequential role on the global stage by making peace operations the centerpiece of its external strategy.

The numbers:

- Since the mission’s beginning, Brazil has led the military component of MINUSTAH. Eleven Brazilian generals have held the top military commander position between 2004 and 2017;
- Brazil has been the largest troop-contributing country, deploying 2,170 troops during the life of the mission;
- Brazil has deployed civilian personnel, including high-level experts in the fields of security and justice reforms, and agriculture;
- Brazil’s estimated financial contribution to MINUSTAH as of 2012 totaled $1.85 billion;
- Although the U.N. Security Council has ordered a drawdown of MINUSTAH, in August 2016 Brazil still maintained 981 troops, providing almost half of the total soldiers operating on the ground. The U.S. and Canada have five soldiers each.7

Motivations

Brazil is a vocal proponent of a more balanced global order that takes into account developing world voices, a founding member of BRICS,8 and a promoter of cooperation among countries of the Global South while highlighting the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations. The first joint statement of the BRIC countries issued in 2009 underscored this principle:

We underline our support for a more democratic and just multi-polar world order based on the rule of international law, equality, mutual respect, cooperation, coordinated action and collective decision-making of all states. We reiterate our support for political and diplomatic efforts to peacefully resolve disputes in international relations.9

Brazil refrained from participating in U.N. peacekeeping missions authorized under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter to remain true to its core beliefs that foreign interventions must not violate the sovereignty of nations. However, Brazil is one of the largest economies of the Americas with various strategic, political, and economic interests in the region. Its ambition to have a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council is not a secret. The motivations of Brazil’s increasing presence on the world stage may be found at a crossroads between South-South solidarity and its strategic ambitions as a rising power.
Peacekeeping as the Cornerstone of Brazil’s Foreign Policy

Under President Lula Da Silva (2003-2010), Brazil made peace operations a key pillar of its foreign policy strategy. The country even established two training facilities for civilians and the military in peace operations: the army’s Centro de Instrução de Operaçôes de Paz (CIOpPAZ) in 2005 and the navy’s Escola de Operaçôes de Paz in 2008. The 2008 National Strategy of Defense confirmed and solidified this stance by promoting armed forces training and participation in U.N. peacekeeping operations. Brazil’s policymakers and decision-makers at both the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the country’s strategic orientation doctrines and how Haiti’s mission fit into this strategy.

Brazil’s Approach to Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Haiti: “The Brazilian Way”

Brazilian authorities portray their participation in Haiti’s post-conflict reconstruction as “active solidarity” based on a policy of non-indifference. As an actor of the Global South, Brazil describes its actions in Haiti as altruistic and providing solidarity to a sister-nation without interfering in domestic affairs. It portrays itself as “the friendly hand connected to the strong arm” by combining “hard power” with “soft power.” This integrated approach is theorized in Brazil’s peacekeeping school, the Centro de Instrução de Operaçôes de Paz (CIOpPaz), where top military commanders and development practitioners forge a peacekeeping strategy composed of carrots and sticks. Haiti is the first country where Brazil applied this strategy. It was in full display at the beginning of the U.N. Mission there when decision-makers brought Brazil’s national soccer team, very popular among Haitians, to play as part of Brazil’s overall approach to gain Haitians’ sympathy and maintain peace through an instrument of soft power.

Furthermore, the following arguments were put forward to reinforce the legitimacy of Brazil’s actions in Haiti.

(1) Shared African Heritage: Brazil taps into ethnic and cultural elements of both nations to justify its solidarity with Haiti. According to former President Lula, Brazil’s involvement in Haiti could explained through the sharing of a common ethnic and cultural history stemming from an “African Heritage,” referring to his country’s ethnic composition of 7.6 percent black people and 43.1 percent mulattoes (mixed white and black). This element is crucial in differentiating Brazil from traditional donors that had colonized Haiti in the past and/or intervened “manu militari” to interfere in the country’s political process. Brazil’s foray into peacekeeping operations is portrayed as a natural course of action for an emerging power, a former colonized country willing to support a sister-nation.
(2) **South-South Cooperation**: South-South cooperation is a broad collaboration and solidarity framework among developing countries for interdependent and mutually supportive goals. The central tenets of this form of cooperation are the core principles of respect for national sovereignty, national ownership, and independence; equality; non-conditionality; non-interference in domestic affairs; and mutual benefit. As a proponent of a multipolar order and more diversity in international governance mechanisms, Brazil felt compelled to intervene in Haiti to demonstrate that its actions can back up its rhetoric as it claims more space in international affairs. Haiti offered a unique opportunity to exemplify its performance on the global stage.

(3) **Shared Security and Social Challenges**: Inequality is one of the characteristics of Brazil’s social fabric. Huge slums (favelas), populated by unemployed and at-risk youth, festered with violence and gang-related activities, share the same characteristics with those in Haiti (Port-au-Prince and in Cité Soleil). Brazil is able to relate to Haiti at this level and to strategize on common solutions to deal with these shared challenges. From the Brazilian point of view, the military mission in Haiti and operations in the favelas in Rio de Janeiro to combat crime are mutually reinforcing. Statistics demonstrate that 60 percent of troops deployed in the Maré Favela participated in MINUSTAH.\(^\text{16}\) The Brazilian approach puts the emphasis on the link between security and development. In accordance with this approach, Brazil advocated for more multilateral development aid to Haiti and increased its bilateral cooperation. Brazilian policymakers, combined this with a range of local initiatives, including investment in road paving, cultural activities and health care, aiming at creating a positive image of the Brazilian troops.

(4) **Peace as Social Justice**: Brazil advocates for an integrated approach to security and peace aimed at reducing inequality and providing economic opportunity. As a result, Brazil sees peace as social justice. According to this approach, militaristic interventions are not the way to achieve long-term peace. For security and peace to be sustainable, inequalities must be reduced and economic opportunities improved. This integrated approach, where social and economic programs form a nexus with military deployments, is how Brazil conceptualized its interventions. In order to implement this approach, Brazil has repeatedly called for a reinforcement of the MINUSTAH mandate with more focus on humanitarian assistance, state reconstruction, and long-term development projects.
(5) **Limited Involvement in Internal Political Affairs:** Brazil maintains a low profile and refrains from meddling in internal affairs. In keeping with the non-intervention principle that is enshrined in Brazil’s constitution, it does not weigh in publicly on internal political matters. This is also an effort to differentiate itself from the U.S. and other Western powers accused historically of meddling in Haitian political affairs. However, Brazil’s engagement in MINUSTAH was contentious from the onset because it is a departure from its classic stance to not support U.N. missions under Chapter VII.

Brazil has also been accused of being the vassal of the U.S. in Haiti – especially because the mission was viewed as being complicit with U.S. and French plans to ouster President Aristide.

Brazil took concrete steps to implement this approach by connecting its military participation in MINUSTAH with engagement in bilateral and multilateral aid initiatives. As part of this integrated approach, Brazil invested in social programs and invited NGOs that had experience working in the favelas to execute projects in the most dangerous slums of Port-au-Prince. The Brazilian NGO Viva Rio developed community projects with local groups to provide water, sanitation, road construction, and job-creating activities for at-risk youth in poverty-stricken communities.

The Brazilian approach is a notable departure from the traditional donors’ perspective on peacekeeping operations where troops and commanders focus mostly on security issues through the narrow prism of armed interventions. This divergence became evident during the first year of MINUSTAH in Haiti when in 2004 a Brazilian general refused to conduct military interventions in the slum of Cité Soleil to root out politically motivated mobs. General Augusto Heleno Ribeiro Pereira advocated for social programs and economic development projects in the poorest area of Haiti as part of an integrated solution to armed conflict. This approach frustrated the Haitian government as well as the United States and its Western allies who advocated for a “peace through strength” strategy.

In early 2005, MINUSTAH General Heleno Ribeiro Pereira testified at a congressional commission in Brazil that “we are under extreme pressure from the international community to use violence,” citing Canada, France, and the United States. He was later replaced as force commander of MINUSTAH by another Brazilian, Lieutenant-General Urano Teixeira da Matta Bacellar. A few months later, the general was found dead in his hotel room in Port-au-Prince. The death was considered a suicide even though the circumstances surrounding his demise have remained unclear. In 2010, a political crisis erupted when a Brazilian diplomat who led the OAS mission to Haiti accused the U.S., Canada, France, and MINUSTAH of meddling in the country’s elections and attempting to “nominate the President of Haiti.” These events brought into sharp relief the conflicting agendas and competing priorities between Brazil and the traditional donors.
Emerging Donors Versus Traditional Donors

Traditional donors have a long history of engagement with Haiti. The U.S. occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934 in keeping with the “Monroe Doctrine” and for approximately 50 years, USAID has worked in Haiti and has been active in all sectors of Haiti’s political and economic development. Since the 2010 earthquake, it has committed $4.2 billion in assistance to Haiti, including disaster relief and long-term development support. Beyond its colonial ties, France has maintained diplomatic relations with Haiti since 1825 and has been a key influence in the country. Two different presidents of France visited Haiti after the earthquake, signaling the high-level commitment to the country. Yet, despite their influence, there is a widespread perception, grounded in history, that these Western powers use development aid and peacekeeping operations as “soft power” to maintain their traditional relationship.

Despite their own geostrategic ambitions, emerging powers such as Brazil bring a different perspective to peacekeeping operations and development aid. Brazil brings a more “humane” and less patronizing face to cooperation and adds legitimacy to the international community’s interventions in developing countries. Both in tone and in substance, Brazil describes its role in Haiti not as an external actor that wants to impose its worldview or “fix” Haiti for Haitians but as a reliable partner that extends a friendly hand to share experiences in matters of peace, security, and development. Moreover, Brazil seemed to include all dimensions of security (from road safety to water and sanitation) as part of its organizational principle. Foreign interventions led by traditional donors are seen in countries such as Haiti as “invasions” to unilaterally impose Western agendas.

Brazil’s leadership role within MINUSTAH mitigates the risk of characterizing U.N. operations as a “covert Western-based mission” serving strategic interests of these countries. Even at the heights of controversy when U.N. troops from Nepal were deemed responsible for spreading cholera in Haiti, Brazilian leadership and other South American nations helped reduce the animosity between the U.N. and the host country. Furthermore, Brazil’s integrated approach tying security to development is a fresh paradigm in peace operations that resonates with poverty-stricken communities.

As the reputation of traditional donors is tainted with suspicion of self-serving foreign interventions and hegemonic ambitions, Brazil’s approach – at least its rhetoric – on non-interference and respect for sovereignty of nations is a powerful magnet that makes peacekeeping operations more attractive to the troubled countries of the developing world. As of 2011, the BRICS countries had contributed about 15 percent of civilian and military personnel involved in peacekeeping operations – with India, for instance, taking part in 39 operations with more than 100,000 soldiers. South Africa stands out as a major troop-contributing country in operations conducted in Africa.
Russia and China have veto power in the U.N. Security Council and provide substantial financial contributions to peacekeeping operations. The increasing importance of the emerging powers in global security mechanisms requires a structured approach of collaboration with traditional donors to develop cohesion and effectiveness on the world stage.

Suffice it to say, both emerging and Western powers have their own strategic ambitions on the global stage. Brazil is an emerging actor that tends to extend its reach beyond the region. “Brazil wants to make, as well as follow, international norms,” stated Monica Hertz from the Catholic University in Rio de Janeiro. However, competing priorities and strategies between emerging and traditional actors bring a refreshing mix of solutions and challenges to post-conflict reconstruction.

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4 See: https://minustah.unmissions.org/composition-militaires.


7 See: https://minustah.unmissions.org/composition-militaires.

8 BRICS: Acronym for the following countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
The BRICS are an informal mechanism of economic and political cooperation among these countries. They start coordination to influence decision-making processes on the global stage.


12 Ibid.


15 From Latin, meaning “with a military hand” or “using the force of arms.”


19 The Monroe Doctrine was a U.S. policy of opposing European influence in the Americas beginning in 1823. “America for the Americans” was a geostrategic orientation promoted by President Monroe to safeguard U.S. influence in the Americas.


22 BRICS and the Peacekeeping Operations; Research Group on International Politics and Multilateral Agenda; BRICS Policy Center, May 2011.

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