

Brazil Does Have the Potential to be a Great Power

By [José Miguel Alonso Trabanco](#)

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Global Research, February 05, 2009

5 February 2009

Almost every single major power in world history has emerged in the Eurasian landmass. So far, the US is the only exception. However, there might be a second exception because another country from the American Hemisphere might achieve great power status during the twenty-first century: Brazil.

China, India and Russia (all of them Eurasian) are quite often mentioned as the likeliest candidates to rise as great powers and sometimes, it is argued, they even have the potential to become superpowers. Nevertheless, as we will see, it is also important to take Brazil into account if one intends to scrutinize what the world balance of power will look like later in this century.

Brazil was originally a Portuguese colony whose economy depended on raw material exports. That situation has changed considerably. According to data released by the CIA World Factbook in early 2009, Brazil has already overtaken Canada as the second largest economy in the Americas. In fact, Brazil's GDP is now nearly 6.5 times larger than that of Portugal, its former colonial master. Moreover, according to Goldman Sachs and its BRIC research project, it is forecasted that, by 2050, Brazil will be the world's fourth largest economy, outranked only by China, the US and India (in that order).

Unlike many other Latin American countries, Brazil has developed an important industrial capacity as the result of its industrial policies. Brazilian businesses are involved in many areas like steel, petrochemicals, banking, telecommunication services, energy, computers, mining, automobiles, aircraft, ethanol and even submarines. Furthermore, Brazil participates in space research projects. Last but not least, its agribusiness sector is also internationally competitive.

All of the above has allowed Brazil to accumulate the world's seventh largest foreign currency reserves. Brazil's foreign trade seems to have been strategically managed to be as diversified as possible so that such commercial flows do not become dependant on a single market. Therefore, a list of Brazil's main imports and exports partners includes the United States, China, Argentina and Germany.

In geographical extension, Brazil is the fifth largest country as its territory occupies nearly half of South America. It possesses many deposits of strategic industrial minerals such as iron, manganese, uranium, bauxite, copper, lead, tungsten, zinc and gold. As far as energy resources are concerned, the country became energy self-sufficient back in 2006. Brazil is currently the world's fifteenth largest petroleum producer and its share in the international oil market could increase given that it has the second largest oil reserves in South America. Additionally, Petrobras has expressed that the country's offshore oil fields could contain more recoverable oil than previously thought.

The combination of a strong industrial economy plus a considerable reserve of key natural resources has allowed Brazil to nurture a military-industrial complex (including Avibras, Helibras and Embraer, among others) which manufactures internationally demanded products. One must never forget during the late phase of the Cold War, Brazil had a covert nuclear weapons program that was finally ended in 1985. It is important to highlight it because it means Brazil has both the technological capability and access to fission material in order to create nuclear weapons so if Brazil, at any point of the future, decides it has the political determination to produce its own nukes, it would be able to do so without any major technical obstacle.

Brazil's rise as a regional power has been made possibly not only because of purely economic factors. One must bear in mind that there are many geopolitical developments that have created a favorable context for Brasilia to achieve a great power position. Brazil has a privileged geographic position since it does not border any hostile powers or coalition thereof. The same cannot be said about China or Russia.

First of all, during the Bush Administration, Washington military and diplomatic resources were too concentrated in the Middle East (i.e. Iraq) and Central Asia (i.e. Afghanistan). As a result, the US did not pay a great deal of attention to Latin America. Nowadays, there are several Latin American regimes that have come to power during the last decade and they are not exactly very enthusiastic about aligning with US interests both in the region and beyond. This list includes Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and maybe even Paraguay.

The Obama presidency has indicated that it will put a larger emphasis in Central Asia and some of its top policymakers have stated that they will also address issues like the emergence of China and Russia. In plain terms, the aforementioned means that they will seek ways to contain the ascent of Eurasian powers. Therefore, Latin America will not be a top priority for the US in this current presidential administration either.

This Latin American power vacuum is an opportunity which Brasilia has seized to enhance its own power. Argentina used to compete with Brazil; both desired to become regional leaders. However, Argentina collapsed in the late 90's and is still trying to recover and regain its health. Argentina's post-crisis governments have decided that, given the circumstances and the growing disparity between both, Argentina is in no condition to compete with Brazil. Thus, they have decided that Buenos Aires will join Brasilia as a junior partner. From then onwards, both countries have been strengthening their mutual links in order to foster bilateral cooperation.

On the other hand, Mexico is too far away from South America so it simply cannot rival the Brazilian regional lead. Furthermore, the northernmost Latin American State has decided to seek a higher degree of integration with the US and Canada. As many analyses that have appeared in the Centre for Research on Globalization website have explained quite extensively, NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and the SPP (Security and Prosperity Partnership) are steps which will ultimately lead to the creation of a North American Union encompassing all three countries and such supranational entity will have its own currency.

In the last decade, Brazilian diplomacy has been careful, assertive and pragmatic. Brasilia maintains fairly good relations with major powers such as the US, China, Russia and Europe because it does not want to alienate any of them. One must always bear in mind that Brazil

wishes to keep its primacy in Latin America unrivaled so it can be successfully consolidated. In fact, Brazil's participation has been notorious in undertaking diplomatic efforts to defuse regional crises, which means that the South American colossus does not want its near abroad to be destabilized or Balkanized. Besides, one could stress Brazil is interested in expanding its sphere of influence a little bit beyond the Americas because since 1986 it has designated its own zone of interest in the Antarctic. In fact, Brasilia operates a permanently-staffed research facility there known as the Comandante Ferraz Brazilian Antarctic Base.

Brazilian foreign policy is more independent from the US than it used to be, This means that now Brazil is strong enough to endure American pressure; but not strong enough to challenge American power on its own. It is yet to be seen if it will do so in the long run. In fact, Brazil's status as an emerging power was acknowledged by foreign powers such as France and Britain when both expressed support for Brazil's claim to a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, which, needless to say, it is highly prestigious symbol of power. It is telling that, in his tenure as Secretary of State, Colin Powell declared that Brazil was a "solid candidate" to obtain such position.

Brazil has also pushed its agenda through an institutional framework. For instance, Brasilia has been busy sponsoring the consolidation of MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market) trade bloc which encompasses Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil itself. Venezuela has been accepted as a member but its entry still has to be ratified by the Brazilian and Paraguayan Senates. One of MERCOSUR's goals is the establishment of a common currency.

On the other hand, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) is a larger intergovernmental union which incorporates the largest trade blocs in the region: MERCOSUR and the Andean Community. This organization has served as a vehicle for Brazil to launch its initiatives. Brazil has suggested that UNASUR member States should advance toward the creation of a regional military structure that has been called South American Defense Council (SADC), which has been dubbed as the South American equivalent of NATO. Brazilian senior geostrategists have highlighted that the point is the creation of an integral alliance that would be able to ensure regional stability and security.

The aforementioned developments are important because they demonstrate that Brazilian gravitational pull has been growing in economic and geopolitical terms. One must never forget that economic wealth and (geo) political power mutually reinforce one another. Therefore, the parallel expansion of trade blocs and military alliance is by no means a coincidence. One can see this in:

- Europe, where EU enlargement and NATO expansion go hand in hand.
- North America, where Washington, along with its Mexican and Canadian allies, has tried to enhance regional integration via NAFTA, the SPP and NORAD.
- Eurasia, where Russia has been the cornerstone of reintegration throughout the post Soviet space through mechanisms such as Eurasec (Eurasian Economic Community) and the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization). The Russians and Chinese have used the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a platform to promote a closer collaboration between both.

Not surprisingly, the SADC proposal was not apparently very well received in Washington.

This was confirmed by official announcements concerning the US Fourth Fleet's operational reactivation. That fleet belongs to the US Southern Command and its focus area includes the Caribbean, Central and South America. It has ships, submarines and aircraft at its disposal. Brasilia and Buenos Aires officially requested detailed information regarding the fleet's specific mission in the region. Moreover, there has been much speculation about possible US plans to establish a more meaningful military presence in Colombia, America's staunchest ally in South America. It is even plausible to claim that the Colombian government will offer Washington a replacement for the Manta Air Base, whose lease will not be renewed by the Ecuadorian government when its current agreement expires in 2009.

Therefore, one can conclude that Brazil is indeed seriously committed to solidifying its role as a regional power, which would be a decisive step toward great power status. Thus, Brasilia will put a lot of economic, military, diplomatic and geopolitical resources into such efforts. So far, Brazil does not seek to challenge any other major power but it has made it clear that South America is its 'Near Abroad' so its main goal is to consolidate its primacy in the region. Consequently, one can assert with confidence that any list of twenty-first century geopolitical heavyweights that does not include Brazil will be incomplete.

***José Miguel Alonso Trabanco** is an independent writer based in Mexico specialising in geopolitical and military affairs. He has a degree in International Relations from the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Studies, Mexico City. His focus is on contemporary and historic geopolitics, the world's balance of power, the international system's architecture and the emergence of new powers.*

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [José Miguel Alonso Trabanco](#), Global Research, 2009

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [José Miguel Alonso Trabanco](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long as the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca