

President Lula's international ambitions and the Franco-Brazilian strategic partnership

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Rediscovering democracy after more than 20 years of military dictatorship (1964-85), Brazil had, until recently, neglected its defence policy. Times have changed, and South America's giant and natural leader is today seeking to build a modern military instrument, adapted to its own geopolitical ambitions, which can ensure the protection of its natural resources in Amazonia and the Atlantic. Such an aim requires the reconstruction of a defence industrial base and technology transfer in the areas of submarine and aircraft construction, which is the basis of the strategic partnership signed with France in late 2008. The partnership anticipates, in particular, bilateral cooperation in building a Brazilian nuclear attack submarine, the first of its kind in Latin America, and a real instrument of deterrence worthy of a major player on the world stage.

As part of its strategy of geopolitical synergy, www.diploweb.com is pleased to present this article, which first appeared in *Défense nationale et sécurité collective*, February 2009, pp. 86-93.

ON 23 December 2008 in Rio, President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, together with his Brazilian counterpart Lula da Silva, sealed the rapprochement between France and Brazil by signing a 'strategic partnership' agreement, of which the first expression is the sale by France of some 50 transport helicopters and four conventional submarines. The two presidents had agreed to develop cooperation in the defence sphere during the Franco-Brazilian summit of 12 February 2008 at Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock (Guyana).

Military equipment sales and technology transfers

During his visit to Brazil, Mr Sarkozy was accompanied by a delegation of some 30 French business leaders, including Denis Ranque (Thales, military electronics), Louis Gallois (EADS, aerospace) and Jean-Marie Poimbeuf (DCNS, naval dockyards). The official bilateral visit concluded with the signing of arms sale contracts worth e8.6 billion, of which e5.2 billion to DCNS (notably for four conventional submarines, the conventional part of a future nuclear submarine and the construction of a submarine base), and to Eurocopter (50-odd EC-725 *Super Cougar* helicopters). [1] Other contracts are still to be negotiated (SM39 *Exocet* missiles and MU90 heavy torpedoes).

As Brasilia wanted, all these contracts come with significant technology transfer and offer considerable participation prospects for Brazilian industry. Unlike the United States and Russia, France does not balk at granting these transfers. 'I want Brazil to have an army, and it is France that will modernise and equip it', President Lula said to his French counterpart during their February 2008 meeting. In Lula's view, France is the only country ready to guarantee Brazil's independence by agreeing to share construction secrets.

The first helicopters will be assembled by the Brazilian firm Hélibras (in partnership with Eurocopter), and will eventually be entirely locally produced. To achieve this, Brazil plans to build a turbine factory in Rio and units for the manufacture of other components in São Paulo and in the south. It should be noted that Brazil is the sole helicopter manufacturer in Latin America. The naval element of the agreement will be for the benefit of DCNS and its local civil

engineering partner Odebrecht, as well as for Thales for the sonar, MBDA for the missiles and Sagem for the optronics. As with the helicopters, submarine assembly will be carried out in Brazil.

Brazil's new defence strategy

Brazil's new international standing requires the country to adopt a revised posture in defence matters. Brazil is faced with new challenges that imply new responsibilities. The Portuguese-speaking giant has decided to implement a new national strategic defence plan that will include a significant increase to the budget (in 2007 Defence Minister Nelson Jobim obtained a 50 per cent increase in the defence budget for 2008).

The strategy is based on four pillars :

- . maintenance of Brazilian territorial integrity ;
- . armed forces participation in internal security operations ;
- . modernisation of military equipment and support for national industries ;
- . Brazil's projection on the world stage, and implementation of the resources needed for it to assume its role as an international actor.

An important issue is surveillance of territorial waters (3.5 million sq. km), particularly in the South Atlantic, where the nation's oil reserves are located, and through which most of Brazil's trade with the world must pass. Amazonia is also a priority strategic zone for Brazil. The Government intends to reinforce its military presence in the Amazon Basin. One aim is to protect natural wealth and the environment in the region.

The new Brazilian strategy foresees a 'robust' deterrent force, and the creation of highly mobile specialised tactical forces. To this end, the armed forces will have to gain new capabilities, with the acquisition of modern equipment. Under this heading, the intention is to acquire the latest generation of combat aircraft, to be able to keep them in service over the long term. For the Navy, new submarines are needed for Brazilian power-projection and the creation of a 'private reserve' zone in the South Atlantic. For the ground forces, the accent will be on an increase in the number of helicopters to ensure greater unit mobility. This aspect is vital in a country that has borders with ten other countries and a seaboard of 8,000 km.

The strategic defence plan also covers reorganisation of the Brazilian defence industry (particularly Embraer, Avibras, Hélibras, Mectron, Imbel and Orbisat). Brazil wants to encourage national industry by developing its autonomous technological potential. To this end, Brazilian businesses will have to adapt to the demands of the armed forces in the equipment sphere. Permanent exclusion of the acquisition of equipment and technology from allied countries is not intended, but it seeks quite simply to help Brazilian industry develop to the point where it can compete with the best performing businesses in the relevant sectors. If purchasing from national sources is not possible, acquisition from abroad should, in exchange, include technology transfer.

For the South American giant, an important role on the international scene implies fuller participation in UN peacekeeping operations. At regional level, therefore, Brazil has taken command of the MINUSTAH force [2] in Haiti. Brazilian authorities would welcome an increasingly important role in such operations. A training school has been created in Brazil for this purpose, and the country cooperates, notably with France, in training for its soldiers in this area. This determination to cooperate with the UN is directly linked to the Brazilian candidature for a seat as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council.

Brazil is also seeking a regional defence grouping by developing the idea of a South American Defence Council. The concept is already under discussion within the Union of South American Nations (UNASUL). The Brazilian government would like the region's countries to have a forum dedicated to analysis and discussion of defence subjects. Such a forum would contribute to the consolidation of the continent as a peace and cooperation zone, and would confirm Brazil in its regional leadership role.

Nuclear submarines : an old dream of the Brazilian Navy

Brazil has recently discovered huge deep-water oil reserves, [3] and it wants to put these new explorations under full protection. The Brazilians need, therefore, an ocean-going capability that allows them to exert sovereignty over their economic exclusion zone (EEZ) in the South Atlantic, in conformity with the *Blue Amazonia* concept developed by the Navy ; [4] hence the interest in acquiring a nuclear submarine force, using a locally designed and manufactured reactor. [5]

The Navy's nuclear programme, set up in 1979 and dormant for many years for budgetary reasons, could at last be realised, to the Navy's great satisfaction. Brazil today is in favour of building a naval nuclear propulsion installation. LABGENE technology (Laboratorio de Geração de Energia Nucleo-Elétrica) could certainly become operational in the near future. The LABGENE project seeks to develop and build a nuclear reactor producing electrical energy. With suitable modifications, that would be used in a submarine propulsion system.

The originator of the *Blue Amazonia* concept, Admiral Guimarães Carvalho, former Chief of Naval Staff, revealed it in three articles published in 2004 and 2005. Faced with a government style marked by 'continental' vision, *Blue Amazonia* is intended to show that Brazil is also a maritime power, and this has implications for its economic development, its future in terms of energy resources, and its regional and strategic responsibilities. The discovery of offshore oil reserves in 2006, offering Brazil the prospect of oil self-sufficiency, encouraged the Brazilian Navy's belief in the pertinence of its views. As with *Green Amazonia* and its resources, the Atlantic Ocean and its exploitation require protection.

Until now, a tacit pact between nuclear powers had accepted the non-diffusion of nuclear attack submarine (SSN) know-how. But the lease of this type of submarine by Russia to India, and now the strategic alliance proposed by Brazil and accepted by France, opens the first door to an SSN export market. Before long, supply and demand could well coincide, notwithstanding certain risks. The big fear is of marine environmental damage, with more nuclear-powered navies multiplying the number of accidents. They are already reckoned in dozens, from simple collisions and radioactive leaks to dramas like the *Kursk* in 2000 and the *Nerpa* in 2008.

The new-generation combat aircraft acquisition programme

Brazil wants to develop an air force capable of defending its airspace : this is an effort in parallel with the development of its naval capabilities. The South American giant has called for tenders for the modernisation of its fighters, and will make its choice in the second half of 2009. The three competitors—Dassault with the *Rafale*, Boeing (F-18) and Saab (*Gripen* NG)—are supposed to submit their bids in February. As with submarines and helicopters, technology transfer could be the decisive factor. The American Congress has always been reticent on this issue. Paris, on the other hand, is ready to play the game, to the great satisfaction of President Lula, who does not hide his preference for the French aircraft. As for the new-generation *Gripen*, it has recently suffered a setback with Oslo's choice of the Lockheed Martin JSF. Excluding weaponry, this indicates a contract of e3-3.5 billion, in which Dassault would be associated with Embraer.

On 12 September 2008, Brazilian Chief of Air Staff General Saïto flew in a *Rafale* out of Orange. At this point the *Rafale* and the *Gripen* were best placed ; Saab, however, is proposing a plane that exists only on paper. Compared with *Rafale*, the *Gripen* is single-engined, with shorter range, basically less adapted to the vast spaces of Brazil. The contract envisages 120 aircraft : 36 in 2014, a packet in 2020 and a further packet in 2023.

However, the FX-2 contract was not discussed during President Sarkozy's visit to Rio last December. Some saw this as a bad sign for the *Rafale*, but others prefer to note that the French President's next visit to Brazil is planned for September 2009, which corresponds to the period in which the final choice of the future Brazilian fighter will be announced. A coincidence ?

A victory in the end for *Rafale* would in any case have great symbolic significance for both countries, since Dassault has never, up to now, succeeded in selling this plane abroad.

French support for Brazil's geopolitical ambitions

Ranking fifth in the world for surface area and population, and tenth as an economic power with a GDP of \$US1,314 billion, Lula's Brazil has set itself two main objectives in its foreign policy : the maintenance of its decisional autonomy, and acquiring greater weight on the world stage.

Accordingly, Lula has injected dynamism into his foreign policy, particularly by developing South-South relations : deepening regional integration (chiefly MERCOSUR) ; reaching strategic agreements with the big emerging countries (India, South Africa, China) ; [6] rapprochement with the African continent on the basis of historic and cultural links ; [7] creation of the G-22 [8] within the WTO. At the same time, Brazil wants to belong to the restricted club of the Great Powers. It can only guarantee its autonomy by sitting at the negotiating table and by being active in multilateral organisations. This is why Brazil aspires to a seat as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council [9] and wants the G8 group of industrialised countries enlarged to include it. This desire to enter the restricted circle of 'First World' countries has led Brazil to invest in research in general, and in nuclear and space technology in particular. The same ambition has led it to signing the strategic partnership

agreement with France.

By rearming, Brazil is clearly announcing its wish to acquire armed forces worthy of a great power. The Lula administration is seeking to affirm in the military sphere the same ambitions that it has set itself on the international political and economic stage : that of a world player carrying weight in the world's affairs, both in the UN and, through the G22, in the WTO.

Brazil must also confirm its regional leadership role, and to do this it must be perceived by its neighbours as a genuine power. Until now, the Brazilian armed forces were regarded as obsolete, or, at least, as a poor reflection of the military weight that the country should have. The strategic partnership with France (and also with Russia) is thus part of Brazil's determination to make up quickly the lost time in that respect.

Conclusion

Much reduced and lacking in dynamism for many years, Franco-Brazilian military cooperation has flourished since Brazil's acquisition of the former aircraft carrier *Foch*, (now the *São Paulo*) and twelve *Mirage 2000* ; it should attain a new dimension with the signing of the strategic partnership agreement.

Brazil's determination to acquire the technology that that will allow it to build a defence capability that matches its strategic ambitions has led it to seek a partner able to respond to its requirements. France being one of the few countries not reticent about technology transfer, Brazil's choice would seem natural. France wants to help Brazil in its quest for the appurtenances of a great power, and has everything to gain by doing so : useful arms contracts, strengthened access to the major market on the Latin-American subcontinent, a friendly country in which to develop investment, the satisfaction of contributing to the strengthening of a democratic country with which it shares, in Guyana, its longest land frontier.

Taken overall, Brazil is showing its intention of becoming a power with full autonomy in the military sphere, and able to possess an arms industry of the first order in the 2030 time-scale. This intention features fully in the country's strategic plan. This new Brazilian position, does, however, risk leading to an arms race in Latin America, which could see Brazil opposed primarily to Hugo Chávez's Venezuela. [\[10\]](#)

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crises, hardships and regime changes that followed. Its readers in France all still share a common interest in defence and security, despite any differences in opinion, origins or political sensitivity. [See](#)

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Notes

[1] 'Paris va signer une importante vente d'armes avec Brasilia', *Les Échos*, 23 December 2008.

[2] United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti.

[3] The reserves are located off the Provinces of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro at more than 6,000 m, in carbonaceous rock known as the 'pre-salt layer', situated beneath a solid 'salt crust' about 2,000 m thick.

[4] The *Blue Amazonia* concept creates a parallel between the development of the *Green Amazonia* and that of the South Atlantic. It is also linked to claims for an extension of the Brazilian EEZ.

[5] Cooperation with France excludes the propulsion system.

[6] The IBAS initiative (India, Brazil and South Africa), also called the G-3, has been created with a view to defending multilateralism and promoting economic cooperation between the three countries.

[7] With a particular importance accorded by the Brazilians to the CPLP (Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries).

[8] A group led by Brazil seeking the progressive abolition of subsidies and aid that block access for developing countries to European and North American markets.

[9] The Europeans are divided on this : France, Germany and the United Kingdom are in favour, Italy and Spain against.

[10] Between 2005 and 2007, Caracas signed twelve arms contracts with Moscow, for a total of \$4,4 billion, buying 24 Sukhoi fighter aircraft, 50 combat helicopters and 100,000 Kalashnikov assault rifles.