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Taking the world by storm: Brazil's new global reach still faces many hurdles^(*)

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As President Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva gets ready to hand over Planalto Palace in a few months, he will undoubtedly leave behind a new Brazil, increasingly vocal in every global stage and with a strong desire to further participate in the international arena. However, questions remain regarding the level of sustainability of such foreign policy in the coming years, given the apparent rush in achieving it.

After eight years in office and although far from ideal, one cannot fail to recognize the staggering improvements in Brazil's economy and social cohesion which have, in turn, contributed to a growing sense of self-empowerment frequently translated into a more assertive foreign policy agenda.

In its own backyard, Brazil has gradually but unequivocally established itself as the leading voice while championing for the development and creation of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUL) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUL). Although the latter's viability has yet to be proved, and the former is currently stalled by a pending EU-trade agreement, both regional integration projects underline Brazil's profound wish to redesign and influence the political future of South America.

Its sights are also greatly set on Africa. Indeed, the opening of 17 new embassies and Lula da Silva's multiple visits to the continent only showcase the importance given to the development of South-South ties. By focusing on appealing issues such as fair trade, the fight against world hunger or climate changes, Brazil managed to grab most of the Third World's attention and, in that order, quickly became known as an international advocate for the causes of these countries – specially through the G20 podium.

Inherently, Brazil also continues to strive for the reform of international financial organizations – like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – while aspiring to a highly coveted permanent seat on the UN Security Council. With such overreaching goal in mind, Brazil even went as far as to send its first military contingent abroad since World War II to command the ongoing UN mission in Haiti.

But ultimately, Brazil's wish for a more significant role in international geopolitics is inevitably curbed by its over-willingness to reshape the current world order. Although the *status quo* created after the fall of the Berlin Wall mostly ignores the appearance of new seats of power, Brazil has essentially opted for a “shock and awe” approach, trying to express its newfound influence and alter the international decision-making process simultaneously – as its latest forays in the Middle East, and especially with Iran, demonstrate.

When coupled with other questionable ties – Cuba, for instance – such doubtful ventures end up contributing to the image of an anxious regional power trying to cope with more than it can handle. Whoever wins the upcoming elections will surely have his/her work cut out but, for the time being, Brazil is not just quite there yet.

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