The Case for Stronger Brazil-India Relations

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In 2050, India will be the third-largest economy on Earth, followed immediately by Brazil. In consequence of their growing economic dominance, ties between Brazil and India will inevitably reach previously unimagined intensity and scope much before 2050. Brazil-India relations reached a historic high point in April 2010, when President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh renewed, in a bilateral meeting in Brasilia, their governments' commitment to the "strategic alliance" between the two countries and expressed satisfaction at the growing bilateral relations. In the process of building stronger ties, Brazil has arguably played the more active role, with President Lula tirelessly working towards this endeavour. As his departure from political office looms at the end of 2010, Brazil-India relations are at a crossroads. As an uninspiring yet competent technocrat is set to succeed the charismatic, energetic and captivating President Lula, it is India's turn to actively strengthen the relationship which was largely insignificant only two decades ago.

More specifically, collaboration needs to focus on four issue areas: trade, defence of democracy in the developing world, large-scale knowledge sharing on issues of economic development, public health and education, and the democratization of global governance. Concentrating on these areas with determination and perseverance is all the more important because the case for stronger ties between Brazil and India is not an obvious one. Even in the age of globalization, the 14,000 kilometres that separate Brasília from New Delhi still form a formidable obstacle for creating more than a fair-weather friendship. Because of the distance, interaction between the two societies is still minimal. No direct flights or direct bulk shipping routes exist between the

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two countries; mutual interest is low, and notions about each other are marked by stereotypes. Yet, despite the distance and the lack of intuitiveness, Brazil-India ties have the potential to be highly beneficial for both parties in the areas named above.

India-Brazil relations are vastly under-explored in both academic and policy circles,² largely because they have been insignificant until recently. In Brazil, the Lula government's decision to intensify ties with India has drawn criticism by many. Critics mostly pointed out that the weak commercial links between the two did not justify a political alliance, reflecting that Brazilian foreign policy has traditionally been dictated by trade links. Lula, on the other hand, envisioned a political alliance as a starting point, from which trade links would be systematically fostered.³ Both governments have used the past eight years wisely, but more needs to be done to seize opportunities, avoid pitfalls and potential discontent, and build an alliance that does not depend on personal friendship at the very top, as it was the case between Lula and Dr. Singh, the unlikely duo of an Oxford-trained economist and a former union leader who speaks little English. If Brazil and India are able to collaborate effectively and build a lasting partnership, they will play a major role in jointly shaping the twenty-first century.

Leaving the Past Behind

It is often forgotten that Brazil and India share, albeit indirectly, a long history. Pedro Alvares Cabral, a Portuguese explorer, landed on the Brazilian coast in 1500 on his way to India, and the scribe of the fleet described the find to the Portuguese king as valuable, mostly in the function of a stopover for the fleets bound to Goa, the Portuguese colony on the Indian subcontinent.⁴ The Portuguese king did initially consider Brazil useful and convenient for navigation, yet experience showed that the best procedure for India-bound ships from Portugal was to stop in East Africa. Brazil was therefore only used by ships which had been blown off course, or which encountered technical or logistical problems (such as a broken rudder or lack of drinking water).⁵ Still, the Portuguese ships allowed an exchange of plants between India and Brazil early on. The coconut and mango, both from India, were introduced in Brazil, and Brazil's manioc and cashew began to be planted in India.⁶ Although introduced much later, most of the cattle in Brazil today are of Indian origin.

Ties between Brazil and India remained largely insignificant during most of the Cold War. When, after gaining independence in 1947, the Indian government allocated spots for important allies' embassies along Shanti Path, the most luxurious street in New Delhi's diplomatic neighbourhood, Latin American nations were overlooked entirely. The region, including Brazil, was simply not on India's diplomatic or economic radar. For the first two decades after World War II, there was not a single trade agreement between the two. Until 1960, no more than 20 Indian visas were issued for Brazilians annually, most of them for diplomats. 8

Rather, what shaped the following two decades were the diplomatic tensions caused by the decolonization process of the Portuguese enclaves in India, principally Goa. When Portugal and India broke off diplomatic relations, Brazil came to represent Portuguese interests in New Delhi. Despite mounting pressure from India on Portugal to retreat from the subcontinent, Brazil staunchly supported Portugal's claim to Goa. Brazil changed course only in 1961, when it became increasingly clear that India would wrest control of Goa from an increasingly feeble Portugal, which faced too many internal problems to pose a potent military threat to India. Still, when Indian defence forces overwhelmed Portuguese resistance, the Brazilian government criticized India sharply for violating international law, and the Brazilian press castigated Nehru for his "war of aggression" that "mutilated Portugal". While Brazil tried to explain to India that its position was to be understood in the context of a long tradition of friendship between Brazil and Portugal, the Indian government was deeply disappointed that Brazil, a democratic country and a former colony, would support a non-democratic Portugal against democratic and recently independent India. The episode complicated ties significantly, especially because the campaign to integrate Goa into Indian territory was immensely popular among Indians.

In 1964, ties improved somewhat with the creation of UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development) and G77, where Brazil and India were able to frequently articulate joint positions. For example, both Brazil and India were highly critical of nuclear weapons early on, and both condemned the creation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1967, calling it an attempt to "freeze" the international power structure to contain emergent powers such as Brazil. Both countries supported the idea that rich countries should use the money not spent on arms to help developing countries fight poverty.

The "3 Ds" (disarmament, development, decolonization) represented an important aspect for their foreign policy.¹¹ In 1968, Indira Gandhi visited Brazil, showing that India was ready to move on towards a closer relationship.¹² Brazil and India also aligned often during trade negotiations in GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade).

Despite the apparent alliance, the geopolitical positions of the two countries were vastly different. As Brazil's former Foreign Minister Lampreia points out, this alignment was often spontaneous and coincidental, rather than planned.¹³ While Brazil was geopolitically tied to the United States, India turned out to be much more aligned with the Soviet Union.¹⁴ In 1976, a constitutional amendment was passed to make India a socialist republic.¹⁵ Ten years later, India unofficially invited Brazil to turn into a full member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to balance leftist radical countries, but Brazil declined and preferred to remain an observer.¹⁶ Throughout the decades bilateral ties remained minimum, and in 1990, less than 100 Brazilians lived in India.¹⁷

Seeing the Light

The end of the Cold War brought fundamental change to the geopolitical landscape, allowing Brazil and India to make a fresh start. At the time, India was undergoing a paradigm shift as it began to increase its international profile in the economic realm. Brazil's President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1994–2002) interpreted the end of the Cold War in a similar fashion, liberalized the economy and pragmatically decided to diversify Brazil's partnerships. While not abandoning traditional allies in Europe and North America, Cardoso carefully articulated and implemented Brazil's new global strategy, which involved stronger ties with other developing countries such as India. Cardoso visited India in 1996; President Narayanan paid a return visit in 1998.

President Lula (2003–2010) promptly built on his predecessor Cardoso's preparatory work and sought to institutionalize Brazil-India ties in 2003, when the two countries jointly led the developing world during the trade negotiations in Cancun, and when IBSA, a trilateral outfit with South Africa, was created. Previously, India, Brazil and South Africa had been known as G3, a group that had jointly decided to break the patent of an HIV/AIDS drug and to provide generic drugs to domestic patients. Only a little later, Brazil and India joined the G4 (consisting of India, Brazil, Japan and Germany) which made a

formal bid to enter the UN Security Council, a strategy that ultimately failed in 2005 due to African, Chinese and American opposition. Ties suffered after the signing of the US-India nuclear deal of 2005, in which the United States recognized India as a nuclear power. Brazil harshly criticized the deal. Aiding India's nuclear weapon programme, the Brazilian government argued, violated the NPT, which bans such help to any country not recognized as a nuclear power by the treaty. Brazil had signed the treaty and refrained from developing nuclear weapons. India, Brazil claimed, had disregarded the rules and was rewarded for it. Worse, India continued to refuse to sign the NPT (although accepting India to the NPT as a nuclear weapon state would have been unlikely anyway, since this would require the approval of all 189 signatories to the treaty).

Yet Lula was shrewd enough to not let the disturbance permanently damage flourishing Brazil-India relations and the two countries continued their project to strengthen ties. In 2006, Manmohan Singh was the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Brazil in thirty-eight years. After IBSA, the G20 in the WTO and the G4, the BRIC label provided yet another opportunity to engage. As Jim O'Neill's invention of the BRIC label turned even more popular, Russia invited the foreign ministers of Brazil, India and China in order to formalize the BRIC summit as a means to strengthen their international weight.²³ In 2009 President Lula, Russia's Prime Minister Medvedev, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and China's President Hu Jintao met for a BRIC summit in Yekaterinburg. A second BRIC summit followed in April 2010 in Brasília.

Managing Expectations

That does not mean that India-Brazil ties are free of problems. The two countries are exceptionally large, diverse and complex nations, so it is natural that they differ on many counts. India is a nuclear weapon state that has never signed the NPT; Brazil is an NPT signatory that resents and secretly envies India's entrance to the nuclear club through the backdoor. India is located in one of the most dangerous regions of the world, and none of India's seven neighbours (eight if one counts Sri Lanka) is a stable democracy. Brazil, on the other hand, is in a region free of military threats, which fundamentally shapes the way it sees the world.²⁴ This reduces the scope for collaboration in the security area.²⁵ Despite that fact that Brazil's Embraer is one of the most competitive producers of small jet aircraft, and that the Indian and Brazilian governments

are considering possibilities to engage in jointly developing military aircraft, Brazil-India security relations will, in the medium term, remain less significant than India's ties with Russia, which provides it with the majority of military supplies. In a similar vein, it is important to ensure that one party does not overestimate the other side's commitment. In his first Presidential speech in 2003, Lula mentioned India as "a priority", which indicated that his government might take ties with India more seriously than India did. Recent progress in India-Brazil relations cannot hide the fact that for India, which faces a plethora of geopolitical threats, ties with Brazil have clearly less strategic importance than its relations with Russia, China, or the United States, and this is unlikely to change over the next decades. Expectations should therefore be managed carefully and seen in the right context to avoid disappointment.

The Roadmap

While top-level summits and bilateral trade may have intensified, exchange on the civil society level is very low, and mutual ignorance of the other vast. Currently less than a thousand Indians live in Brazil. It would thus certainly be an exaggeration to claim that Brazil and India are "natural allies" or already enjoy a "special relationship" – the Indian government, for example, seeks to strengthen ties with all Latin American countries, such as Argentina, whose President Cristina Fernandez Kirchner travelled to India in October 2009 to strengthen bilateral ties and deepen technical cooperation. Similarly, Brazil seeks to strengthen relations with China, with which its bilateral trade volume is superior to that with India. In order to create lasting mutual benefits, both governments must do four things: boost trade, defend democracy in the developing world, promote large-scale sharing of expertise, and collaborate in the democratization of global governance.

Boosting Trade and Creating Synergies

Trade between the two countries remains small but has grown significantly over the past two decades. In the early 1990s, India actively sought new trade partners, and Latin America was identified as one of the regions where India was least present. In 2004, a trade agreement between Mercosur and India was signed, coming into force in 2009, but the agreement covers only 900 products, affecting barely 3 per cent of the products traded between India and Mercosur.²⁶ Recent discussions about expanding the list are important,

and a more sweeping liberalization between Brazil and India is necessary. Trade between the two grew from (US)\$0.4 billion in 1999 to \$2 billion in 2005, and to \$5.6 billion in 2009. Both Brazil and India had set the goal to reach \$10 billion of trade by 2010, a figure that is likely to be reached over the next years. Both governments have taken active steps towards boosting trade. For example, they launched the "CEO Forum", hosted by Petrobras President Gabrielli and Tata Group Chairman Ratan Tata, and the number of trade fairs has increased significantly. In September 2010, India's Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jyotiraditya Scindia met Miguel Jorge, Brazil's Minister of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade in São Paulo during a trade fair that sought to connect Indian and Brazilian businesses.

The economies of both Brazil and India are set to grow strongly over the next decades, and many industries offer room for collaboration. Indian companies have focused on investment and joint ventures in Brazil's IT, energy and pharmaceutical sectors. Brazil's expertise in agriculture could very well be used in India,²⁷ and Brazilian products such as soy and processed foods are in growing demand in India. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who as an economics student has studied the dramatic effects of the Green Revolution on India's economy, is aware of Brazil's importance for India's quest to take yet another quantum leap with regard to agricultural productivity. The Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) has started to engage with its Brazilian counterpart Embrapa, probably the most advanced research institute on agricultural productivity in the world. In the context of food security, Brazil could thus be of key importance to India.

Once Brazil is able to tap into its recently discovered vast oil resources, energy-poor India is likely to be an important customer. The same is true for iron ore, of which Brazil has the world's largest reserves, and India's Arcelor Mittal has already invested heavily in Brazil. The pharmaceuticals sector also provides opportunities for more collaboration. Indian pharmaceutical laboratories, such as Dr. Reddy's Laboratories and Ranbaxy, which are big exporters of generic medicines have formed joint ventures and installed factories in Brazil. One particularly interesting project is the joint venture between Brazil's Marcopolo, a bus manufacturer, and India's Tata Motors, which has facilities near Bangalore. This single example cannot, however, hide the fact that it is still difficult for small companies to make the leap to the other side of the world. There are fewer than fifty Indian companies operating

in Brazil, a number which is set to increase. One of the most notable is Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), which employs more than 1500 people in Brazil. TCS has noted that in Brazil it has difficulty finding professionals with both technical knowledge and fluency in English,²⁸ pointing to deficits in Brazilian education which must be overcome.

Defending Democracy and Human Rights in the Developing World

Brazil and India are two principal emerging powers whose citizens enjoy a human-rights abiding liberal democratic system. Both countries have been able to maintain such institutions and rights despite highly diverse populations, a lack of social inclusion, and high rates of poverty. In a world where an increasing number of national leaders look to China as an economic and political model to copy, India and Brazil provide powerful counter examples that political freedom is no obstacle to economic growth. Both countries must make use of their legitimacy more frequently, for example by jointly calling on Zimbabwe's dictator Robert Mugabe to respect the unity government with Morgan Tsvangirai. In the same way, Brazil and India can do more to coax the countless rulers who have difficulty in letting go of power to preserve the country's democratic institutions.

Why should it be the responsibility of Brazil and India to condemn brutal dictators like Mugabe? With their past as developing countries, Brazil and India have more legitimacy in the eyes of developing countries than industrialized nations in Europe and the United States. India and Brazil's leadership during the trade negotiations in Cancun has shown that they wield significant influence over many other developing countries. The two have traditionally been leaders of G77, and Brazil and India habitually have seen the world through a North vs. South, West vs. non-West, and colonizer vs. colonized prism. Both supported conceptions of international order that challenged those of the liberal Western World Order, such as the revisionist Third Worldism in India after 1948 and in Brazil in the 1970s and '80s. India opposed the United States more often in the UN General Assembly than Cuba did. The gap between Brazil and India on the one side and small developing countries on the other is certainly widening, and both countries' allegiance to G77 will be increasingly difficult to sustain. Yet, Brazil and India must use their ambiguous status and defend the values they so cherish at home. This does not mean that they should pursue an aggressive liberalist strategy employed

by the Bush administration. Rather, Brazil and India should show that respect for sovereignty and the rule of non-intervention, a treasured principle in both countries, is no excuse for closing one's eyes to ruthless dictators who use the threat of Western imperialism as a pretext to suppress opposition movements and human rights groups that fight for the very rights Brazilian and Indian citizens enjoy. Both Brazil and India habitually argue that they are reluctant to meddle in other countries' internal affairs. Brazil, for example, has not once criticized Venezuela's Hugo Chavez for slowly dismantling democracy in Venezuela, and India is similarly cautious to promote democratic rule in dictatorial Myanmar. Yet a closer look reveals that both countries are willing to engage if necessary. Brazil actively intervened in the political upheaval in Haiti, while India is deeply involved in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Both Brazil and India will need to make use of their legitimacy to provide international leadership more frequently.

Jointly Tackling Global Challenges

Aside from increasing bilateral trade flows and standing up for democracy and human rights in the developing world, India and Brazil need to understand that their collaboration is needed to tackle some of the most complex challenges, ranging from economic development and the combat against poverty to public health and universal education. In the process of their economic rise, the two countries have learned valuable lessons. Both have repaid their IMF debt early and turned into IMF lenders. Yet they still face enormous challenges. Forty million Brazilians and 300 million Indians still live below the poverty line, and social mobility remains low due to the lack of universal education. Yet successful approaches are numerous, as are opportunities to learn from each other. The creation of IBSA has been a step in the right direction to institutionalize such knowledge sharing. The trilateral platform has allowed political leaders to meet more regularly and technocrats to learn from each other to address common challenges such as poverty, HIV/AIDS and a lack of social cohesion and the provision of transport and energy infrastructure.²⁹ Brazil's knowledge in agriculture is sorely needed in India to increase productivity and help India combat rural poverty more effectively, which would eventually allow it to open its markets and compete internationally. India, on the other hand, can provide software expertise in Brazil, an industry that despite its size has not been able to export much. Other areas where the two can collaborate meaningfully are cash transfer programmes to combat

poverty, ways to foster social mobility and women's rights. The IBSA Working Group on Energy is also likely to provide particularly useful insights.³⁰ Brazil is one of the cleanest large economies on Earth, with most of the electricity it produces coming from hydropower plants, and it is bound to turn into a leader in the combat against climate change. Resource-hungry India, on the other hand, sorely needs to invest in its energy infrastructure, an area where Brazil can provide crucial knowledge. Yet more platforms are needed to help not only experts and businesses, but also to enable the civil society of the two countries to engage more broadly.

Universities are a good place to start. As early as 2002, the President of the Brazilian Council for the Development of Science and Technology headed a Mission on Biotechnology to India, and the two sides subsequently signed an agreement which generated some joint research in areas such as medicine, agriculture and bio-informatics. Yet despite numerous agreements, exchange programmes for students or professors are still rare. Lack of money is rarely the main problem, as there are many companies eager to step in. Rather, bureaucratic apathy is usually to blame. Student exchanges are difficult because there is no agreement to recognize credits from the other country. Visa rules are often too cumbersome. Brazil's visa waiver agreement with Russia showed that if there is enough political will, change can occur. A similar agreement is necessary between Brazil and India.

Towards More Democratic Global Governance

While it is difficult to assess the future potential of IBSA, it distinguishes itself from other developing-country alliances with its explicit commitment to the defence of institutions and democratic values. This unique feature can help IBSA to turn itself into a crucial vehicle to successfully push for UN Security Council Reform.³¹ Yet with or without IBSA, Brazil and India need to continue to forge a strong partnership in their quest to reform global governance and assure that today's international institutions adequately reflect the recent changes in the distribution of power. While progress with the World Bank and the IMF has been slow, Brazil and India have benefited immensely from coordinating their efforts. Any renewed attempt to enter the UN Security Council as permanent members should occur in unison and after careful joint deliberation.

What makes the case for Brazil and India to collaborate in the quest for

more democratic global governance so compelling is that despite the differing regional contexts, both countries' geopolitical interpretation of the world is strikingly similar. While India is more convinced of its power than Brazil, both regard themselves as important international actors who have not yet been granted adequate status and recognition. There is an overarching conviction across all political parties that India is destined to become a world power again.³² Nehru pointed out that India should be the world's fourth major power after the US, the Soviet Union and China. And, as one foreign minister declared in 1976, "Our size, our potential strength, our traditions and heritage do not allow us to become a client state."33 This aspiration to become a major power explains the importance of self-reliance under all Indian governments after 1947, even when these policies failed to bring positive results.³⁴ While less pronounced, a similar rhetoric is visible in Brazil. Most diplomats interviewed for this study characterize Brazil as a "middle power". However, the majority also affirmed that Brazil had "the potential to become a great power" and affirmed that they expected Brazil to be a great power by the middle of the current century.³⁵

As a consequence, both countries are united in their efforts to change the distribution of power in international institutions, yet conscious of the fact that there is a growing need to assume responsibility and a more active role in addressing global challenges. The two governments regularly point to the need for strengthening the participation of developing countries in multilateral financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, as well as in political institutions such as the United Nations. During the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh, for example, heads of government agreed to shift voting power within the World Bank, increasing developing countries' weight by 3 per cent. The Brazilian and Indian governments did not regard this as sufficient, but rather as a first step towards a long-term reform process. Prior to the summit, Brazil and India had asked for a bigger increase.³⁶ Their joint effort to reform global governance and to seek access to important decision-making forums thus provides a good platform for future collaboration. In the case of the World Bank and the IMF, their collaborative efforts are indeed more likely to pay off than if pursued separately. Some Brazilian analysts have suggested that aligning with India in the quest for UN Security Council reform hurts Brazil's chances to become a permanent member due to staunch opposition against the Indian bid by Pakistan.³⁷ Yet Brazil is unlikely to be more successful if it is to pursue a Security Council seat on its own. Brazil and India can bring

a lot to the table, and their cooperation is important as rising powers face the delicate task of articulating their vision of the world, assuming ever greater responsibility. If they are able to coordinate their positions through serious cooperation, they are sure to gain in the long term.

Holding Steady

The largest potential obstacle on the way towards stronger ties is the lack of political will of future governments. For the India-Brazil alliance to become sustainable, it must be made clear that strong ties between Brazil and India are in no way meant to be an anti-Western alliance. While this has never been a problem in India, President Lula's strategy of strengthening South-South ties has often been criticized as being motivated by an anti-American ideology. To assuage such fears, the Brazilian government may have to employ less confrontational rhetoric, which has often worried Western governments that Brazil and India seek to create a parallel system with "its own distinctive set of rules, institutions, and currencies of power, rejecting key tenets of liberal internationalism and particularly any notion of global civil society justifying political or military intervention." ³⁸

Furthermore, both sides need to be ready to strike compromises and sometimes forgo some profit for the sake of preserving the coalition.³⁹ Many Brazilian policy analysts have argued that their government was investing too much in its friendship with India and was getting too little in return. The perception about Brazil not getting enough benefits from the collaboration is partly true. After the trade negotiations in Cancun, where Brazilian-Indian leadership had helped the developing countries build a strong coalition,⁴⁰ Brazilian critics pointed out that India emerged as the winner, while Brazil had forfeited the chance to gain access to international markets for its highly competitive agricultural sector. While India's reluctance to liberalize trade in the agricultural sector is understandable, India must begin to regard its agriculture not as an obstacle but as a potential. While India faces water shortages which make increasing productivity more difficult than in rain-rich Brazil, it does not mean that one day India cannot turn into an agricultural powerhouse. If there is one country that can help India in this quest, it is Brazil.

Indian companies have already made moves to make use of Brazil's abundant resources. India's largest sugar refiner, Shree Renuka Sugars, owns

majority stakes in two Brazilian firms it acquired last November, and is considering additional investments in Brazil. Brazil is also a leading producer of sugarcane-based ethanol for cars, and could help India develop the alternative fuel. Increasingly dependent on foreign oil, while simultaneously emerging as one of the largest sugar producers in the world, India has a natural interest in the production of ethanol.

Brazil's efforts to fortify its relations with India are part of a broader goal to strengthen ties with other developing nations. South-South diplomacy has been a hallmark of the Lula administration. While it would be simplistic to reduce Brazil-India ties to the personal predilection of Brazil's current President, it is true that it is under President Lula that the Brazilian government's efforts to engage with India have reached a historic high. As Lula is preparing his political exit, it is India's responsibility to preserve his legacy and make the partnership last. Even if it will take time to implement the strategies indicated above, the potential mutual benefits of stronger ties between Brazil and India are too large to ignore.

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