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Why Brazil does not deliver weapons to Ukraine

The rejection of non-Western countries to follow NATO lines on Russia does not mean support for the invasion of Ukraine

During his state visit to China last week, the President of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, insisted once again that sending more weapons to Ukraine would only intensify the war and obstruct any prospect for peace negotiations. His remarks were met with disappointment and criticism among many in Europe who consider themselves Lula´s friends.

The war in Ukraine has revealed several hard realities. European leaders and opinion makers have shown that they are completely out of touch with the aspirations and perceptions of the non-Western world, known as the Global South. It should not have come as a surprise that countries such as Brazil, South Africa and India would not blindly follow the narratives and policies of NATO countries and their allies. Still, this doesn´t mean that they support the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Failing to understand Brazil's position

Immediately after the invasion, Lula – the leader of the opposition at the time – condemned 'the use of military force to settle territorial issues that should be resolved by negotiations'. Under his presidency, Brazil voted in favour of the UN resolution of 23 February, calling for the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops. And yet, Lula rejected German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's demand to send munition for the Gepard anti-aircraft tanks to Ukraine.

For Germany, the war in Ukraine means a 'Zeitenwende' – but not so for the Global South.

Germany is an important historic partner for Brazil, ranging from productive investments to environmental policies. At the end of January, Scholz was the first Western leader to visit Brazil since Lula started his new term. And still, it seems that Germany has failed to invest the slightest effort into understanding and

respecting Brazil´s position. Scholz should have known that Lula's answer could not have been anything other than a rejection – just like it was the case in the two other South American countries he visited during his trip, Chile and Argentina. There again, he asked in vain for support in arms deliveries to Ukraine.

The reason for this is simple: it is just not correct to refer to the positions held by NATO countries and its allies as 'the voice of the international community that respects a rule-based order'. Indeed, for Germany, the war in Ukraine means a '*Zeitenwende*' – but not so for the Global South.

No right to point fingers

And we don't have to go all the way back to the atrocities of the colonial time to understand that one can be quite sceptical about the high moral ground from which the Global South is being criticised for having their own views.

After all, we are talking about the same countries that had no problem in bombing Belgrade without a UN mandate; countries that extended the UN mandate to provoke lasting destruction in Libya; invoked Article 5 to invade Afghanistan, investing trillions of dollars to destruct the country, just to end up handing Afghanistan over to the Taliban again; and in the specific case of the US and the UK: the Iraq war, which was based on a lie to exploit the country's oil reserves and on the pursuit of this gave rise to the Islamic State. Did these countries, including Germany, not sell weapons to Saudi Arabia to support the war against the Houthi population in Yemen, which, according to the UN, provoked a huge humanitarian crisis with more than 300,000 victims? Why applaud Poland for its humanitarian reception of Ukrainian migrants and not point to its criminalisation of refugees from non-European countries? And so on, and so on.

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Let us look at the details. While Europe, after 24 February 2022, continued to spend around € 1 bn a day on buying petrol, gas and coal from Russia, countries of the Global South were criticised for not supporting its sanctions. India was blamed for taking advantage of the situation by increasing its imports of Russian oil at a discount price, while Western oil companies made record-high and 'immoral profits on the backs of the poorest people', as acknowledged

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by United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Not to mention the extraordinary gains for the US military-industrial complex. And how do you expect African countries to react to the post-invasion diplomatic efforts by European leaders to expand the continent's fossil energy exports after they had been told for several years that there would be no more financing for such investments?

Trying to understand the other side

Again, this does not mean that there is no understanding of the clear violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity which must be condemned – like Lula did on many occasions. But one should also not ignore the many mistakes that were made by the West in its relation to Russia since the breakdown of the Soviet Union. These do not justify the invasion, but these mistakes are necessary to take into consideration if we want a peace settlement.

Does anybody really believe that by sending more arms, Zelenskyy will be able to force the withdrawal of Russian troops from Donbass and Crimea? Or does anybody really believe that we can expect a regime change in Moscow? Is it fair and honest to give Zelenskyy – and the Ukrainian population that supports him – the impression that they will get support forever, whatever it takes?

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There can be no doubt that Russian diplomacy has shown great capability in mobilising in its favour the discontent of the Global South against the reluctance of the West to recognise the legitimate complaints and security concerns of Russia and the arrogance with which other views and attempts to come to solutions are met. At best, these views are thought of as naïve and not in line with what NATO considers to be the rightful international rule-based order – an order which, in the words of US President Joe Biden, divides the world between democracies and autocracies. The position of OPEC+ (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) is a good example of the success of such Russian diplomacy. Europe might insist that Russia has isolated itself, but from a Global South perspective this looks very

different.

Paradoxically, for all these reasons, the war in Ukraine has given new awareness in the Global South about the need to strengthen their cooperation and voice their priorities in the fight against poverty, hunger, climate crises (which affects these countries the most) and pandemics, among others. And in this, Europe must understand that, by the vast majority of the developing world, China is seen as a key partner – and that Russia is not seen as the biggest problem. It is in this context that more and more countries express interest in joining the BRICS and its New Development Bank.

The Eurocentric world is coming to an end; the US' dominant position is being challenged. More weapons to Ukraine will not stop this process.



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