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Brazil's Role in the Dialogue of Civilizations and in the World's Physical Economy

This is the edited transcript of the presentation of Felipe Maruf Quintas to Panel 4, "Classical Culture and the Dialogue of Civilizations," of the Schiller Institute's June 18–19 Conference, "There Can Be No Peace Without the Bankruptcy Reorganization of the Dying Trans-Atlantic Financial System." Prof. Quintas is Intern Professor of Political Science, Fluminense Federal University, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and a columnist for Monitor Mercantil. Graphics used in the presentation have been omitted.



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Brazil is the 5th largest country in the world in area, 6th in population, and it has the 12th largest economy in the world, accounting for nearly 2% of the world's GDP. Brazil is the leading country in MERCOSUR, a regional economic block among South American countries, and it is one of the members of the BRICS. Historically, Brazil has its own international policies, seeking to establish influence in its strategic environment, which includes South America and West Africa.

In terms of its civilization, Brazil is a synthesis of all mankind, since the Brazilian people come from a mixture of populations from every continent. The original source of the formation of Brazil is the miscegenation among Portuguese and Spaniards, Amerindians and Africans, later complemented by a great influx of Italians, Arabs, Japanese, Jews, Slavs and Germans. Ethnic apartheid never existed in Brazil, not even during the period of slavery. The broad racial and cultural mixture, created a *sui generis* social configuration which is very different from Anglo-Saxon multiculturalism—a configuration which didn't call for Lockean tolerance among different and separate people, but rather for the combination of different ethnic groups and cultural heritages in a new, typically Brazilian amalgam.

In that way, Brazil incorporates various humanities

in a civilization of its own which, given its nature, does not seek to get into conflicts with others, but rather establishes bridges for reciprocal dialogue and learning, as has always been Brazil's practice. The predisposition for dialogue and moderation arises from the typically Brazilian recognition of all people as equal human beings, and it has led historically, on the domestic front, to a greater institutional and social stability than that of other South American countries.

This has facilitated the process of industrialization of Brazil in the 20th century and its leadership in the continent. And on the foreign front, it has allowed for a conciliatory and defensive posture with the goal of ensuring the non-intervention of foreign powers in its territory and in the territory of neighboring nations.

Brazilian civilization has a large territory as a physical-geographic base, greater than that of the continental United States and slightly smaller than China's. Of the world's great nations, Brazil is the only one whose entire territory is available for prompt demographic and economic activity. Furthermore, it is a *physical* economic country par excellence, since nearly all energy sources are to be found in Brazil, such as oil, coal, water, uranium, sunlight, and wind. Brazil, a country which combines abundant sunlight and varied and extensive water resources, has vigorous biodiversity and a subsoil rich in various kinds of minerals. Brazil is potentially economically self-sufficient and, if it deepens its industrialization process, it could become a major power of the world's physical economy.

Brazil already has an admirable economic and industrial infrastructure, most of which was built by nationalist and pro-development governments during the 20th century.

In the decade of the 1950s, Brazilian engineering achieved the construction of a new capital in the deep

interior of the country, opening the doors of the *cerrado*, or tropical savanna, to economic development. This intensified with the creation in the 1970s of Embrapa, the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation, which transformed the acidic soil of the *cerrado* into cultivatable land, transforming Brazil into an agricultural power.

The state petroleum company Petrobras is one of the largest in the world and, until recently, was an integrated petroleum company, which included all upstream and downstream segments. Thanks to Petrobras, Brazil is a world leader in deep-water oil production. Brazil is the leader in the technology of deep-water oil production. Brazil has discovered the “pre-salt” deposits, which are potentially the largest oil deposits in the world.

So too, the recently and unfortunately privatized state electricity corporation, Eletrobras, was responsible for the construction of some of the largest hydroelectric plants in the world, such as Itaipú, Tucuruí, Paulo Afonso, and Belo Monte, and it developed the most extensive integrated electrical system in the world, with transmission lines covering all of Brazil. Brazil is the only continental country that has long-range transmission lines—not Russia, not China, not the U.S., which have more regionalized electricity systems. Only Brazil has that integrated electrical system, thanks to Eletrobras, thanks to the driving, nationalist actions of the Brazilian state.

The Itaipú hydroelectric plant is shared with Paraguay, and is an important factor in the development of that neighboring country and in South American integration.

Furthermore, Eletrobras also developed a bold nuclear program in the 1970s and 1980s, which led to the construction of two large nuclear plants which are strategically located between the two biggest consumption centers in Brazil, and, symbolically, in an area where there had been slavery and where slaves lived—thus representing the victory of development and national sovereignty over slavery. The Angra dos Reis nuclear plants, Angra I and Angra II, have a strategic, economic and also symbolic position: that of the triumph of development over underdevelopment, over slavery, over social inequity.

Furthermore, the Trans-Amazon, Belem-Brasilia and Cuibá-Santarém highways connect the less-populated regions of the country and ensure national integration.

Currently, with China’s help, a bi-oceanic railway from Peru to Brazil is being planned, which will integrate the South American continent and strengthen its commercial relations across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, which will be excellent for Brazil to broaden its trade opportunities in the Pacific and especially with China, currently the great physical-economic power. Brazil needs access to the Pacific in order to integrate South America and also broaden its opportunities for investment and trade with Asia, and especially with China, which is the center of the world’s physical economy today.

The development of the Brazilian physical economy will be fundamental for strengthening the BRICS as a new global geopolitical axis, for South American integration, and for the connection between South America and Africa, a continent with which Brazil has strong historical and cultural ties. In that way, Brazil will be a strategic agent in the expansion of the New Silk Road in the South Atlantic region, to make that half-ocean more dynamic, and free it from the power of the Anglo-Saxon imperial elites. Brazil can turn the South Atlantic into a new international economic center, overcoming its status as periphery that British and Anglo-Saxon imperialism have imposed on the South Atlantic over the centuries.

The development of Brazil, a country with an integrationist and conciliatory approach among peoples and cultures, would make it a protagonist in the creation of a new, more inclusive, polycentric globalization, one which is freed from the speculative and free trade commands of the neocolonial elites of the North Atlantic.

The world depends on Brazil, to the degree that Brazil arose by opening itself to the world and made possible, in the tropics, a more generous redefinition of Mankind’s domain. Imperialism is contradictory to Brazil’s civilizing character, since it is based on a hierarchy among peoples, which is contrary to the true practice of Brazilians, children of the union and the co-existence of different peoples.

Therefore, the development of Brazil’s physical economy, by strengthening Brazil’s national power, will not be a threat to the world. On the contrary, it is the condition for Brazil to be able to express itself internationally as a great arbiter and conciliator on behalf of world peace and the development of other countries, as a pole irradiating progress and the common good of the entire world.