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BRAZIL: IF DEVELOPMENT BRINGS POLLUTION, SO BE IT

Brazil's opposition to anything that hints at the development of ecological standards at the June UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment reflects deeply held fears that such controls can thwart its impressive economic growth and fulfillment of its destiny as a world power. Thus the Brazilians' overriding commitment to development is unlikely to be diminished by even the most cogent arguments for attention to environmental problems. At the Conference the Brazilians can be expected to vigorously lead those who consider controls a threat to their development, and they will continue to encourage whatever large-scale investment that will support their development goals, even if it means "importing pollution".

The Brazilian position. Although the June UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment is unlikely to recommend actions leading to obligatory international pollution standards, Brazil has nevertheless taken a strong stand against what it considers encroachments on its national sovereignty. Brazil's official policy, reflected in preliminary discussions, places developmental goals above pollution control and seeks

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to force the developed countries to assume responsibility for controlling pollution. While Brazilian attitudes toward pollution are not monolithic, those who make policy, such as President Medici, the Foreign Office, and powerful Minister of Finance Delfim Netto, are in close agreement and claim international standards will be used to keep the developing nations dependent. Others, such as some members of the weak Congress and the President of the Institute of Ocean Studies, admit the dangers of pollution, but typically argue for Brazilian solutions to Brazilian problems. Most believe that Brazil's environmental problems differ from those of the developed countries and that sanitation, nutrition, and health problems in themselves are forms of pollution which can best be overcome through the process of development itself.

Brazilian aspirations. The fifth largest country in the world, Brazil has historically viewed itself as a potential world power. Now that the Brazilians see themselves actually entering an era of greatness, they are also seeking a role of spokesman for LDCs and leader of the Latin American nations. With the most sophisticated industrial establishment in South America and dramatic disparities in regional development, Brazil has problems and aspirations common to both the developing and developed world. Given this duality, Brazilians look at the Stockholm Conference both as a threat to their development ambitions and as an opportunity to play a leadership role among the LDCs. Moreover, Brazil has little to lose by taking a pro-development position at the Conference. Such a position reinforces national aspirations at home and puts pressure on the developed countries

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to provide additional assistance to cover the costs of pollution control.

Controls a threat. Brazil's impressive economic growth has provided a major underpinning for the three military regimes in power since the 1964 coup. Although continued military rule is unlikely to be threatened unless the economy takes a drastic and unforeseen downturn, present leaders recognize that much of the passive acceptance that permits their current style of authoritarian rule depends on continued prosperity. This prosperity has been fueled in significant part by the growth of industrial exports which would be most vulnerable should international pollution controls be established.

Manufactured export growth averaged 50% in 1969 and in 1970. In 1964 the share of manufactures in Brazil's total exports was 6.5%; in 1970 it reached 16.6%. Furthermore, 52% of manufactured exports go to the US, Europe, Japan, and Canada, countries more immediately concerned with pollution problems and in a better position to absorb the costs of controls, especially since they are more likely to develop the necessary technology. Should these countries impose their own standards, the Brazilians might have to partially retool in order to retain their markets. Moreover, even though the additional costs of importing new technology may be low, the amount is uncertain and, in any event, could affect the competitive advantage of Brazil's manufactured exports.

Brazil may also be concerned about the possibility that international lending agencies may adopt environmental standards for projects they finance, thus adding to borrowing costs. As the largest customer of the

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Export-Import Bank and the IBRD, even minimal standards would add to Brazil's already large foreign debt.

Still another consideration may explain the Brazilians' intransigence on ecological issues. Part of the country's grand design of national development and defense includes the colonization of the Amazon region, in itself equivalent to the 10th largest country in the world. The ecological implications of disturbing the balance of nature through development of the Amazon region are not only difficult to judge, but appear an unnecessary distraction to a government that wants to incorporate the region into the national life and "counteract external threats and neutralize longtime foreign desires for Amazonia as a region to be enjoyed by others." Nor is Brazil interested in giving an edge to critics of its intensive hydro-electric programs, a sensitive issue with Argentina which is concerned with its down-river riparian rights.

Prospects. Given the Brazilians' commitment to development and tremendous confidence that their vast resources will preclude serious damage to environmental balance, it is unlikely that even the most cogent arguments for attention to ecological problems will make the Brazilians more cooperative. At the Stockholm Conference they can be expected to be aggressive advocates of national sovereignty and the responsibility of the developed countries to shoulder the burden of pollution control. The Brazilians may consider environmental factors in projects when the cost is minimal, especially in congested, developed areas like Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

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But generally they will continue to encourage large-scale investment that supports their development goals, even if it means "importing pollution." In the future, Brazil may even become a "pollution haven" for enterprises seeking to escape the restrictions of countries with controls.

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