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Air Governance and Humanitarian Protection at Borders: The Role of Brazilian Aerospace Power at the Intersection of Security and Human Rights

Juliana Araújo da Silva, Michelle Salgado Ferreira Arcúrio
University of Brasília

*** Corresponding author e-mail address**: juarauj1503@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The general objective of this article is to analyze how the Brazilian State articulates air security and humanitarian protection in its border policy, in order to preserve territorial sovereignty while guaranteeing the fundamental rights of human dignity protection. The focus on humanitarian protection is established through the analysis of migratory flows entering Brazilian territory, as the country is a primary destination for individuals seeking refuge and better socioeconomic conditions, particularly in the northern region.

The methodology adopted is qualitative in nature, focusing on the subjective aspects of the Brazilian government's response to the migratory phenomena it faces. The study examines the Brazilian Migration Policy, Migration Law No. 13.445/2017, and the guidelines of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), through the lens of national defense and security. It seeks to understand whether immigration flows in the country remain under the surveillance of the Brazilian Air Force (FAB), especially through the perspective of sovereignty and airspace control via Operation Ostium.

The expected results aim to highlight the role of the FAB in border security with a focus on humanitarian protection, aligned with the Social and Governance objectives of the ESG framework. In the Social dimension, the study seeks to emphasize how the FAB's collaboration with civil agencies assisting migrants and refugees (Federal Police and Ministry of Justice) could strengthen protection mechanisms for migrants along hazardous routes, particularly in the Brazilian Amazon region. The Governance pillar suggests mechanisms of coordination between military and civil institutions, analyzing normative coherence and the balance between security and humanitarian reception, contributing to the development of public policies.

Keywords: Border Governance; Migration and Refuge; Air Security; Aerospace Power; Integrated Public Policy.

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TITLE OF THE PAPER

1 INTRODUCTION

The growing complexity of international migratory flows, driven by humanitarian crises, armed conflicts, environmental degradation and socio-economic inequalities, has increased the challenges for states in terms of the safe and orderly management of their borders. Among the flows that demand special attention are asylum seekers, whose entry into national territory often takes place in precarious conditions, via irregular routes or in remote border regions. (JUBILUT, 2007)

Brazil, due to its vast territory and strategic position in South America, has been a destination for people fleeing persecution and seeking better conditions for economic development. In regions that are difficult to access, the Brazilian aerospace power, through the Brazilian Air Force (FAB), plays a decisive role in airspace surveillance, and can act both in deterring threats to sovereignty and in hosting and coordinating the logistics of humanitarian actions, in line with Operation Acolhida. (SANTOS, 2009)

The lack of land infrastructure, combined with the territorial extension of more than 17,000 km of borders, makes the aerospace domain a strategic dimension for monitoring and defending sovereignty. In this scenario, the FAB plays a fundamental role in detecting, intercepting and responding to these suspicious movements in the airspace, for example through operations such as Ostium, which aims to curb clandestine flights and protect Brazilian airspace. (SANTOS, 2009)

Santos (2009) states that the concept of crisis management has three stages: prevention, response, and recovery. Therefore, organizations' targeted efforts in crisis management must identify the problem and seek to solve it with a view to minimizing damage. Therefore, the integration between the axes of security and human rights must examine clear strategic guidelines that reconcile territorial protection, respect for international standards, and a proportional response to real threats to the sovereignty of Brazilian territory, so that a systematic attempt at crisis management is effective.

In addition, the current geopolitical scenario, with the strengthening of transnational criminal networks and the growing use of drone and unmanned flight technologies, requires a reassessment of the use of aerospace power as a vector of sovereignty and an instrument of migratory governance and public security. In this context, there is a need for interdisciplinary studies, between defense and migration, that propose integrated solutions capable of aligning the strategic interests of the Brazilian state with international commitments regarding the articulation in migration, security and defense of aerospace territory. (FAB, 2024)

Thus, the general objective of this research seeks to analyze the integration between the use of Brazilian aerospace power and migration policies, with a focus on air border security. This will be broken down by means of specific objectives that will be outlined in the investigation of the current role of the Brazilian Air Force in air border control operations; evaluation of the articulation between migration policies and aerospace security and defense strategies; identification of good international practices of interagency cooperation in confronting threats in air border zones; proposition of guidelines to improve the strategic use of aerospace power in line with migration control policies.

It is also worth noting that Brazil has incorporated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) into its legal system, Article 13 of which guarantees freedom of movement within the borders of each state. From the perspective of human rights, it is important to think about their scope and limits and how these elements can be balanced with state sovereignty (UN, 1948).

Chapter XVII of Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan puts forward the idea that despite the laws of nature (justice, equity, piety, etc.), a power large enough to guarantee people’s safety must be established, so that no one trusts in their own strength or ability to do justice. This conviction is legitimized

within the Brazilian state through the concept of sovereignty, i.e. the supreme power of a state over its territory, exercised through maximum authority within its borders (HOBBES, 1651, p. 59).

Furthermore, most of the migrants who enter Brazil and request refuge are in a vulnerable situation. Data from Refúgio em Números (Refuge in Numbers), Obmigra's report on refuge, shows that in 2024 Brazil received 27,150 requests for refuge from Venezuelans, which is a country that is recognized by Brazil for being in a situation of serious and widespread violation of human rights (GGVDH). (JUNGER DA SILVA et al, 2025, p. 17)

Recognizing these particularities of the Brazilian state makes it possible to guarantee effective measures to protect the dignity of the human person. Integrated actions between the civil and military powers in border control provide security for the entry of migrants, to the extent that it also consolidates the Brazilian state's control over border movements.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents the literature review with the aim of presenting the characteristics and concepts of the themes used in the research. The theoretical framework was structured along three thematic axes: (i) Contextualization of military action on the border (ii) Presentation of migratory flows (iii) The use of air power in border control to protect the migrant population. These elements are crucial to understanding the intersection between defense, human rights, and governance in contexts of migration and refuge seek.

Oscar Medeiros Filho (2020) introduces the concepts of border and frontier, which are essential to comprehend how states deal with territorial limits. While border refers to a legal and cartographic division, frontier represents areas of sparse population, limited state presence, and vulnerability to transnational pressures. This distinction highlights the theoretical challenge of state authority in peripheral regions and serves as a useful lens for analyzing the role of military forces in territories where governance is fragile.

From a critical security perspective, Didier Bigo (2002) discusses how migration management is often framed through processes of securitization. According to the author, the portrayal of migrants as potential threats generates logic of surveillance and control that shape public policy. This perspective enables an analytical contrast between measures focused on protection and those oriented towards restriction, providing theoretical tools to evaluate whether state practices align with human rights commitments or with security rationalities.

In parallel, the literature on forced migration emphasizes that migration should not be understood merely as individual displacements but as processes embedded in global structures. Stephen Castles (2003) highlights that forced migration results from inequalities and exclusions produced by globalization, demanding responses that transcend emergency assistance. This sociological perspective contributes to framing refuge not as an isolated phenomenon but as part of structural transformations in the international system.

On the legal and institutional dimension, the work of Renato Leão (2007) and Carolina Claro (2019) discusses the evolution of Brazilian migration policies, from the restrictive orientation of the Estatuto do Estrangeiro to the more human rights oriented Lei de Migração. Such analyses reflect broader international trends that incorporate principles derived from instruments like the Cartagena Declaration (Barreto; Leão, 2010), reinforcing the normative basis of refugee protection in Latin America.

Finally, the debate on the role of armed forces in humanitarian operations is informed by authors such as Rosa et al. (2014) and Santos (2009), who examine the logistical and organizational capacity of the military in responding to crises. These contributions underscore that military involvement is not limited to defense, but extends to support in disaster management and humanitarian logistics. From a legal standpoint, Jubilut (2007) highlights that the institution of

refuge in international law stems from the need to protect individuals against persecution and violence, reinforcing the principle of human dignity.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide the conceptual ground for analyzing how security, migration, and humanitarian protection intersect, and how states navigate the tensions between sovereignty, defense, and human rights.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 DATABASES AND SEARCH STRATEGY

The research used a qualitative approach, with documentary analysis of defense, border security and refugee regulations, as well as case studies of joint operations by the FAB and migration agencies (such as Operation Ostium). The bibliographic search was conducted in Scopus, Web of Science and SciELO, between January and March 2025. Additional official documents were retrieved from the websites of the Brazilian Air Force, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The search descriptors used (in english and portuguese) were: “airspace security”, “border governance”, “Brazilian Air Force”, “migration and refuge”, “humanitarian operations”. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to combine keywords.

3.2 INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

The following inclusion criteria were defined:

a) Publications between 2000 and 2025.

b) Articles in Portuguese or English

c) Direct relation to migration/refuge, border management, or airpower in humanitarian/security contexts.

Exclusion criteria included:

a) Articles not related to the Brazilian or Latin American context.

b) Studies with only technical/military descriptions and no intersection with migration or humanitarian issues.

c) Duplicates or incomplete records.

3.3 ARTICLE SELECTION PROCESS

The systematic review followed four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. At each stage, records were removed based on the exclusion criteria.

Stage	**Number of Articles**	**Description**
Identified in databases	85	Articles retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, SciELO
After removing duplicates	77	Unique records remaining after duplicate removal
Excluded after title or abstract screening	32	Out of scope (not related to airspace security nor migration)

Full text assessed	21	Selected for detailed reading
Final included in the review	9	Used in the theoretical framework and discussion

3.4 COMPLEMENTARY SOURCES

The research adopts a qualitative approach, of an exploratory nature, with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of how the Brazilian state articulates its policy of air security and humanitarian protection in border management. The choice of a qualitative approach is justified by the interpretative nature of the phenomenon under investigation, which involves relations between civilian and military institutions, political and normative decisions and the impacts on migratory and refugee flows.

The main research technique that will be used is documentary analysis, focused on the critical interpretation of articles related to both the theme and the Brazilian legal system. In addition to the articles proposed within each thematic axis, official documents from the Brazilian Air Force (FAB), the National Committee for Refugees (Conare) and guidelines produced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will be examined. Legal and infra-legal regulations related to the Migration Law (Law No. 13.445/2017), refugee policy (Law No. 9.474/1997) and national security and defense guidelines will also be included.

As a case study, the FA's actions on the border will be analyzed, with the support of civilian agencies, focusing on the strategic objectives, methods of execution, institutional partnerships and results obtained in the containment of illicit activities and the monitoring of migratory flows areas, especially in the Amazon region. In addition, the analysis of Operation Acolhida and Operation Ostium will serve as empirical objects and is justified by their inter-institutional nature and by the fact that they represent some of the main integrated aerospace defense and migration control actions of the Brazilian state in recent years.

The analysis will be guided by categories derived from the theoretical framework of the research, such as the concepts of border and frontier, migratory governance (with regard to the PNMRA), humanitarian security and the sovereignty of the Brazilian state. The information extracted from the articles, official documents and case studies will be organized through content analysis, seeking to identify patterns, contradictions and political implications in the actions studied. The cross-referencing between the different sources and institutional levels will guarantee the triangulation of data, strengthening the analytical consistency of the results.

3.5 THE ROLE OF THE BRAZILIAN ARMY ON THE BORDER

To introduce military operations on the border, Filho (2020) uses the concepts of border and frontier and their application to defense and security. While the border is the notion of a frontier in legal terms and delimited cartographically, the notion of frontier refers to the idea of a small population, where there is a lack of state presence.

The distinction between the concepts of border and frontier is fundamental to understanding the Brazilian Army's (EB) role in this region, especially in the Amazon, where international pressure is exerted due to its high level of natural resources, and also due to the presence of illicit flows in the region (FILHO, 2020).

Brazil's border, seen in these terms, demonstrates one of the weaknesses that the state faces in controlling the entry of migrants into Brazilian territory, from the moment that the dense and vast Amazon region becomes one of the obstacles to strategic human action. The presence of the Air Force on the ground could be one of the elements of humanitarian logistical control that corroborates the

capacity for humanitarian aid in the region. In addition to Operation Acolhida, which carries out its work by internalizing migrants crossing the border between Venezuela and Brazil, Operation Ostium of the Brazilian Air Force (FAB) monitors the airspace 24 hours a day (FAB, 2024).

The intersection between the civilian and military sectors, in favor of controlling the extension of the Amazon, can make it possible to better coordinate the intersectoral work of humanitarian response. The counterpoint to this theme is explored by Didier Bigo through an analysis of the securitization of the issue. The author states that controlling the entry of people at the state border can shape the perception of management strategies that justify restrictive policies (BIGO, 2002).

Therefore, the sensitivity brought to this subject will address the analysis of EB operations along the length of the country's border. Both Operation Acolhida and Operation Ostium will be studied in this research, so that integrated measures can serve to support the migrant population.

3.6 MIGRATORY FLOW INTO BRAZIL

The contextualization of the migratory flow will include the specialized literature, with special emphasis on the work of Luiz Paulo Barreto (former Minister of Justice) and Renato Leão (former General Coordinator of the National Committee for Refugees) entitled "Brazil and the spirit of the Cartagena Declaration", which presents the Brazilian State's dealings with the contexts of humanitarian crisis that give rise to refugee migration (BARRETO, LEÃO, 2010).

The article shows that the spirit of Cartagena, which originated from the ratification of the Cartagena Declaration (1984), has been incorporated into the Brazilian legal system since the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988, reaffirming the prevalence of human rights and the self-determination of peoples (BARRETO, LEÃO, 2010).

Furthermore, to corroborate the debate, Carolina Claro brings to light the distinction between the new Migration Law and the old Foreigner's Statute, which now has a vision in favor of human dignity in the distinction between the national population and migrants. The old Statute, created during the military regime, had the main objective of ensuring the sovereignty of the state. In light of the country's Magna Carta, and Brazil's participation in international agreements, the document's obsolescence was observed, and in 2017 Federal Law No. 13.445 was enacted, with a view to protecting migrants in the country. (CLARO, 2019)

The differentiation between the legal protection of migrants and refugees will be the cornerstone of this research, since refugees are people who migrate in search of protection, but not every migrant is a refugee. In the context of refuge, the individual is forced to leave their country of origin due to well-founded fears of persecution for reasons of race, sex, religion, political opinion or social group, or even due to a situation of human rights violations, in which they need to seek asylum in another country (BRASIL, 1997).

To this end, Stephen Castles states that the sociology of forced migration cannot exist in a context of isolation, i.e. it needs to be understood as part of globalization, from a social, cultural and political perspective. With regard to the context of migration within globalization, the author explains that there is no structured system of equitable participation in the global economy, society and politics, but rather a system of selective inclusion and exclusion of specific areas and groups, which maintains and exacerbates social inequalities (CASTLES, 2003).

From this perspective, it can be seen that forced migration causes social transformations that need to be thought of not just as a government policy, but as the structural cause of the problem. The sociological study surrounding forced migration needs to be incorporated into specific humanitarian aid tasks, addressing the root cause. (CASTLES, 2003)

3.7 THE USE OF AIR POWER IN BORDER CONTROL TO PROTECT THE MIGRANT POPULATION

Military action in humanitarian operations, cases of armed conflict and in response to natural disasters is not a recent event. Brazil's armed forces have played an important role in providing support during these operations, due to their organizational structure and logistical capacity for strategic studies. Paulo da Rosa et al (2014) summarizes the role of the Armed Forces (FA) in managing humanitarian aid logistics operations, analyzing their relationship with humanitarian agencies.

He explains that FA's main motto is the defense of order and national sovereignty, acting where humanitarian agencies are insufficient and limited (ROSA et al, 2014). This vision is one of the pillars of the scope of military action, and can be seen in Operation Acolhida, which has been assisting people in vulnerable situations since its implementation in 2018. (BRAZIL, 2025)

According to Rodrigo Santos (2009), organizational crisis management always involves different organizations with their own action capabilities, making the coordination of their activities an essential area of research in humanitarian logistics. Thus, with the aim of effective humanitarian assistance, it is important to mobilize all efforts to comply with practices that ensure the defence of human dignity.

Thus, the Brazilian Air Force's control and operation in the airspace becomes not only a defense and attack mechanism that ensures national sovereignty, but an essential element in humanitarian assistance logistics operations. (SANTOS, 2009)

The institute of refuge, as a political mechanism for humanitarian assistance, arose after the cruel events of World War II, seeking to ensure the dignity of the human person, providing minimum guarantees for human survival based on their essential rights. Therefore, human rights seek to consolidate the equal rights of peoples, without them interfering in the protection of others, or by virtue of the sovereignty of the state. (JUBILUT, 2007)

4 DISCUSSION

Based on the theoretical framework presented, this section examines how the Brazilian case illustrates the intersection between security, migration, and humanitarian protection. The concepts of border and frontier (Filho, 2020) are particularly relevant to the Amazon region, where geographic vastness, limited state presence, and transnational pressures converge. These conditions explain why the Brazilian Armed Forces, particularly the Air Force, have assumed a prominent role in monitoring, surveillance, and logistical support along aerial borders.

Operations such as Ostium, coordinated by the Brazilian Air Force (FAB), demonstrate the country's efforts to maintain continuous control of its airspace in regions vulnerable to irregular flows and illicit activities (FAB, 2024). However, unlike a purely securitarian approach, these operations intersect with humanitarian concerns when migration and refuge are involved. The FAB's capacity for rapid deployment and logistical coordination makes it an essential actor not only for defense but also for ensuring access to humanitarian assistance in remote border areas.

The case of the Operação Acolhida, coordinated by the Brazilian government in response to the Venezuelan displacement crisis, illustrates how civil and military institutions cooperate in migration management. While the Ministry of Justice and Public Security and the Federal Police are responsible for registration and documentation, the Armed Forces provide logistical capacity for reception, accommodation, and interiorization of migrants. This inter-institutional arrangement reflects an attempt to integrate security and protection, aligning with ESG governance principles by fostering transparency, cooperation, and respect for human dignity.

Nonetheless, Didier Bigo's (2002) critique of securitization serves as a reminder that the military presence in migration governance is not exempt from risks. The incorporation of the

Armed Forces into migration management can reinforce the framing of migrants as threats, potentially legitimizing restrictive policies. Thus, it becomes crucial to assess whether Brazilian practices, although innovative, truly balance humanitarian imperatives with security rationales.

At the normative level, the replacement of the Estatuto do Estrangeiro by the Lei de Migração (Claro, 2019) and Brazil's adherence to the Cartagena Declaration (Barreto; Leão, 2010) suggest a shift toward human-rights-oriented policies. Yet, the practical implementation of these norms depends on how institutions such as the FAB, the Federal Police, and the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) coordinate their actions in everyday border management.

The discussion also highlights the relevance of the sociological perspective of forced migration. As Castles (2003) argues, migration is not an isolated phenomenon but part of structural inequalities and exclusions. The Brazilian case shows that responses limited to immediate control or emergency reception are insufficient without long-term policies capable of addressing integration, social protection, and human development.

In this sense, the FAB's dual role—as both a defense actor and a humanitarian supporter—embodies the challenges of border governance in the 21st century. While its involvement enhances the state's logistical and operational capacity, it also requires constant monitoring to ensure that security practices remain aligned with international refugee law (Jubilut, 2007) and with the principles of human dignity.

Ultimately, Brazil's experience demonstrates both opportunities and dilemmas. On one hand, it allows the country to project itself internationally as a cooperative and ethical actor, enhancing its soft power in global migration governance. On the other hand, tensions between protection and control persist, raising the question of whether the Brazilian model advances beyond securitization or risks reproducing its logics under a humanitarian guise.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research sought to reflect on the role of the Brazilian Air Force in linking air border security and humanitarian protection, considering the complexity of contemporary migratory flows and the challenges imposed on the sovereignty of the Brazilian state, especially in the Amazon region. It was based on the premise that the defense of the territory cannot be dissociated from the protection of human rights, especially in the face of the scenario of forced migration and refuge that has marked the South American context in recent years.

The analysis showed that the FAB's actions, when coordinated with civilian institutions such as the Federal Police, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security and the National Committee for Refugees, can contribute not only to airspace control and national security, but also to guaranteeing a dignified and organized welcome for the migrant population. Brazil's experience with operations such as Acolhida and Ostium shows that the military presence can be used strategically to support humanitarian logistics and strengthen protection networks for the most vulnerable.

These actions become even more relevant when seen in the light of the ESG guidelines applied to the air sector. The social pillar is covered insofar as the institutional response is centered on protecting life, respecting human dignity and welcoming those fleeing persecution or situations of serious violation of rights. The governance aspect is manifested in inter-institutional coordination and the construction of integrated and efficient public policies, which link the defense apparatus to civil action and international regulations. Finally, the positive impact on Brazil's international image reinforces its role as an actor committed to the principles of multilateralism, humanitarian cooperation and the promotion of fundamental rights.

In summary, this reflection proposes that Brazil consolidate a model of border governance that is both sovereign and supportive. This balance between protection and control not only strengthens

the Brazilian state internally, but also enhances its international projection, enshrining the human rights protection regime

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