



Brazil as a Regional Power in Latin America or South America?

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- Brazil needs to balance its emerging regional and global ambitions in its foreign policy. This will be a defining challenge as the country embraces its regional responsibilities and role on the global stage.
- Relations with the United States remain paramount both in its immediate region and in its aspiration to wield greater global influence. The United States' position has to be considered in regional and global policy decisions.
- Regionally, Brazil should focus on South America. Latin America as a concept has lost whatever usefulness it once had.
- The emergence of Venezuela in its immediate sphere of influence provides an alternative that Brazil should respond to in its vision for the region. It should be pragmatic in engaging Venezuela while demonstrating assertive leadership that will carve a decisively non-radical path for the region and its relations with the outside world.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This briefing, part history of ideas, part history of international relations, provides historical background to Brazil's emergence as a regional power. It argues that Brazil never considered itself an integral part of Latin America which, for Brazil, generally referred to Spanish America only. But in the past 10–15 years South America has become a central concern of Brazilian foreign policy.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century Brazil considers itself, and is internationally considered, an emerging regional and global power — or at least an emerging regional power with global aspirations. But in which region? In Latin America, including Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, where for more than a century the United States has been the hegemonic power? Or in South America only? An examination of its historically complex relationship with the United States and Latin America helps us understand why South America has become the principal focus of Brazil's regional foreign policy.

THE ORIGINS OF LATIN AMERICA

The idea of *América Latina* has its origins in the 1850s and 1860s. A number of Spanish American intellectuals and politicians, many resident in Paris and Madrid, argued that despite the fragmentation of Spanish America into 10 republics at the time of independence — 16 by the middle of the 19th century — there existed a common Spanish (Latin) American consciousness and identity. This was stronger than local and regional nationalisms and provided a basis for unity and resistance to

the territorial expansion of the United States, Anglo-Saxon America. At the same time, French intellectuals argued that there was a linguistic and cultural affinity of Latin peoples in America for whom France was the natural leader and inspiration (and defender against US influence and, ultimately, domination). Neither the Spanish Americans nor the French thought that *América Latina/L'Amérique Latine* included Brazil.

At the time, Brazilian intellectuals agreed. While conscious of a common Iberian and Catholic background, they were aware of what separated Portuguese America/Brazil from Spanish America: geography, economic and social structures based on slavery, racial composition, political institutions (independent Brazil was an empire) and, above all, language, history and culture.

From the 1880s to the 1920s Spanish American intellectuals further developed the idea that *América Española, Hispanoamérica, América Latina*, now frequently called *Nuestra América* and, by those anxious to include Indian populations, *Indoamérica*, was different from, and superior to, Anglo-Saxon America, the 'other' America. The term *Iberoamérica* was sometimes used to include both Spanish and Portuguese America. But the great majority continued to focus on their own national identities and, beyond that, Spanish America, separate and different from the United States and Brazil.

BRAZIL AND SPANISH AMERICA

Few Brazilian intellectuals identified with *América Latina*, much less *Indoamérica*. They viewed Spanish America in an overwhelmingly negative light. Like their Spanish American counterparts, they were interested principally in the formation of their own national identity: the idea of Brazil, the roots in its indigenous peoples, the Portuguese and African slaves, the racial, social and cultural miscegenation. All these differentiated Brazil from Spanish America which, for them more than the United States, represented the 'other' America.

In its international relations, the Empire of Brazil did not identify with, or participate in, any of the Spanish American initiatives for

inter-American unity: Simon Bolívar's Congress of Panama (1826) followed by conferences in Lima (1847–48), Santiago de Chile (1856), Washington (1856), Lima again (1864–65) and Caracas (1883 — on the centenary of Bolívar's birth). The Spanish American republics, deeply suspicious of their huge Portuguese-speaking neighbour, were reluctant to include Brazil. And Brazil, with its immense Atlantic coastline, saw itself as part of the Atlantic world, its principal economic and political links with Great Britain. Relations between the groupings were limited mainly to the Río de la Plata where Brazil had strategic interests and fought three wars between 1825 and 1870.

BRAZIL, THE UNITED STATES AND LATIN AMERICA

The Brazilian Republican Manifesto of 1870 began with the famous words: 'We are of America and we wish to be Americans'. With the proclamation of the Republic in 1889, Brazil resolved its frontier disputes with all its South American neighbours and began to develop somewhat closer relations with Argentina and Chile in particular. At the same time, it pursued even closer relations with the United States. The two giants of the Americas, it was argued, had a great deal in common, which differentiated both of them from Spanish America. Spanish American governments generally condemned US interventionism in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and reacted with suspicion and mistrust to the US attempt to assert its economic and political leadership in the Western hemisphere through pan-Americanism. Brazilian governments were less critical of US imperialism. They gave their full support to the United States at all eight Pan-American conferences between 1889 and 1938. In the First World War Brazil alone followed the United States in declaring war on Germany. In the Second World War Brazil was by far the most supportive and strategically important of the US's southern neighbours.

It was the United States that first came to regard Brazil as an integral part of the Latin American region. This view evolved during the

1930s (with Roosevelt's Good Neighbour policy), the Second World War and the Cold War, and was in response to threats to its economic and geo-political interests in the Western hemisphere, initially from the fascist powers of Europe and then the communist Soviet Union. United States governments saw Latin America as a cohesive region in terms of geography, history, religion, language and culture and sharing similar economic, social and political structures. The differences between the 18 Spanish American republics and Brazil (except to some extent religion) were simply ignored. So were the huge disparities in size and population between Brazil and all the other countries in the region (except perhaps Mexico). And official US thinking influenced other governments and multilateral institutions. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, ECLA/CEPAL, established in 1948, was the first international organisation responsible for Latin America. Also influenced were non-governmental organisations, foundations and, not least, universities. In both the United States and Europe Latin American Studies (overwhelmingly studies of Spanish America, especially Mexico, with Brazilian studies invariably less well served) experienced rapid growth, especially after the Cuban revolution.

In view of the special relationship Brazil had enjoyed with the United States and the support it had given during the Pan-American conferences and the Second World War, Brazil was disappointed to be treated as simply one, albeit perhaps the most important, of the 20 countries of Latin America. Although Brazil remained on the side of the United States and the West in the Cold War, a more independent foreign policy emerged in 1961–64. It led to closer relations not only with revolutionary Cuba but with China and the rest of the underdeveloped third world, including the countries of Africa and Asia in their struggles against colonialism. Even under the 21-year military dictatorship that followed the US-supported military coup of 1964, there was tension and low-level conflict with the United States. Although it never joined the Non-Aligned Movement (it had observer status only), Brazil pursued independent third world policies often at

odds with US interests in, for example, the Middle East and Southern Africa, in particular Angola.

In Latin America, where it was clearly now the dominant country, its population grew from 35 million in 1930 to 170 million in 1980 and its economy at an average rate of 7% a year between 1940 and 1980. But it showed no inclination to play a leadership role, and certainly not the role of regional 'sheriff' as the US State Department sometimes envisaged. In 1980 Brazil joined the Association for Latin American Integration (ALADI). And a dramatic improvement in Brazil's relations with Argentina, its closest neighbour and arch-rival, after democratisation in both countries in the mid-1980s, led eventually to the Treaty of Asunción (1991) and the creation of the Mercosur trade bloc consisting of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay (to which Chile and Bolivia later associated themselves). Nevertheless, 40 years after the end of the Second World War Brazil could still not be said to have a deep engagement with the region. Although many Brazilian intellectuals, artists, writers and critics began to self-identify with Latin America, especially on the left during the military dictatorship, it is probably fair to say the majority — like Brazilians in general — continued to think of Latin America as signifying Spanish America. Brazil was not part of that grouping; its inhabitants were not essentially Latin American.

BRAZIL AND SOUTH AMERICA

The end of the Cold War brought economic and political change to the global order and to Brazil. The country consolidated democracy and first stabilised, then renewed, economic growth. Its presence and influence in the world grew significantly. Under the presidencies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002) and Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva (2003 to present) it has played an increasingly important role in North–South and South–South relations and Brazil has been a key player in discussions on global issues.

For the first time in its history, Brazil has actively pursued a policy of engagement, economic and political, with its neighbours. In practice, however, this has meant its South American

neighbours, not the Western hemisphere. Brazil resisted the United States agenda for integrating the Americas and not Latin America. This was a deliberate decision, reinforced by the fact that in 1994 Mexico joined the United States and Canada in North America and the United States has been prepared to allow, indeed has at times encouraged, Brazil to assume the leading role in South America. In 2000 President Cardoso hosted the first summit of South American presidents in Brasilia. At the third summit in Cusco in December 2004, during the 'Lula' administration, a South American Community of Nations was formed, consisting of 12 nations, including Guyana and Suriname. This community became the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) in May 2008.

CONCLUSION

Improved relations with its South American neighbours and the economic and political integration of South America have been the principal focus of Brazilian foreign policy

under President 'Lula'. And perhaps for the first time, Brazil has begun to think of itself as a regional power; with a good deal of hesitancy and ambivalence, not least because the rest of South America is reluctant to accept even non-hegemonic leadership, and because Venezuela offers an alternative Bolivarian project (ALBA). Brazil has assumed the role not only because it is in its long-term economic and strategic interests but because, it is argued by some in Brazil, regional power is a necessary condition for global power. But, again, the region is South America, not Latin America, although during the recent crisis in Honduras, in which Brazil played a prominent role, President 'Lula' did refer to *Nossa América Latina* or 'Our Latin America'.

ENDNOTES

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