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- 51 LULA'S LEGACY TO THE WORLD: BRAZIL ON TRACK  
*Pedro Seabra*



### Portuguese Journal of International Affairs

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**Chapters in books:** Manuel Ennes Ferreira, "China in Angola: Just a Passion for Oil?", in Christopher Alden, Daniel Large and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira (eds.), *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 295-317.

**Articles in journals:** Paulo Gorjão, "Japan's Foreign Policy and East Timor, 1975-2002" (*Asian Survey*, Vol. 42, No. 5, September/October 2002), pp. 754-771.

**Articles in newspapers:** Paulo Gorjão, "UN needs coherent strategy to exit from East Timor" (*Jakarta Post*, 19 May 2004), p. 25.

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# Lula's legacy to the world: Brazil on track

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By the end of the Cold War, the rise of a new, multipolar international order became a distinct possibility, with predictions abounding about which countries would hold/share the mantle of international responsibility and leadership in the near future. With the long announced end of the US's worldwide hegemony in sight – though not quite there yet – a number of frontrunners have emerged, recognizing an opportunity for more international acknowledgment and demanding greater participation in important decisions, often with far-reaching global consequences.

In this group, Brazil has consistently grabbed most international headlines, mainly due to the effusive and charming style of its President, Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva, who has been actively and incessantly lobbying for a greater Brazilian stance on the world stage for the past eight years.

By taking advantage of the favorable economic prospects of the last decade – which have allowed Brazil to grow into the world's eighth biggest economy – Lula has managed to inspire a new sense of dynamism and assertiveness in Brazilian diplomacy, pursuing an ambitious foreign agenda so as to reposition the country as an unavoidable vocal actor abroad.

Trying to break through/reform the established international order has thus become an unceasingly important goal for Brazil, who sees this as an essential step towards gaining greater foreign preponderance and transitioning from a middle-size regional power to a member of the international decision-making elite.

However, as the final months of Lula's Administration whittle away and he prepares to hand over the Presidency to his elected successor, the need for a careful reevaluation of his foreign policy grows exponentially. With a new chapter in Brazil's history about to begin, it is crucial to take a look back and assess what is left behind, in terms of actual accomplishments and setbacks for the South American giant and its global aspirations.

This article will therefore attempt to present the episodes and/or relationships that have characterized Brazil's foreign policy for the past years, seeking an in-depth understanding of Lula's contribution to his country's objectives. It will begin by analyzing certain widely recognizable achievements, often referenced by Lula's supporters as proof of his external vision and political cunning, followed by a few issues where Brazil's

posture and results have remained relatively ambiguous. It will subsequently end with the topics that have caused more concern amid the international community, allowing then for conclusions to be drawn as to Lula da Silva's actual legacy to Brazil.

## Reaching out

If we take into consideration the general objective of wider recognition by its foreign peers, it is possible to make sense of Brazil's investment in the development of multilateral forums that promote a more equitable representation of power, supposedly allowing for a better handling of common world issues.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Brazil's attendance of the G20. Indeed, the more traditional G7/G8 have long taken precedence over the G20 – forgotten in a myriad of international gatherings – but the Group suddenly regained a new focus during the financial crisis of 2008/2009, which quickly spread to the four corners of the globe, demonstrating the weaknesses of a globalized and intertwined economy. In order to overcome the daunting effects of this crisis, it was consensually agreed that any solution would have to incorporate the fast-growing developing countries – Brazil included – in the international overseeing structures.

Unsurprisingly, Brazil took this opportunity to further bolster its place in the new international architecture as it pushed forward in consolidating the G20 option, which now constitutes the preferred stage for concerted action on worldwide financing issues.<sup>1</sup> Brazil's gravitas was then met with a significant boost as the country became a leading voice for the remaining under-represented developing nations. Likewise, after many years of demands, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is finally setting itself up to complete a structural reform that will include shifting quota share by at least 5% from over-represented to under-represented countries by January 2011 – a move which will consequently benefit Brazil's position within the organization.<sup>2</sup>

But Brazil's growing role in international affairs is also evident in negotiations surrounding major controversial issues. Indeed, since the fifth ministerial World Trade Organization (WTO) conference of 2003 in Cancun, Mexico, Brazil has assumed the role of preferential spokesperson against the protectionist policies and trade-distorting practices promoted by developed countries, and by the US and the European Union (EU) in particular. Likewise, the Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change in December 2009 once again demonstrated Brazil's clout when, together with India, South Africa and China, it negotiated the final declaration with the US delegation.

The affinities with these particular countries were also skillfully displayed as mutual relations deepened – for example, by 2010, China had already become Brazil's main trading partner. In this evolving context, a particular acronym became well known to the

international community. First identified in 2001 by a Goldman Sachs report, the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) group would quickly arouse the interest and focus of its peers, for the alleged geo-strategic potential. Despite significant political, structural and economic differences among them, these countries “have come to embody twenty-first-century skepticism with markets and with institutions that date from the 1940s.”<sup>3</sup> The succession of official summits between their respective leaderships – the latest in Brasília on April 16<sup>th</sup> 2010 – and the overwhelming numbers of their economic force combined – for the past decade, the four countries contributed over a third of the world’s GDP growth<sup>4</sup> – have understandably brought their activities under a new light, with the world looking upon this gathering with some curiosity and apprehension.

Recognizing the wisdom of not putting all its eggs in one basket, Brazil also pushed for the development of the IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) forum, as another alternative to its growing alliance platforms – although with no direct competing interests between each member, as opposed to BRIC. Created in 2003, it has since then constituted “a platform for dialogue and exchange between ministries and non-government entities” and has fostered “a common culture of constructive cooperation”, thus allowing for an expressive political coordination between Brazil and its peers, with particular focus on economic development and social inequality – topics always close to Brazil’s own agenda.<sup>5</sup>

Such issues have likewise guided Brazilian foreign policy when it comes to improving what are generally called “South-South” relations. Africa in particular, has been a preferable recipient of Brazil’s attention as the current network of thirty-two embassies and two general-consulates throughout the continent, as well as the launch of an international TV station broadcasted to 49 African nations, demonstrate.<sup>6</sup> Lula himself managed to visit 25 of the 53 African states during his two terms in office, signaling the importance he gave to this relationship. Issues like sustainable development and political stability, the fight against hunger/poverty and debt relief – like Cape Verde’s US\$2.7 million and Gabon’s US\$36 million, for example – easily climbed to the top of the working agenda. In this context, Brazil’s approach to the Third World came to comprise different instruments, such as generalized technical cooperation in agricultural projects by the Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária (EMBRAPA), ethanol development incentives, copious financing with no strings attached or massive commercial loans by the Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento (BNDES) to national firms doing business in poor countries. In fact, the country has ultimately become one of the world’s biggest providers of help to least favored nations as recent estimates indicate that the value of all Brazilian development aid has roughly reached US\$4 billion a year, in line with similar contributions by typical major donors like Canada or Sweden.<sup>7</sup>

In return, most local states are only too eager to reciprocate, in appreciation for their generous Brazilian patron. Hence, the outcome is fairly predictable. In the words of Cape Verdean President Pedro Pires, during Lula’s last visit in July 2010, “Brazil is a

country that is respected and listened to, and its President is a great defender of Africa's interests".<sup>8</sup> Even more, by easily conciliating his presence in the consecutive World Economic Forum in Davos and World Social Forum, Lula also won widespread praise by successfully taking on the role of a hybrid herald between the North and the South, in the name of fairer and more sustainable global development for all.

## Dubious results

Among the reasons behind the desire of greater global recognition, one could cite Brazil's deep belief in its contribution to the stability and development of South America, which in a way allows the country to present itself as a natural leading voice for its neighborhood on international stages. Indeed, since he took office, Lula has always been a strong and fierce advocate of the benefits surrounding the region's multiple integration projects, understood as viable mechanisms to bring the continent together with a set of common goals.

From the start, the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUL) envisioned back in 1991, was supposedly granted full attention by Brazilian authorities who saw in its development the possibility of ascertaining Brazil's economic and trade preponderance in the region. By connecting these respective economies, MERCOSUL would thus in the long-run become a credible trade block, modeled on Europe's own integration path. Similarly, the desire for more political coordination and consultation led Brazil to push for the creation of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUL) in 2008 as a new intergovernmental forum that could bring all countries of the Southern continent to the table and thus defuse potential crises that could eventually arise.

However, despite Brazil's assumption that its backyard is 100% on board with its designs, appearances can be deceiving. Indeed, "in concept, MERCOSUL may be the foundation for Brazil's consensual hegemony project, but in practice, it is an increasingly fractious and hollow organization" since the Brazilian political class does not appear willing to invest the necessary resources to form truly independent judiciary and legislative bodies – an 'unacceptable' level of constraint to the country's national sovereignty, that many would wish to prevent<sup>9</sup>. The same could be said of UNASUL, still too structurally incipient to actually have a say in the grand geopolitical scheme, despite including some feasibly workable ideas – like the burgeoning South American Defense Council and its foreseeable role in constraining further escalations of regional feuds. Additionally, the occasional challenges to Brazil's leadership in these projects – for example, Argentina's discontentment with the region's over-dependence on the Brazilian market, or Venezuela's Hugo Chávez's constant attempts to hijack the spotlight for his

Bolivarian Revolution – also indicate that Brazil's exported image of South America's consensual champion is not quite so.

When it comes to its long quest for fairer representation in international decision-making bodies, results are equally questionable. When he took office, Lula pledged that the Itamaraty's ultimate objective would consist in securing a permanent seat on the UN's Security Council – the 'Holy Grail' for whomever seeks international status, like Brazil has incessantly done in its modern history<sup>10</sup>. Hence, the diplomatic maneuvers that followed throughout Lula's two terms can be understood in this grand design of seeking to accomplish such objective, an undeniable confirmation of Brazil's new weight in the world, if ever achieved. The participation and leadership of the United Nations Stabilization Mission on Haiti (MINUSTAH) in 2004 with 1.200 troops – the largest external military contingent since World War II – was considered the perfect token of Brazil's willingness to take on its share of responsibility in international security.<sup>11</sup> The fact that the country remained deeply committed with Haiti's fate, even after the devastating earthquake of January 2010, also brought on widespread international praise.

However, at the end of the day, the reality has hardly changed. Aligning with the so-called G4's (Germany, Brazil, India and Japan) unanimous demand has borne little fruit, and the 2005 report by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the UN reform – calling for the Council's expansion from 15 to 24 members – only instigated rival 'Uniting for Consensus'/'Coffee Club' group's active opposition, who preferred no change in the existing status quo.<sup>12</sup> Since then, prospects for a comprehensive reform have considerably diminished, and significant developments are not likely to happen any time soon – a true bucket of cold water to Brazil's global aspirations.

Additionally, the relationship between Brazil and the US also received particular focus. During Lula's tenure and against all odds – given Brazil's wish for international autonomy and their common background, often strained by the US's interference in South American internal politics – both countries managed to work closely on a number of bilateral issues. Discrete but effective cooperation on counterterrorism as well as a 2007 agreement to foster biofuels development – namely, ethanol research and promotion on a regional level – were considered the highlights of the Bush Administration's policy towards Brazil. Still, many hurdles remained. For example, Lula did not let the War in Iraq go unnoticed and swiftly joined the international outcry against the unilateral American decision. And even after Barack Obama took office, the fiery rhetoric was not toned down, as the overall US policy towards Latin America remained essentially unchanged. Episodes like the US-Colombia agreement in the summer of 2009 for the use of local military bases only increased mistrust within Brazil's political elite, who saw the new American Administration is only too eager to follow in its predecessor's criticized footsteps. But again, these tensions did not prevent the deepening of ties as both parts signed the first major military cooperation agreement since 1977 on April 2010, which included

joint military exercises and training, research and development as well as information exchange.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, trade persistently remained a thorny bilateral issue. Back in 2003, Lula helped torpedo the US-backed Free Trade Area of the Americas project and since then, both countries have frequently squabbled over negotiations surrounding the WTO's Doha Round. Bottom line, Brazil wishes an end to the vast American agricultural subsidies while the US, in turn, distrusts the weak Brazilian intellectual property rights regime and vies for more market openness.<sup>14</sup> Such opposing views reached their pinnacle when in March 2010, the Brazilian government announced trade sanctions against a variety of American goods in retaliation for illegal US subsidies to its cotton farmers.<sup>15</sup> Although the application of this decision was later delayed until 2012 in order to give an opportunity for bilateral negotiations, it showcases the level of disagreement both countries were able to reach.

On a lower level, relations with the EU during the last eight years have also followed the same lines. Both sides have come to recognize the importance of working on a bilateral basis; the EU even went as far as to sign a Strategic Partnership with Brazil in 2007, classifying the country as a "natural leader in South America and a key player in Latin America".<sup>16</sup> However, negotiations aiming for a trade agreement between MERCOSUL and the EU have stalled – despite the numerous attempts to reignite them, the latest during the 2010 EU Spanish presidency – essentially due to European agriculture subsidies which continue to prevent a final amicable result. The preferential relationships and strategic associations with some European countries – like Portugal and France, respectively – resulted in a minor consolation prize for both continents.

## Raising eyebrows

As Brazil entered Lula's second and final term, the country grew more confident in its growing international repositioning, which supposedly enabled it to hand-pick the situations in which it could choose to invest its newfound political capital. In that order, the Middle East conundrum with all its puzzling variables presented itself as a worthy challenge for the dully-energized Brazilian diplomacy.

Hence, Lula's forays into this 'geopolitical graveyard' soon followed and November 2009 proved a golden opportunity to achieve developments in that area. Indeed, in just one month, Brazil hosted the likes of Israeli President Shimon Peres, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in what was perceived by many as a serious attempt to tackle some of the world's most pressing security matters.<sup>17</sup> In March 2010, Lula himself toured the region while stating that "The



time has come to bring into the arena players who will be able to put forward new ideas. Those players must have access to all levels of the conflict: in Israel, in Palestine, in Iran, in Syria, in Jordan and in many other countries that are associated with this conflict.”<sup>18</sup> However, for all his efforts to present a new approach to the Israeli-Palestinian long-lasting conflict, he ended up producing virtually no concrete political results as it soon became clear that Brazil's novelty in this scenario would simply not be enough to achieve any kind of breakthrough on the ground.

Even so, the Middle East still had many hurdles to 'pick from' and as international pressure grew stronger and more adamant on Iran's nuclear enrichment program, Lula quickly saw it as another opportunity to 'parachute' once again into a extremely publicized standoff crisis between the West and the defiant Islamic Republic. In May 2010, together with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, both leaders presented a fuel-swap deal, claiming it as an alleged diplomatic breakthrough while seeking to convince the world of Iran's peaceful intentions. The remaining international community however, was not persuaded and promptly dismissed such agreement as another "stalling tactic" by Iranian authorities; for their part, Brazilian diplomats were soon branded as too "naïve", for believing themselves capable of addressing such complex matters, far from their own backyard.<sup>19</sup> In the end, it was consensually agreed that the political and diplomatic investment in this crisis hardly paid-off, as the following ineffectual negative vote on further UN sanctions later demonstrated.

But even close to home, Lula had to deal with one of Latin America's most volatile political crisis in years, more precisely in Honduras. Indeed, the controversial ousting on July 28<sup>th</sup> 2009 of former President Manuel Zelaya – accused of seeking to alter the Constitution in order to change term limits so that he could run for office again – brought back memories of political instability in the Southern continent. Nonetheless, Brazil did not lose time in aligning with the international community and condemning the overthrow of a democratically-elected President. It was, however, put in a sensitive position when Zelaya returned to the country on September 21<sup>st</sup> and successfully sought shelter at the Brazilian embassy in Tegucigalpa.

The political stalemate that followed was initially seen as a demonstration of Brazilian's resilience in the defense of the democratic process but swiftly evolved into a stubborn inability to grasp the situation on the ground. After the fair elections that took place in November and the swearing in of newly-elected President Porfirio Lobo the following January, Honduras began pulling out of its own crisis, trying to repair the state's damaged image in the international arena, since many countries were still hesitant to formally recognize the new government. But while the US, the EU, most of Central America, Peru, Chile and Colombia have since then reestablished ties with Honduras, almost a year after it all began, Brazil still resists such a move, growing increasingly isolated in its position. Beyond the political merits of the stance adopted during the Honduras crisis, the fact is

that Brazilian diplomacy ended up cornered with scarce support by its peers and with little options for the future, therefore accounting for a clear setback for Lula's leadership vision of the region.

Another disputable issue in Lula's exuberant presidential diplomacy was his ability to frequently overlook poor human rights track records and his often controversial rhetoric, which usually led to substantial international media headlines and jeopardized Brazil's credibility as a respectful actor. The list of examples abounds. For example, when on February 2010, Lula met with Raul and Fidel Castro, just hours after renowned Cuban dissident Orlando Zapata died from a prolonged hunger strike; while he avoided making any condemnation back then, in an interview a month later, he indicated a comparison between Cuban political prisoners and common Brazilian criminals, triggering a public outcry against his underlined support and connivance with the Cuban regime.<sup>20</sup> The outcome was similar when accompanied by then British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, he bluntly stated that the ongoing financial crisis was "caused by white men with blue eyes".<sup>21</sup>

The relationship with his Iranian counterpart also did not go unnoticed. When confronted with violent protests in Teheran, after the country's widely considered fraudulent election, Lula went on record, comparing them to mere disputes between football fans.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the fact that he was one of the first world leaders to welcome Ahmadinejad after such internal tumults, granted him accusations of lending legitimacy to an undemocratic and unfair regime, generally accused of gross human rights violations.

On a lesser note, Lula also took some heat due to his political and ideological affinities with rhetorically inflammable Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Although not always agreeing eye to eye on every single issue and often called to mediate Venezuelan-incited local disputes, for the most part Lula opted to look the other way rather than publicly calling out his trouble-making neighbor, thus limiting yet again his ambitions of consensual regional ascendancy.

## Conclusion

When taking into consideration all the above mentioned issues that, in one way or another, have characterized Brazil's foreign policy for most part of the last decade, one can undoubtedly spot Lula's driving will behind the majority of such developments, with significant effects on the country's image and stance abroad.

However, truth be told, since the end of the military dictatorship, Brazil's foreign policy has demonstrated a persistent consolidation around a certain number of 'pillars', consensually agreed upon by the political elites and protected/nurtured by

the consecutive governments. The tradition of multilateralism, the multiple integration options – albeit with a strong retention of national sovereignty – and the continuous search for international autonomy have all, at a certain point, been evident throughout the years, especially when combined with the idealistic deep belief of a ‘manifest destiny’ for a greater role of Brazil in the world. For many, it was only a matter of time until the country’s demographic, territorial, economic and commercial weight led to such an equivalent in international projection and responsibility.

In that sense, Lula’s Presidency wisely acknowledged such foundations and sought to galvanize its foreign agenda by demonstrating that the time for Brazil to take its rightful place in the world had indeed arrived. Moreover, successes on the internal front – remarkably, at a social and economic level – also allowed the allocation of greater resources and time to foreign matters while at the same time serving as further accomplishments that could support Brazil’s argument in its increased external ambitions.

Inevitably, concerns were bound to surface, especially when any middle-size regional power with a serious intention to disturb the fragile but prevailing equilibrium in the current international order is swiftly labeled a revisionist player, seeking to irreparably overthrow and destroy such balance. Still, one should not rush to put Brazil in that category.

True, under Lula, Brazilians have been hardly satisfied with the present international power arrangements and do not appear too keen on further delaying what they view as their overdue right to have a say in the world’s evolving architecture. But ultimately, Brazil’s desire is more reformist than revisionist as it does not explicitly reject the existing structures but rather the elite status that they embody and the unfairness of not representing the new global dynamics. The multiplicity and diversity of diplomatic endeavors should then be interpreted in this context. As Andrew Hurrell states, “being willing to be a part of global multilateral bodies is perfectly compatible with a willingness to challenge the status quo, to reject US-favored positions, and to favor new forms of global governance”.<sup>23</sup>

The ‘unofficial’ disagreements with the US in particular have also naturally fostered suspicions among Western capitals that Brazil would be reluctant to further align with any pre-defined consensus, especially in security matters. However, it should be equally noted that Lula’s diatribes directed at the US are usually better understood when looked at within the larger context of potential political gains in the internal home-front and in the pursuit of a multipolar framework, as any quarrel with Washington will inevitably raise Brazil’s public profile and further advance the accomplishment of its objectives.

Furthermore, it is important to apprehend that Lula managed to juggle many different roles and goals without assuming a belligerent posture or seeking a military dominion/hegemony over Brazil’s surrounding neighborhood. On the contrary, despite great investments towards improving the country’s defense capabilities<sup>24</sup>, Brazil actually took

on a recognizably benign and conciliatory position, evolving into a spokesperson for the ‘underdogs’ – either at a regional or at a South-South level – often earning the rightful designation of “quintessential soft-power”.<sup>25</sup>

However, the merits associated with eight years in office should not lead to a direct subscription of Lula’s policies abroad. The debacle/wishful thinking in the Middle East and the supposed alternatives put forward – though commendable for the fresh approach they implied – only strengthened the arguments of Brazil’s critics, who insistently point out the country’s inability to carry on the fair share of international responsibility it so adamantly desires. On this issue, it seems they were proven right. Furthermore, thoughtless declarations usually carry a risk of publicly downgrading any previously earned goodwill, and in that sense Lula’s tirades were grossly underestimated and ultimately proved to be damaging for the country’s own purpose of greater foreign openness and exposition.

Be as it may, Lula’s place in Brazil’s modern history is already more than assured. Nowadays, it is simply inconceivable to imagine tackling climate change, nonproliferation or economic governance without Brazil’s input on these issues. Likewise, when addressing South America or even Africa for that matter, Brazil must be forcibly included in any calculations. Ultimately, the Lula Administration can be credited with laying the ground for the newfound influence and status that Brazil will increasingly acquire in the coming years. Indeed, eight years later, the country is still not quite there yet in terms of an actual and indisputable international preponderance, but Lula da Silva can rest assured as he leaves office with Brazil right on track.

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- 24 See Pedro Seabra, "Brazil's National Defense Strategy: At last, matching words with deeds?" (*IPRIS Lusophone Countries Bulletin*, No. 5, March 2010), pp. 8-12.
- 25 Paulo Sotero and Leslie Armijo, "Brazil: To be or not to be a BRIC?" (*Asian Perspective*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2007), p. 43.