

IN SEARCH OF SPACE FOR INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATION: THE PRAGMATISM OF BRAZILIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE FIRST DECADE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the pragmatism of Brazilian foreign policy in the first decade of the 21st century and discusses its performance in the context of an international agenda characterized by United States pressures on securitization. The text also discusses the consequences of American foreign policy in terms of adopting unilateral and exclusively military actions in the international scenario, considering the US helped to create most governance structures in the world.

Keywords:

Global governance; Brazilian foreign policy; securitization; international agenda; International Relations

How to cite this paper:

Júlio César Borges dos Santos (2012). "In search of space for international integration: the pragmatism of Brazilian foreign policy in the first decade of the 21st century". *JANUS.NET, e-journal of International Relations*, Vol. 3, n.º 2, outono 2012. Retrieved [online] at, observare.ual.pt/janus.net/en_vol3_n2_art9

Paper received in 12th April 2012 and accepted for publication in 5th November 2012



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Introduction¹

Our contention is that the Brazilian foreign policy in the first decade of the 21st century used skilful pragmatism towards Brazil's international integration².

The emergence of new patterns in international relations during the first decade of the 21st century is an issue that deserves some considerations because it influences the analyses and the perception of major actors in contemporary political agenda³. In fact, this period was characterized by circumstances related to the globalization process in a context where the reconfiguring of power is visible.

As a consequence of these developments, new actors are clearly emerging - as is the case of, for example, G-20 and BRICS⁴ - ready to and already performing new roles in international agenda. While some of the new state functions are carried out by new actors, a new scenario is developing in which global governance⁵ is gradually a more inescapable reality in contemporary international relations.

Though we do not aim to summarize the debate on this issue, this paper focuses on analyzing, from a non-deterministic perspective, developments linked to Brazil's international integration from the point of view of the options taken in terms of its foreign policy during the first decade of the 21st century.

Within this analytical framework, two main issues will be directly discussed. The first is the relations with the United States. The second is connected to the first and concerns the Brazilian foreign policy agenda in the context of multilateral global relations. Our

¹ Although the foreign policy of Dilma Rousseff's administration, which began in 2011, shares similarities with that of Lula's (Visentini 2011), this paper focuses only on the first decade of the 21st century.

² Noteworthy is the fact that the said pragmatism is not a novelty in terms of Brazilian Foreign Policy but rather one of its distinctive traits and, thus, a continuity feature. Therefore, we will briefly analyze Brazilian foreign policy in terms of bilateral relations with the United States during the first decade of the 21st century, as well as actions concerning global governance.

³ G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, co-directors of the *Princeton Project on National Security*, state some of these perceptions in *Forging a World of Liberty under Law, 2006*. Available at <http://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/report/FinalReport.pdf>. For these scholars, the world does not generally have one organizing principle in the first decade of the 21st century, such as anti-fascism or anti-communism. Noteworthy is that these patterns do not necessarily arise in the 21st century but have rather been evolving since the fall of the Berlin wall.

⁴ In 2006, the concept of BRICs, created by Jim O'Neal, gave origin to a group incorporated in Brazilian, Russian, Indian and Chinese foreign policy. In 2011, in the Third Summit, South Africa became a member of the group.

⁵ According to the UN Commission on Global Governance (1995), global governance is viewed as "the set of ways in which individuals and institutions, public and private, manage common matters. It is a continuous process through which conflict or different interests may be accommodated and cooperation may occur... At global level, Governance was essentially seen as intergovernmental relations but today it may be viewed as involving non-governmental organizations, citizen movements, multinational corporations and the global capital market."



contention is that, despite the unquestionable (especially military) hegemony of the United States, the first decade of the century evidenced the existence of space for old and new actors to participate in the international agenda.

The emphasis on themes related to security in the American foreign policy after the end of 2001, and the differences between that and the major themes in the international agenda during the first decade of the century, have allowed for some of the parameters in international relations to be redefined in this period. Curiously, the United States military hegemony did not allow them to automatically and freely perform their actions as the planet's most powerful nation but rather eroded their leadership. The military component of their foreign policy in the referred period deeply affected US manoeuvrability in an international system with features inherent to a globalization process and the dynamics of global governance structures.

According to Gelson Fonseca Jr. (2008), though the United States have real power and are able to unilaterally promote any military action due to their strategic advantage, they have been experiencing defeat, especially because they were never open to work with partners to whom they would offer reciprocity to the support given. In this sense, the perception derived from analyzing American foreign policy in the last decades is that the country has increasingly lost its ability to project the so-called *soft power*, to use Joseph Nye's designation when referring to the types of power the United States may enforce. Therefore, there seems to be a gap between the ideals and the ability to implement them.

Noteworthy is the fact that, using the words of Stephen M. Walt, "as the universal ideals of freedom and democracy are basic principles for the Americans, leaders find it difficult to understand societies which do not promptly assimilate those ideals. Even when those leaders understand they are not able to create a *type of Central Asia Vahalla*, as the Secretary of State Robert Gates acknowledged in 2009, they continue to spend billions of dollars attempting to create a democracy in Afghanistan, a society that never became a centralized State or even a democracy"⁶.

Within the referred context, i.e., in the same period the United States have attempted to affirm their interests unilaterally⁷, it is important to emphasize the co-operation initiatives around the main issues in the international agenda, many of which led by Brazil, as is the case of initiatives within the reinforcement and re-dimensioning of global governance structures. Thus, despite American efforts to securitize the international agenda, when in terms of developing better global governance standards, we realize that in the debate on issues such as the environment, international trade and finances, among others, American institutional defeats are frequent (Fonseca Jr, 2008).

Due to an international agenda which cannot be decided solely from the point of view of international security, and in accordance to spaces in international system which cannot be filled considering the assumptions of security alone, other vectors in the structuring of the international scenario have now become relevant. As a result, multilateral

⁶ WALT, Stephen M. "Where Do Bad Ideas Come From?". *Foreign Policy*. January/February 2011. Available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/01/02/here_do_bad_ideas_come_from?_page=0,1, retrieved in February, 2011.

⁷ They are unable to creatively meet the challenges presented by an international agenda that cannot be designed from the point of view of international security.



initiatives have emerged (for example, G-3, commercial G-20, increased relevance of financial G-20 after the 2008/2009 crisis).

According to Vizentini (2006), *variable geometry initiatives such as G-3 and G-20*, reflected Brazilian initiatives to coordinate efforts and ease space occupation in the international system, as well as evidenced the pragmatism of a strategy designed to expand national power.

The emergence of new patterns in international relations in the first decade of the 21st century presupposes, in turn, a new agenda characterized by the appearance of new actors and their interactions in the international system. In this paper, the word "new" is used to describe the rise of already existing actors in the international system, which now, due to their economic dynamism, have the ability to more assertively influence the international agenda - as is the case of China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Russia. These actors have gradually occupied space in international system⁸.

The context we described earlier appears to confirm the perception that the military relevance of the United States was not viewed as the unquestioned leader in political or economic fields and, though indispensable, the hegemonic nation is inevitably tied to developments in the international agenda - many of which are not always favourable to the US⁹.

At the risk of oversimplifying, we may summarize the American dilemma thus: by turning their back to the multilateral system, the US risk creating a reality in which the existence of rules for international interaction is totally dispensable. As a consequence, these interactions occur in circumstances which will hardly serve all those concerned.

Fareed Zakaria's (2008) arguments are relevant here, as the author analyzes the inevitability of a new world order, in which industrial, financial and cultural power are no longer controlled by the hegemonic power and in which a group of countries will counterbalance American power.

The dynamics of the international agenda in the first decade of the 21st century, therefore, accounts for this study. Initially, we will discuss the role of the United States in the definition of the international agenda and the perceptions other actors in the international system have of the country. Several authors have studied the hegemonic power of the United States, as well as the country's relation with other actors in the international system. John Ikenberry (2006) argues that the world order the United States helped to create is now threatened due to the country's hesitation in facing the challenges posed to the international agenda.

In the referred context, the guiding principles for Brazil's international integration seem to reflect its perception in terms of the superpower's contradictions in assessing costs and benefits of a foreign policy able to balance soft power and hard power. According to Mónica Hirst, "the differences between the two countries in terms of world policy will be maintained or heightened due to the United States' global strategic priorities since September 11. Brazil, in its attempt to have its own - to a certain extent alternative -

⁸ This space have often been left vacant by the traditional actors, the developed countries.

⁹ According to Joseph Nye, the success of the United States in the world - after so many changes - will depend on their ability to fully understand the nature and the role of soft power and at the same time find a balance between hard and soft power in their foreign policy. For Nye, smart power - power smartly used - is not hard or soft. Smart power is a combination of hard and soft power. In "Soft power and Higher Education", available at <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/FFP0502S.pdf>.



field of action, has focused on multilateralism to deal with crisis situations in security and in international politics. In its foreign policy, Brazil has also focused on widening the political dialogue with intermediary powers such as South Africa and India, and with world powers, such as China and Russia"¹⁰.

As continuity is one of the defining assumptions of Brazilian foreign policy, we believe it has assimilated the misunderstanding that American strategy for the hemisphere is still based on strategic assumptions established in the 19th century and periodically renewed: that for the United States foreign policy, the hemisphere will continue to be *ad eternum* a preferred field of action¹¹.

In this sense, the pragmatism aimed to ease bilateral relations based on the assumption that both countries would never allow their relation to become a direct confrontation¹².

The securitization of the international agenda

The years after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 deeply influenced the United States foreign policy-makers. Though, admittedly, this policy evidences several internal trends (among impulses, interests, beliefs and semiconscious desires of many people)¹³, 2001 may be considered a moment of change.

Most initiatives of the United States foreign policy are now conditioned by the so-called war on terror. At the same time, in terms of home policy, the American democratic system itself has been conditioned. While Congress approved the Patriot Act - extended in 2010 during the Obama administration - a legal tool used to increase the power of police authorities in the fight against terrorism, externally the United States attacked Iraq and Afghanistan against the United Nations and in a context in which preventative war has become essential from the point of view of Washington.

Faced with the challenge to respond internally and externally to the threat of terrorism, the American government has opted for a new interpretation of some basic American principles as, for example, the defence of democratic regimes and the concern with human rights, among others. In fact, such perception of the international agenda - under the pre-eminence of neo-conservatism - would condition Washington to commit a series of ambiguities in performing their foreign policy¹⁴; explicitly opting for a not using the strategy that had led them to success after World War II¹⁵.

¹⁰ Hirst, Mônica. "Os cinco «AS» das Relações Brasil -Estados Unidos: aliança, alinhamento, autonomia, ajustamento e afirmação" In ALTEMANI, Henrique & LESSA, Antônio Carlos (orgs) *Relações Internacionais do Brasil: temas e agendas*, pp.91-17. Vol.1. São Paulo, Saraiva: 2006.

¹¹ Noteworthy here are Cristina Soreanu Pecequillo's ideas on US perception of Latin America: "*Compared to other regions, Latin America is reasonably stable in US perception, which somewhat underestimate the disruptive impact of their social problems, ethnical interaction, crime and border issues. Bush senior's initiatives are a modern version of "America for the Americans", adapting the rules of the Monroe Doctrine, without deep changes in the dynamics of hemisphere relation or in the United States perception of their regional partners*". In "Manual do candidato: Política Internacional", p216-217. Brasília, Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão - MRE: 2010.

¹² See Mônica Hirst (op.cit.).

¹³ See MEAD, Walter Russell, *op. cit.* p. 23.

¹⁴ According to Francis Fukuyama, these principles are part of the American collective unconscious, especially while they are still described in the abstract. However, the fact that they are described in the abstract has allowed those ideas to be "*taken in different directions which have changed them, whenever misconstrued, into more than individual misunderstandings*". In "O dilema americano: democracia, poder



After World War II, the United States actively worked in the structuring of those bodies on which all the world's (and especially American) hope would be placed of an order able to stop the anarchy typical of an international system. This way, the United States, according to Anne-Marie Slaughter (2007), accepted to restrain themselves, under certain circumstances, heading the foundation of the United Nations Organization and, by doing so, not only did they empower themselves but were also able to organize alliances against their opponents.

The concept, common among United States foreign policy-makers at the time was that it was necessary to face your opponents not wanting to conquer or dominate them but rather taking their points of view into consideration and accepting possible disputes. This way, United States participation in these power disputes, though apparently restricting their field of action, were in fact sources of power (Slaughter, 2007). According to Chanda (2008), under the leadership of Roosevelt and Truman, the United States - then the most powerful country in the world, not only in military terms - opted for creating a cooperative world in which their leadership was highly beneficial for them.

The change in perception of their position in accordance with international agenda after 2001, Washington clearly abandoned the assets their foreign policy had earned in the previous decades. As a result, the idea of performing a "benevolent hegemony" (Fukuyama, 2006) clearly overestimates American capacity to freely accept the international agenda.

Just as the first moment after the Cold War led to optimism in the international system, which would soon become anxiety, the change in American foreign policy after 2001 contributed to new perceptions within the international community on the limits of hegemonic power, especially when we analyze the results of the military option and its limitations. Curiously, Washington continued to harden its positions in the multilateral scenario, even when the limitations to its soft power became visible.

Brazil and the international agenda in the first decade of the 19th century

The international agenda in the first decade of the 21st century was deeply influenced by American efforts to shape it according to their security concerns. From this point of view, the United States allowed themselves to believe that exercising their military hegemony would have easily assimilated costs. In truth, by not believing in multilateralism and focusing on a vision limited to their national interests, supported merely by their military capacity, the United States ignored one of the most relevant elements of the globalization process, of which they were leaders: the interdependency among actors in the international system.

e o legado do neoconservadorismo", pp. 18-19. Translated by Nivaldo Montigelli Jr.- Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2006.

¹⁵ Still according to Fukuyama (op. Cit, p.71), "*In the period immediately after World War II, American power was used not only to prevent Soviet aggression but also to create a series of international organizations and agreements, from institution connected to Bretton Woods (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) to the UN, NATO, the Security Treaty between the US and Japan, the Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS), GATT and others*".



Though the globalization process is now unabated, you cannot ignore the interdependency among most state actors, regardless of their size. In fact, in a globalized world, international order can no longer be theoretically defined in a simple manner. The period in which two ideologies represented international dispute is long gone, the cohesion factors in the so-called western world can no longer guarantee to the United States that they will maintain a network of allies, especially when they appear to believe that exercising their military hegemony will be enough to guarantee their preponderance in defining the international agenda.

In this context, the conditions affecting the structuring of new patterns in international order seem to confirm that this is not confined to military options. International politics in the last few years has combined, in a complex way, the vectors of the United States hegemonic unilateralism and the patterns derived from globalization in its multilateral dimension.

Considering that the hegemonic power remains indifferent or unable to understand the need to exercise a leadership which is more comprehensive and in accordance with the complexities of the international agenda, gaps are arising in international relations structure where other actors seem to move around better than the superpower.

It is less and less likely that military power alone can define international order. At the same time, and as Zakaria stated, the role of other powers has gradually increased (2008). According to this perspective, Brazil defined a strategy of international integration that was extremely assertive in the sense of occupying spaces within the international agenda where its action was relevant.

Near the end of Fernando Henrique Cardoso's second mandate and during the Lula administration, Brazil tried more intensely to find a new dimension for its international integration. However, it was during the administration of Luis Inácio 'Lula' da Silva that the country tried to exercise a foreign policy visibly more tied to the heritage left by the so-called Independent Foreign Policy¹⁶, with features from Responsible Pragmatism¹⁷ from the Geisel administration and from Universalism¹⁸ from the Figueiredo administration¹⁹.

In view of the complexity of the international agenda at the beginning of the new century, the perception of Brazilian foreign policy-makers in that period suggests there is a high degree of continuity between the FHC and Lula administrations, as the efforts for economic stability and international integration were well taken advantage of by the latter.

¹⁶ In Paulo Fagundes Vizentini's opinion, the Independent Foreign Policy was a "response by Brazilian diplomacy to fast international changes, in particular to the emergence of new actors and the changes in other actors, whose needs and desires placed them outside main political centres.

¹⁷ According to Luis Felipe de Seixas Corrêa, "responsible pragmatism" was a foreign policy guideline which allowed "Brazilian diplomacy to leave behind ideological burdens or alignments that prevented the country from establishing alliances and relations in accordance with their unilateral interests in political or economic terms".

¹⁸ The Diplomacy of Universalism by the Figueiredo administration tried to keep Brazil's autonomy in an unfavourable international scenario while maintaining features of continuity with the assumptions of Responsible Pragmatism.

¹⁹ *Balanço da Política Externa do Governo Lula (2003-2010)* states that "Foreign policy between 2003 and 2010 was guided by the idea that Brazil should take on an increasingly important role in the international scenario, evidencing a proud and sovereign external image". Available at [link](#) website of Ministério das Relações Exteriores (MRE): [Anexo_integra_Balanco MRE.doc](#).



As an example of this, it is important to refer the reinforcement of the agenda for South America during the FHC administration and its efforts in keeping the integration process within a context of preserving autonomy in relation to American hegemony. These initiatives - attempts to have a more pragmatic perception of international relations - were deepened within the scope of foreign policy in the Lula administration.

Within the scope of commercial multilateralism, the positions of the United States and of the European Union were clearly understood, as these were tied to the interests of internal actors, for example, lobbies dedicated to maintaining extraordinary agricultural subsidies. Meanwhile, the diffusion of other spheres of international power became clear evidence that new spaces have emerged for new actors (among which, Brazil) in the structuring of the international agenda.

The pragmatism of Brazilian foreign policy in the first decade of the 21st century is that of an autonomy which is not exclusively confrontational but rather a combination of factors such as cooperation with several actors in different spheres, as well as a low profile in delicate questions within North-South relations. This means that Brazilian foreign policy in this period is the pragmatic combination of several axes (besides North-South axis) (Pecequillo, 2010).

Coordinating initiatives such as the structure of G-3 or G-20, together with the effort in emphasizing multilateral initiatives (*vis-à-vis* a greater involvement in UN peace operations and the effective use of WTO as a forum to reduce controversy in international trade), establish the referred pragmatism of Brazilian foreign policy. Together with actors such as South Africa, China, India and Russia, Brazil has expanded the scope of its participation in the debate of many global themes²⁰.

The decrease in American capacity to meet the challenges posed by the international agenda gained a new dimension during the 2008 global financial crisis, when important financial institutions collapsed and the economic activity throughout the globe also decreased. Important is to verify that, even before the crisis, according to Anup Shah (2010), several scholars had already noticed a new decline, evidenced especially in the way America faced challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the deterioration of the country's image in Europe, Asia and other parts of the world.

Brazilian diplomacy in this context, as a reflection of positions observed after 2003, when G-3 and G-20 appeared, focused on gaining a leadership position within the debate, which ultimately led to positive results in initiatives related to changing some of the global governance structures - such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank - into institutions more representative of the weight of developing countries.

We can see, therefore, that despite American military power, its limitations have been dramatically exposed, especially as far the vulnerability of the only superpower in terms of defining the economic and financial elements in global agenda, exactly the space in which the coordinated effort of new actors has counterbalanced the influence of the United States.

²⁰ See "*Balanço da Política Externa do Governo Lula (2003-2010)*", available *link* at website of Ministério das Relações Exteriores (MRE): [Anexo_integra_Balanco MRE.doc](#).



Brazilian foreign policy: a pragmatic international integration

Obviously, the apparent decline of the United States does not mean in any way that the country is no longer relevant in the international system. Rather the opposite, we cannot consider any 21st century challenge without understanding and carefully considering the vectors of American foreign policy. However, and paradoxically, what has gradually become more visible is that exercising this hegemony is not always in parallel with the trends of the international agenda.

Whatever the circumstances in which the hegemonic country exercises its power, a reality seems to be established in which new international actors emerged in the spaces the United States no longer occupy. This means that the rise of new powers and the relation between the United States and these new powers seem interrelated phenomena (Zakarias, 2008)²¹.

In this sense, Brazil's international integration strategy in the first decade of the 21st century is clearly evidence of further pragmatic exercising of its foreign policy. By acknowledging the limitations that United States use of military power has been experiencing, as well as dilemmas of the country in exercising all branches of power, Brazilian diplomacy and that of other emerging nations have taken on a role of international integration in accordance with rules of multilateral mechanisms the America helped to create.

This use of multilateralism is justified because, as a consequence of the emergence of multilateralism, an element is developed which can break away from the duality hegemony and balance of power, because of the specificities of multilateral diplomacy, able to express values such as justice and rationality at international level (Fonseca Jr, 2008).

Paradoxically, as previously discussed, the United States increased the dilemmas of their foreign policy by undermining the actions of some global governance structures in which they had invested part of their power in during the past decades. At the same time, other nations - among which Brazil - started to use these vectors as relevant tools in international integration.

Noteworthy is the fact that the costs of opting for a policy of power - not only for the United States, but for any other power - will lead to an inability to coordinate responses to challenges of the international agenda which are based on cooperation and in the ideals of multilateralism. International politics in the first decade of the 21st century reflected these circumstances.

Amado Luiz Cervo, in a text written in 2001, stated that the role of the United States as the keeper of international order and security would probably not become a geostrategic paradigm based on factors such as unilateral and introspective view of international order, in the difficult dialogue, as well as American inability to tolerate other interests at play in international relations.

²¹ For Zakaria, this shows that the power of the USA is put into perspective. Though for some analysts, this putting into perspective does not necessarily imply American decline, we realize that US inability to implement their desires in specific situations cannot be in any way considered one of the vectors of their hegemony.



Within the framework of the pragmatism adopted by Brazilian foreign policy in the first decade of the 21st century, the strategy of international integration seems to have led to a positive outcome, considering that multilateralism integrated the Brazilian option to combine several axes within their international integration.

Noteworthy is, again, to remember the importance of continuity in Brazilian foreign policy.²² From this point of view and in accordance with its ability to exercise its own elements of power, the pragmatism of Brazilian foreign policy in the first decade of the 21st century allowed the country to more actively participate in the definition of many parameters in the international agenda.

Conclusion

Brazil option for a foreign policy we defined as pragmatic did not imply a deep change in its strategy of international integration in the last decades. In fact, if the dynamics of Brazilian growth is analyzed and the tradition of continuity in foreign policy-making, especially after the 1960s, we realize that pragmatism has been part of initiatives in this policy.

Besides, in the same context, though it seems to have assimilated the United States inability to manage a more assertive foreign policy for its own hemisphere, the lack of divergences between Brazil and the United States evidences there is space for furthering bilateral relations and overcoming existing gaps.

Finally, though there is no evidence that American foreign policy will become more assertive and converging with the dynamics of the international agenda for the hemisphere, we must not forget that, on the other hand, the pragmatism of Brazilian foreign policy in the last years, in accordance with its rationality and continuity (Patrício, 2008), has become an instrument able to enhance the country's international integration.

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²² According to Raquel Patrício, "In the evolution of Brasil foreign policy, certain principles and values are being added to the diplomacy. These principles and values became inherent to Brazilian foreign policy and are so specific that, besides providing predictability to Brazilian foreign action, they shape the country's position and are imposed on governments and even regimes. Furthermore, they contribute to Brazilian foreign policy becoming a real State policy, providing it with rationality and continuity rather than change."



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