

Brazil and the New World Order

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The story of Lula is not just one of economic rags to political riches. It is also the story of the transition of Brazil into a global power. This transformation began before Lula became President, but it has accelerated during his time in power. From United Nations peace-keeping to mitigating climate change, Brazil is now at the forefront of the key international issues of the day and much of the credit must go to the winner of this year's Chatham House Prize. The award of the 2016 Olympic Games to Rio de Janeiro is the icing on the cake for a man who has graced the world stage with distinction since he was first elected as President in 2002.

Brazil, although for much of its independent history a reluctant member of the Latin American club, has always been a regional power. Comparing itself with the United States rather than with other Latin American states, Brazil played a leading role in the Pan-American Union (PAU) from its foundation in 1889. When the PAU was replaced in 1948 by the Organisation of American States (OAS), Brazil – now more comfortable in its Latin American skin – was once again a leading member.

With the distraction of US administrations since 11th September 2001, Brazil has been very effective at filling the space made available at the regional level by greater US focus on other parts of the world. Brazil, which in the 1990s was tempted to consolidate its position in South America alone, is now heavily engaged in the Caribbean and Central America, and likely to remain so.

Brazilian engagement at the regional level is currently at an historic peak, helped not only by US priorities elsewhere but also by the self-inflicted wounds of Argentina – its once great rival. The outside world may focus on the histrionics of President Chávez, but Venezuela is more like an unruly member of the family than a serious threat to Brazilian regional pretensions.

Yet Brazil wants more and, starting in the 1990s, began to aspire to a global leadership role. Although Brazil had played a very significant role in the Second World War and was one of only nine developing countries to join GATT in 1947, its global leadership pretensions were of necessity postponed by a combination of inward-looking development, military government and hyper-inflation. It was only in the mid-1990s, when Brazil had finally tamed inflation, opened its economy and consolidated its democracy, that a global role could again be considered.

Aspiration is one thing and achievement is another. Fighting for a place at the top table is not easy when those already there are not keen to share the banquet. However, Brazil has made impressive progress in 15 years. She is now a member of the G20. She is also a regular participant at the G8 summits, the club of rich countries founded in 1976 as the G7 and which Russia was invited to join in the 1990s. And if the reform of United Nations institutions is ever agreed, Brazil is likely to join the Security Council as a permanent member alongside the five 'official' nuclear states (US, China, Russia, UK and France).

To the Brazilian elites and perhaps most of the Brazilian people, all of this is self-evidently desirable. Brazil will be much better able to defend its national interests and shape the global agenda if it is at the top table. The future negotiations on climate change, for example, and the measures taken to mitigate the effects of global warming will be crucial for Brazil. But what do Brazil's global aspirations mean for the rest of the world? To put it crudely, what is in it for all those countries whose support in the United Nations Brazil is currently so assiduously courting?

Many of the architects of the United Nations system hoped that it would be a step towards global governance and a step away from Great Power politics. Sadly, it did not turn out that way. The interests of the Great Powers were enshrined in their permanent seat with veto powers on the Security Council and the Cold War soon divided the permanent members even among themselves. Furthermore, the end of the Cold War did not herald a move back towards global governance, but instead led to a brief period in which the United States thought it could change the rules of the game and establish global hegemony for at least a generation.

Most of the countries aspiring to a permanent seat on the Security Council would make little difference to the current world order if they were invited to join. Japan may not be a nuclear power, but its dependence on the United States for its security in the face of a rising China makes the country extremely reluctant to play a truly independent role in international affairs. India, on the other hand, is a nuclear power and now acknowledged as such by the United States, but it is too obsessed with security on the sub-continent and the threat of being eclipsed by China. In addition, India is the least progressive of all big states on the question of

climate change and will be a drag on negotiations for many years to come.

That leaves Brazil, a non-nuclear state with an impressive international pedigree to its credit already. A Security Council with Brazil as a permanent member, with or without a veto, should therefore be very beneficial. Brazil has demonstrated on numerous occasions its independence from the existing permanent members; it will work to free the world of nuclear weapons; it will be constructive on climate change negotiations; and it is not tied down by security concerns in its own region. Brazil's permanent membership of the Security Council is something that the rest of the world should welcome.

Like other aspirants, Brazil will not move to permanent status without serving a long apprenticeship in the rich country clubs. Yet in the eyes of many

around the globe these clubs (especially the G8 and even the G20) have little legitimacy. Self-appointed and unelected, often meeting under extreme security arrangements, these clubs pronounce at the end of each summit a long list of 'promises' that have no force in law and which are often ignored even by those countries that have signed.

Brazil will not quickly change the way these clubs operate and yet Brazil has no choice but to participate for otherwise she will be branded a second-rate power. For Brazil's sake we must all hope that the apprenticeship she is forced to serve on these bodies helps to make them more legitimate and that Brazil, once elected to permanent membership of the Security Council, will feel able to demand further changes in the system of global governance that allows the voice of the south to be heard with greater force. **F**



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