

An Assessment of the Lula Era

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Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010) has kept Brazil open to the international economy and promoted internal economic development and social inclusion. He has worked toward the overcoming of the inequalities among nations and the elimination of hunger in the world; and has intensified the harmony between the State and social leaders to whom he has delegated power and responsibilities regarding development. He endured the criticism of the opposition, used for decades to lambasting foreign policy and, in Lula's case, some concessions made to the Workers Party as mere allegories. As a matter of fact, Lula has achieved significant external results in important sectors for national life and failed in others. South America, his priority project, occupies a middle ground.

To make South America into a power pole supported by a solid economic base, political unity, and security autonomy is a Brazilian project that dates back to previous governments but which has been assigned priority by Lula. A series of circumstances turned this project from a high priority into a low priority in the 21st century. The South American countries have promoted institutionalization, with the establishment of UNASUR in 2008. In general, they have preserved the political intent but have created different national arrangements and became dispersed among different models of participation in the international scene. Major energy and infrastructure projects have not materialized. With the passing of time, Lula has let know that Brazil's locus is the world, without however allowing this global dimension of external action to result in a distancing from South America.

Lula's diplomacy has met with two failures. At the WTO it failed to achieve the desired global agreement on free trade that would favor our national interests, given Brazil's higher competitiveness at a systemic level. In addition, the effort to make part of the global power club, especially of the Security Council, was an attempt that earned some rhetoric support but yielded no actual result. It will be up to the next government to rethink these two lines of external action – foreign trade policy and admission to the power club.

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On three other fronts – the most relevant for the promotion of national interests – Lula has achieved remarkable success, which makes it advisable for the next government not only to maintain but also to reinforce these lines of external action.

First, the internationalization of the Brazilian economy. Of the BRIC countries, Lula's Brazil has stood out as the most internationalized economy, either as a recipient of foreign enterprises or direct foreign investments or owing to the outward expansion of Brazilian companies and investments. This represents a jump in historic quality toward a mature process of development and of the country's participation in the international scene.

Secondly, with conviction and even with bold initiatives, Lula has promoted the negotiation of international conflicts. This conflict solution strategy is a novelty, given the intensity with which it is conducted by Brazilian and Chinese diplomacy, not to mention UNASUR. It is the opposite of NATO's strategy of dealing with conflicts through the violence of sanctions or intervention, which has governed international relations since World War II and should be replaced for the sake of peace.

Thirdly, Lula has promoted coalitions among emerging countries that have demanded and achieved the shifting of the axis of the international system characterized by the old North-South asymmetry toward a new North-Emerging Countries symmetry. The time is past when the decision-making power in international relations was restricted to the understanding among a few developed powers, which was then proposed to the others as a possible consensus.

This special issue we offer our readers examines and looks deeper into these and other aspects of Brazil's international relations in the 21th century.