

## **The United States and Brazil:**

### **A Long Road of Unmet Expectations**

(Hirst, Mônica. With a concluding essay by Andrew Hurrell. Oxon: Routledge, 2005)

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**T**he relationship with the United States has been a central element of Brazil's foreign policy since the early 20th century. What shaped the two paradigms that guided Brazil's international insertion until the late 1980s — the americanist paradigm and the globalist paradigm — were relations with the USA (Lima, 1994; Silva, 1995; Pinheiro, 2004).

For the americanist paradigm, the approximation, cooperation and understanding were justified not only for pragmatic reasons, given the emergence of the USA as a power hub in the Americas and the world at the start of the 20th century, but also due to a set of beliefs that expressed the admiration for the liberal political system and economic development of that country, and the view that the USA and Brazil participated in similar histories vis-à-vis their Hispanic neighbours, which made them the “odd men out” (Silva, 1995, 99) and destined to become close.

The globalist paradigm, in its turn, considered that Brazil's capacity for successful action in the external realm would result: i) from an international insertion not determined a priori by ideological alignments, but guided fundamentally by the national interest; ii) from the universalization of the country's foreign relations; iii) from the search for an autonomous economic development. In this paradigm, the non-excluding broadening of Brazil's foreign relations implied the relativization of Brazil-US relations, though without any suggestion of confrontation.

With the end of the Cold War and the USA's rise as a global hegemonic power, the international political conditions for fulfilling the above-mentioned foreign policy guidelines

were less favourable. Furthermore, the deepening of globalization and the economic-financial crisis of the 1980s led Brazil to review its economic development model led by the state — domestic counterpart and important element of the globalist paradigm, as it would permit achieving the much sought-after autonomy in the international space — and adopt, even if more pragmatically than ideologically (Almeida, 1996), and even then not in its totality, the neo-liberal model.

Hence, from the 1990s, relations with the USA began to be redefined. How this process occurred, what were its main determinants and what are its perspectives from the election of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva are questions that the book *The United States and Brazil: A long road of unmet expectations*, by Mônica Hirst (Universidad Torcuato Di Tella), with a concluding essay by Andrew Hurrell (University of Oxford), helps to answer. It is part of the *Contemporary Inter-American Relations Series*, organized by Jorge Domínguez (Harvard University) and Rafael Fernández Castro (Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México), which aims to assess the impact of the end of the Cold War, of the economic and debt crisis of Latin American countries and of the transition from authoritarianism to democracy on relations between the USA and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The book by Hirst and Hurrell joins a long list of studies on US-Brazil relations published in the two countries.<sup>1</sup> What makes it stand out is the wide-ranging but detailed overview of US-Brazil relations in recent times, based on an agenda containing several themes, among them the more traditional ones, such as security and trade, and “newer” ones, such as human rights, the environment, drug trafficking and immigration, for example. The study is well documented and seeks to interpret US-Brazil relations on the basis of their conditioning factors and, consequently, not reducing them to the mere will of their protagonists. It introduces the international relations student and scholar to the complexity of US-Brazil links from the second half of the 1980s.

Hirst argues that US-Brazil relations are characterized by tensions and conflicts, but also by understanding and cooperation. However, the existence of mistaken perceptions on the part of the elites and of decision-makers in the two countries, regarding the real interests of the other has created unmet expectations and frustrations on both sides. Further, the author highlights the fact that the differences between the USA and Brazil occurred within a context of “constrained disagreements”, which made it possible for the conflicts not to lead to a broader confrontation.

Hirst’s arguments are developed in three chapters. The first provides a historical and analytic overview of US-Brazil relations from the early 20th century until the end of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government. The next two focus more directly and in more detailed fashion on the impact of international and domestic changes on the US-Brazil relationship from the beginning of the 1990s.

In order to conduct the historical research, the author uses four models: the unwritten alliance (from the start of the Republic to the 1940s); the alignment (from 1942 to 1977); the autonomy (from 1977 to 1990); and the adjustment (from 1990 to the end of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government). There emerges in Hirst's analysis a brief but significant account, in which the main aspects of the relationship between the two players are adequately outlined.

However, it is worth stressing the difficulty in applying the category "alignment" to the period of the Jânio Quadros and João Goulart governments. The changes introduced in Brazilian foreign policy in the early 1960s, the gestation of the Independent Foreign Policy during the same period and the politico-ideological internalization of the Cold War are elements that point to tensions in that phase of US-Brazil relations that the model ends up minimizing.

According to the author, the 1990s brought Brazil and the USA closer together and led to a reduction in their differences, which had mainly defined the previous period (1977-1990). Convergences set in with regards to the field of international security, to pro-market economic reforms and to the consolidation of democracy. This did not mean, however, that Brazil gave up on pursuing spaces of autonomy in the international arena, a search substantiated, for example, by the creation and implementation of the Mercosur. Hence, the *adjustment* did not result in a mere adaptation.

The following two chapters — *New Complexities in US-Brazil Economic Relations and US-Brazil Political Relations* — represent a relevant and successful effort to approach in analytical and systematic fashion the development of US-Brazil relations in different issue-areas, on the basis of the performance of state and non-state players. According to Hirst, the complexity of relations between the two states is intensified not only owing to factors such as a broadening of the agenda, the restrictive characteristics of the international system and the consequences of the events of September 2001 on US foreign policy, but also due to the expansion of transnational links between non-governmental organizations of the two countries.

A pattern of the existence of divergences and convergences characterizes US-Brazil relations in different issue-areas. This is explored, initially, in the various dimensions related to the economic links between the USA and Brazil. Examples of this include the evolution of the economy and its impact on US expectations regarding the increase in foreign investment in Brazil; the disputes at the level of the World Trade Organization (WTO); and the hemispheric negotiations with a view to constituting the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

Later, this pattern is taken up again in the analysis of US-Brazil political relations. These, in turn, are dealt with based on two combinations of different types of agendas

and players. The first encompasses a typically political agenda, including international security and regional policy, in which inter-state relations predominate. The second includes questions such as human rights, the environment and immigration, which are mobilized mainly by social movements and non-governmental organizations. While the asymmetry of power is the factor conditioning US-Brazil relations in the first agenda of issues, in the second, it is in the consolidation of democracy in Brazil and in the expansion of transnational networks that one finds the elements impacting that relations.

If, on the one hand, there existed convergence in the adherence to nuclear non-proliferation regimes, in the fight against drug trafficking and in the stabilizing performance in relation to the Peru-Ecuador conflict, on the other, divergences are present regarding Plan Colombia, the creation of the FTAA and the aspiration to a more affirmative position in South America. The same applies to the environment, human rights and immigration. If in the environmental sphere the positions of the two states come close together, in that of human rights, for example, they are further apart. Thus, for the USA, the question of human rights abuse is focused on the basis of a perspective that favours coercive measures, whilst for Brazil the same question is focused on the basis of the establishment of more effective social policies.

Non-governmental organizations, in their turn, reinforce the position of state players in some instances, like, for example, in the defence by the USA of international control over the Amazon forest. In others, they develop positions of disagreement with or act in parallel to their respective governments.

Although the actions of non-state players are relevant to US-Brazil relations and must be considered, as the author contends, one cannot but note that this role remains relative, given the establishment of interstate and trans-governmental communication channels between the USA and Brazil on those questions and the central role of the Itamaraty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in the formulation of Brazilian foreign policy. However, the presence of non-governmental organizations, social movements and transnational networks demonstrates that the decision-making process at the foreign policy level has acquired such complexity that an analysis that focuses only on the performance of state actors reduces the chances of a more encompassing understanding of this picture.

In terms of prognoses, the author argues that President Lula's election will not bring changes to the pattern of "constrained disagreements" and unmet expectations that have characterized relations between Brazil and the USA over the last sixty years. Even though the government has set out to play a more affirmative role at the regional and international levels than its predecessor, which has actually ended up happening, the author rightly highlights that such a role would not result in confrontation, and that spaces of convergence and divergence would set in.

Although Hurrell's concluding essay sets out from a perspective different from Hirst's — since it uses the neo-realist theoretical framework to analyse US-Brazil relations —, the two do come together, as they both conceive of the relationship as permeated by convergences and divergences, unmet perceptions and frustrated expectations that have not resulted in a close relationship, on the one hand, but on the other, have not led to open confrontation either.

However, Hurrell, differently from Hirst, emphasises the tensions permeating US-Brazil relations. In the author's view, these remained in the 1990s, even though the decade provided more spaces for cooperation between the two states than the 1970s and 1980s, with Brazil's adherence to the dominant values of the international order and the adoption, even if in restricted form, of pro-market reforms.

According to Hurrell, the tensions “are rooted in divergent hard interests and in asymmetries of power” (p. 94) and the theoretical approach of liberalism is not appropriate to explain the permanent presence of frictions between the USA and Brazil.

Hence, whilst democracy contributes to bringing the two countries together, the use of coercive mechanisms by the *hegemon* to create or guarantee democratic regimes brings with it distrust. If, on the one hand, institutions may be important to restrict the power of the major players — and Brazil has made intense use of such spaces, like the WTO —, on the other, the relatively small constraint that Latin America and particularly Brazil can place on the USA diminishes the possibilities of an effective multilateral engagement in the regional sphere; if, on the one hand, the USA's decision-making pluralism at domestic level offers different channels of access to subordinate countries, on the other, these are not sufficient to make US-Brazil relations more egalitarian; if, on the one hand, transnational civil society has actually influenced the formation of the agenda in the fields of the environment and human rights, on the other, their effects may go in the direction of strengthening the interests and values of the powerful; if, on the one hand, globalization intensifies interdependence, on the other the asymmetries of power between the two countries make interdependence cease to be a two-way street and come closer to a context of dependence.

Moreover, to be able to paint a fuller picture of the difficulties that the US-Brazil relationship faces, one must add to power considerations elements from other theoretical frameworks of international relations, such as constructivism, and from studies in political psychology. In this way, Hurrell, accompanying Hirst, stresses the limits of the mistaken perceptions, which are caused by the lack of knowledge, in both countries, of the factors conditioning their respective foreign policies. The author also emphasizes the interests and identities of each country moulded by history, culture and the interaction between them. In relation to the latter set of factors, the author's evaluation is that the presence of the ideology of autonomy and national development in Brazil, and the mix of values and

interests that make up US foreign policy, rooted in the historical formation of the state there, give rise to more distancing than approximation.

Whilst Hurrell's essay contributes to demonstrating the existence of permanent tensions in Brazil-US relations and to explaining them, it leaves the reader faced with the following question: what would explain the cooperation, since it exists and is also present in these relations, mainly from the 1990s?

Similarly, in Hirst's view, the election of President Lula has not brought significant changes to Brazilian foreign policy, in spite of intensifying the emphasis in certain aspects of this agenda. The impact of a radicalized agenda on US-Brazil relations is ambiguous. The aspiration to a more active role in South America may generate convergence, as observed in how the Venezuelan crisis was dealt with, but the divergent views of the USA and Brazil on how to approach the threats to regional stability remain. And while the USA and Brazil did commit to the FTAA negotiations, the conflicts between them would tend to be intense — given the broad agenda put forward by the USA and the emphasis placed by Brazil on the reduction of US protectionism —, which effectively occurred, bearing in mind the failure of the whole FTAA project. Lastly, and equally following Hirst, Hurrell ponders that the most probable future scenario is “a continuation of the inherited pattern of relatively low-level friction, unmet expectations and recurrent frustration” (p. 106).

Hirst and Hurrell offer relevant contributions for understanding US-Brazil relations, and their differences of interpretation help one outline a fuller picture of the said relations. As well as being very well documented, the study also has the virtue of a strong analytical content. It will certainly be very useful for all those who make international relations their daily field of study.

Translated from Portuguese by Leandro Moura.

## Notes

- 1 See, for example, the selected bibliography made up of at least 60 titles, contained in the recent publication *Relações Brasil-Estados Unidos: Assimetrias e Convergências*, edited by Paulo Roberto de Almeida and Rubens Antônio Barbosa. (São Paulo: Saraiva, 2005).

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