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BRAZIL AND USA: A DECLINING RELATIONSHIP?

Abstract: Over the past few decades, there has been extensive discussion regarding the perceived decline of United States hegemony. These discussions often attribute such decline to external factors, such as the rise of emerging powers like China and Russia, as well as domestic forces - chiefly represented by the growing political influence of far-right movements. Within this intricate and challenging context, it becomes pertinent to inquire about the impacts of these transformations on the bilateral relationship between the United States and Brazil, a relationship often considered a cornerstone of both countries' foreign policies. However, contemporary events, such as the increasing influence of China in Latin America and the recent political transformations undergone by both nations, present new challenges for these relations. This article aims to delve into these events, focusing specifically on the administrations of Donald Trump (2017-2021), Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019-2022), the early years of the Biden administration (2021-2024), and the beginning of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's presidency (2023-2024). Methodologically, the article will draw upon content analysis and literature review.

Keywords: BRAZIL, USA, DONALD TRUMP, JAIR MESSIAS BOLSANARO, JOE BIDEN, LUIZ INACIO LULA DE SILVA

Introduction

In recent decades, the international geopolitical landscape has been marked by an intense debate about the decline of U.S. hegemony. Various analysts and scholars have attributed this situation to a series of external and internal factors that, to some extent, suggest the gradual deterioration of American power. On the external front, the rise of powers such as China and Russia challenges the dominant position of the United States in economic and military realms. Internally, the growing influence of far-right movements has generated significant transformations in U.S. domestic politics, putting liberal democracy in crisis.

In this complex context, it is crucial to understand that beyond the alleged decline of the United States as a global power, these changes also impact bilateral relations between Washington and Brasília from multiple perspectives. Traditionally seen as a cornerstone of the foreign policies of both countries, this relationship faces new challenges in light of contemporary events, such as China's growing influence in Latin America and recent political shifts in both nations.

Historically, the relationship between the United States and Brazil has been characterized by a combination of economic cooperation, strategic alignment, and, in some periods, pronounced political divergences caused by various factors. In recent decades, with China expanding its economic and diplomatic presence in Latin America and becoming Brazil's largest trading partner, Brazil, as the region's largest economy, finds itself in a delicate position of balancing its relations with the two major global powers.

In this regard, the administrations of Donald Trump (2017-2021) and Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019-2022) brought a new dimension to this bilateral relationship. Both leaders shared similar political-ideological views, including skepticism towards multilateralism and international organizations, as well as self-proclaimed patriotic rhetoric based on the exaltation of conservative values and national symbols. However, their policies also introduced elements of unpredictability and tensions that complicated the traditional alliance between the two countries, especially due to the pressure exerted by China.

With Joe Biden's arrival to the presidency of the United States in 2021, a shift in U.S. foreign policy was observed, marked by a return to multilateral dialogue and a renewed focus on issues related to climate change and human rights, which had been neglected during the Trump administration. This new direction

directly impacted the relationship with Brazil, especially considering Bolsonaro's controversial environmental policies, which had also drawn criticism from European Union countries.

More recently, the beginning of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's third term in 2023 brought new developments to this bilateral relationship. Known for his "active and assertive foreign policy" and for reinforcing Brazil's quest for international prominence, Lula da Silva may redefine diplomatic and economic priorities, thereby affecting interactions with the United States in a new phase of this relationship, which continues to be influenced by external forces, especially China and the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza.

This paper aims to investigate these events and their implications for the bilateral relationship between the United States and Brazil in recent years, without the intention of exhaustively covering the debate. With a particular focus on the most recent presidential terms in both countries — the administrations of Donald Trump (2017-2021), Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019-2022), the early years of Joe Biden's administration (initiated in 2021), and the beginning of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's presidency (in 2023) — this study will utilize methodologies of documental content analysis and literature review. Through this approach, the aim is to provide an understanding of the dynamics shaping relations between these two nations today.

In this regard, the purpose of this paper is to address the following research question: based on recent administrations in both countries and the changes brought by internal and external contexts, as well as the alleged decline of American hegemony, is it possible to assert that the relationship between Brazil and the United States is in the process of weakening? And what are the prospects for the partnership, considering the political transformations in both countries in recent years?

The paper is divided into two sections. The first section aims to analyze the relations between Brazil and the United States during the Trump and Bolsonaro administrations, as well as the impacts of the failure of the Republican re-election campaign in 2020 that led Joe Biden to the oval office. The second part of the study will discuss Lula da Silva's third term and Biden's rise in the United States, and their implications for Brazilian foreign policy.

The alignment between Trump and Bolsonaro

The relationship between Brazil and the United States is of significant importance to both countries due to the economic and strategic influence each exerts on the international and regional systems. This relationship will also reach its bicentennial milestone in 2024. For the United States, Brazil represents a crucial partner in Latin America, being the largest economy in the region and a vital market for American exports, including manufactured goods, services, and technology. Cooperation

between the two nations in areas such as security and drug trafficking control is also fundamental to U.S. foreign policy, which aims to maintain its influence in the hemisphere.

For Brazil, the relationship with the United States offers substantial opportunities in terms of trade, investment, and technology transfer. For a long time, the U.S. occupied the top position in Brazilian foreign trade, being the principal destination for exports and the main source of imports. This position has recently been taken by China (Ministério do Desenvolvimento, Indústria, Comércio e Serviços, 2023). The loss of U.S. prominence in the trade and investment sectors was accentuated in the post-Cold War era and has been attributed not only to China's economic growth but also to specific events such as the strategic shift of U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East — particularly in the early 2000s — and subsequently towards containing China in Asia (Pecequillo, 2011), which led to hemispheric relations and relations with Brazil being relegated to a secondary plan. Another significant factor during this period was the rise of left-leaning Latin American governments under the so-called “pink tide,” which facilitated the strengthening of regional integration projects and deepened the debate on autonomy and development. However, it is important to note that this did not mean the absence of the U.S. in Latin America. As illustrated by Milani (2021), the presence of the U.S. in the region remained relevant through its bureaucratic agencies, particularly in the areas of security and military cooperation.

When Jair Messias Bolsonaro assumed the presidency of Brazil in 2019, Donald Trump had already established some key pillars in U.S. foreign policy that would also resonate in Brazilian foreign policy: criticism of the multilateral system, particularly the United Nations, an emphasis on defending sovereignty, the promotion of economic freedoms, and climate change denial. These traits became some of the hallmarks of the broader phenomenon of the so-called “global new right” (Abrahamsen et al., 2020), to which both Trump and Bolsonaro were associated. Thus, it can be argued that Brazilian foreign policy under Bolsonaro underwent significant changes that reflected the ideological convictions of the president, his team, and part of the electorate, while also resonating with elements of U.S. foreign policy during the period. According to some researchers, Bolsonaro's arrival in Brasília and the appointment of Chancellor Ernesto Araújo represented not only an ideological shift in the government but also an internal restructuring of Itamaraty, which would alter the scope of Brazilian foreign policy (Hirst & Maciel, 2022). These alignments earned Bolsonaro the label of “Trump of the Tropics”, a nickname later adopted by the president himself.

In this sense, Hirst and Maciel (2022) argue that Bolsonaro's foreign policy was guided by three fundamental pillars, which in certain aspects align with the guidelines also followed by the United States under Trump:

The first pillar of foreign policy corresponds to the “ideological political core”, which reveals the alignment of the project with the international far-right ideology;

the second pillar is the “liberal conservative economic policy”, which encompasses the external aspect of its political economy; the third pillar pertains to the “security and defense complex”, related to the external alignments of the militarization of the Brazilian state. (Hirst & Maciel, 2022).

In his inauguration speech, delivered in Brasília on January 1, 2019, Bolsonaro extolled the need to “remove the ideological bias from our international relations” (Bolsonaro, 2019a), although on various occasions, the president himself, or even his Foreign Ministers, indicated a preference for relations with the United States over other international actors, as demonstrated by former Minister Ernesto Araújo in his inauguration speech: “(...) That is why we admire the United States of America, those who raise their flag and venerate their heroes” (Araújo, 2019). In a notorious article published still in 2017, Araújo attributed to Trump the role of “regenerating” the West through a return to the traditional symbols of Western/Judeo-Christian culture and the rejection of the principles of liberal democracy (Araújo, 2017). Although ideological alignment with the U.S. was not new in the history of Brazilian foreign policy (Pinheiro, 2005), the speeches elaborated by Bolsonaro and Araújo suggest a profound shift in the perception of this alignment, with the U.S. being seen as the primary reference point of Brazil’s foreign policy.

Both Bolsonaro and Trump were critics of multilateral institutions and international agreements. Trump, for instance, withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement, a 2015 treaty on climate change, arguing that the pact harmed the American economy. He also withdrew the United States from other organizations, such as UNESCO and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). Bolsonaro and his foreign minister, Ernesto Araújo, also expressed recurring skepticism about multilateral institutions, such as the UN and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Brazilian government justified this stance with arguments that such institutions served the interests of a globalism which, according to them, compromised national sovereignty and favored an ideological agenda contrary to the conservative values defended by Bolsonaro. The Brazilian administration echoed certain decisions of the Trump government and, similarly, withdrew Brazil from the UN Global Pact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration and frequently criticized multilateral organizations for allegedly interfering in Brazilian sovereignty.

One of the major points of convergence was the environmental agenda. Both presidents adopted policies favoring economic growth over environmental protection. Trump promoted fossil fuel exploration and reversed several environmental regulations implemented by previous administrations. The Republican argued that such measures were necessary to ensure energy independence and stimulate economic development. Similarly, Bolsonaro’s environmental approach generated significant tensions in Brazil’s relations with several countries and international organizations, particularly the European Union.

Beyond environmental issues, the alignment of Trump and Bolsonaro’s policies also extended to their political narrative-building. Both leaders based their foreign

policies on strong nationalist and populist rhetoric, prioritizing national sovereignty and independence in their domestic policies. Trump frequently referenced the “America First” slogan to justify his actions, asserting that U.S. interests should prevail over international commitments. Bolsonaro adopted a similar rhetoric, emphasizing Brazil’s sovereignty even in United Nations meetings, especially regarding the Amazon, and rejecting what he considered external interference.

The Trump and Bolsonaro administrations also operated from a significant alignment in their economic views, characterized by neoliberal policies that prioritized deregulation of productive forces, tax reduction, and the defense of free market principles, arguing that a less regulated economy would stimulate economic growth and job creation. At the opening of the 2019 annual United Nations General Assembly meeting, the first year of his term, Bolsonaro’s speech emphasized the relationship between economy, freedom, and democracy, which was also a hallmark of Trump’s speeches:

In the pursuit of prosperity, we are adopting policies that bring us closer to countries that have developed and consolidated their democracies. There cannot be political freedom without economic freedom, and vice versa. The free market, concessions, and privatizations are already present in Brazil today. The economy is responding by breaking free from nearly two decades of fiscal irresponsibility, state apparatus corruption, and widespread corruption. Openness, competent management, and productivity gains are immediate objectives of our government. (Bolsonaro, 2019b).

In terms of bilateral initiatives, it was emblematic that the United States was, in 2019, the first destination among the official visits undertaken by Bolsonaro’s government, contrary to the diplomatic tradition that had previously accorded this position to Argentina¹. During this visit, several key issues that would shape the partnership in the following years were discussed, such as: the status of trade relations and visa waiver systems; military cooperation, including negotiations on the use of the Alcântara base and elevating Brazil to the status of a NATO extra-regional ally; and regional issues, such as political instability in Venezuela and the fight against drug trafficking (Forner, 2023).

In the commercial sphere, facilitations were negotiated concerning the export of Brazilian beef to the U.S. and the import of American wheat, through the U.S.-Brazil Economic and Trade Cooperation Agreement. The Trump administration also expressed support for Brazil’s accession to the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (Embaixada e Consulado dos EUA no Brasil, 2019). Although Brazil’s entry into the OECD did not materialize, Brazil proceeded to the renunciation of benefits granted by the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) special treatment clause for developing countries. Additionally, the Bolsonaro administration announced that it would unilaterally grant visa waivers to U.S. citizens, a move seen not

1 On the other hand, as highlighted by Motta and Cruz (2024), Trump was the first U.S. president in nearly four decades not to visit Brazil.

only as an expression of automatic alignment with the U.S. government but also as an adoption of a submissive stance by the Brazilian government (Motta & Cruz, 2024).

Another notable point was the relations in the technological and military fields. During the Trump administration, Brazil was elevated to the status of “extra-regional” ally of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), a position previously granted only to Argentina in South America. In practical terms, this designation involved facilitations regarding arms transfers, joint training, and financing for defense products exported by Brazil (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2019). However, it can be asserted that this status entails complex consequences, reaffirming, for example, the dependent insertion of the Brazilian military system into the modern international technological system (Assis, 2022).

In this same regard, the approval of the agreement for the use of the Alcântara military base in Maranhão complements the perspective of technological dependence, by establishing not only the commercial and military use of the base by the U.S., particularly in the space sector, but also prescribing obligations that Brazil would not enter into agreements for space vehicle launches with nations that are not part of the Missile Technology Control Regime (Câmara dos Deputados, 2019). This includes China, indicating that the restriction also aimed to reduce Chinese influence in the region. Furthermore, the agreement maintained specifications on restricted areas of controlled access, which would be monitored and exclusively used by the U.S. (Câmara dos Deputados, 2019). As highlighted by Motta and Cruz (2024), although the agreement facilitates the launch of rockets and satellites from any nation — provided they contain U.S. technology and comply with the Missile Technology Control Regime — no technological transfer provisions benefiting Brazil were included in the agreement document.

Regarding the regional context, the Trump and Bolsonaro administrations also aligned in adopting harsher stances on the Venezuelan situation. In 2020, both administrations expressed support for the opposition front led by Juan Guaidó against Nicolás Maduro’s government. Similarly, Bolsonaro’s presidency deepened the process of diminishing regional integration projects, withdrawing Brazil from Unasul and promoting the creation of more commercialist and neoliberal initiatives such as Prosur.

Despite the alignment with the U.S. government, this did not practically result in Brazil’s commercial and economic distancing from China. Despite Brazilian government figures and the president himself adopting Trumpian rhetoric blaming China for the COVID-19 pandemic, China retained its position as Brazil’s largest commercial partner. In 2021, even during the pandemic, trade between the two countries reached a historic volume of \$135 billion. China continued to be the primary destination for Brazilian exports and the leading source of imports and investments received by Brazil (Rosito & Carvalho, 2022). In light of the increasing relations with China, the U.S. remained in second place, reinforcing the trend observed in recent decades, as indicated in Table 1.

Brazil exports destination	2021 USD bn	% of total	Brazil exports destination	2011 USD bn	% of total	Brazil exports destination	2001 USD bn	% of total
China	87.8	31.3%	China	44.3	17.5%	USA	14.1	24.4%
USA	31.1	11.1%	USA	25.8	10.2%	Argentina	5.0	8.6%
Argentina	11.9	4.2%	Argentina	22.7	8.9%	Netherlands	2.9	4.9%
Netherlands	9.3	3.3%	Netherlands	12.4	4.9%	Germany	2.5	4.3%
Chile	7.0	2.5%	Japan	9.5	3.7%	Japan	2.0	3.4%
Singapore	5.8	2.1%	Germany	9.0	3.6%	China	1.9	3.3%
South Korea	5.7	2.0%	Italy	5.4	2.1%	Mexico	1.9	3.2%
Mexico	5.6	2.0%	Chile	5.4	2.1%	Italy	1.8	3.1%
Japan	5.5	2.0%	UK	5.2	2.1%	Belgium	1.7	3.0%
Spain	5.4	1.9%	South Korea	4.7	1.9%	UK	1.7	2.9%
Germany	5.0	1.8%	Spain	4.7	1.8%	France	1.6	2.8%
Canada	4.9	1.7%	Venezuela	4.6	1.8%	Chile	1.4	2.3%
India	4.8	1.7%	France	4.3	1.7%	Russia	1.1	1.9%
Malaysia	4.7	1.7%	Russia	4.2	1.7%	Venezuela	1.1	1.9%
Italy	3.9	1.4%	Belgium	4.0	1.6%	Spain	1.0	1.8%
Top 15 Partners	198.4	70.7%	Top 15 Partners	167.1	65.9%	Top 15 Partners	36.4	62.7%
Total	280.6	100.0%		253.7	100.0%		58.0	100.0%

Table 1: Brazilian exports between 2001 and 2021

Source: Rosito & Carvalho (2022)

The ambivalence in Brazilian conduct was also reflected in the issue of 5G technology and the negotiations involving the Chinese technology company Huawei. During the Trump administration, the U.S. engaged in an aggressive technological competition strategy, which included, among other measures, raising tariffs on Chinese products in the context of the so-called “trade war” and banning Huawei from the U.S. market, citing violations of national security guidelines. Huawei had been establishing itself over the previous decades as a leader in the 5G frequency market, raising concerns in U.S. economic and military sectors due to its multiple applications and strategic impacts.

In August 2020, then-U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo launched the “Clean Network” program to counteract Chinese presence in telecommunications, through the adoption and dissemination of security measures and guarantees for the privacy of U.S. citizens, businesses, and diplomatic posts abroad (Pompeo, 2020). The initiative was adopted as part of broader national security measures under the Trump administration, which also included, in addition to the Huawei ban, proposed — but not implemented — bans on apps and social networks such as TikTok, on the grounds that the Chinese government could exploit user privacy data. At that time, Brazil diplomatically supported the program but did not ban Huawei from the country or restrict other Chinese apps within national territory.

In 2021, the arrival of Joe Biden (2021-present) to the U.S. presidency triggered a

shift in bilateral relations, breaking with the ideological alignment present during the Trump-Bolsonaro era. Since the electoral campaign, the Democratic president criticized the Brazilian government's environmental policies and emphasized the need for investment in Amazon protection measures. On the other hand, Bolsonaro was one of the last heads of state to congratulate the Democrat on his victory and, on more than one occasion, questioned the legitimacy of the U.S. elections (Sanches, 2022). In this context, the period between 2021 and 2022 was marked by episodes of estrangement and tension between Washington and Brasília, particularly regarding Brazilian stances on the Ukraine war, oscillating between neutral rhetoric on the conflict and positive gestures (including a visit) to the Russian government. Significantly, the first official meeting between the Brazilian and U.S. presidents occurred only in 2022, at the IX Summit of the Americas.

In summary, we can assert that the Brazil-U.S. relations under the Trump and Bolsonaro administrations were characterized by automatic and ideological alignment, which deepened Brazil's dependent insertion pattern in the economic, technological, and military fields. The arrival of Biden to the U.S. presidency brought challenges to the maintenance of this proximity and reinforced points of divergence between the administrations. The next section will discuss the results and prospects regarding the early years of Biden and Lula III.

The relationship between the Lula III and Biden administrations

The beginning of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's third term in 2023 as president of Brazil brought significant changes compared to Jair Bolsonaro's administration, particularly concerning environmental issues and multilateral relations, which were once again prominent on Brazil's foreign policy agenda. From the 2022 presidential campaign, the leftist coalition had already signaled that, if victorious, it would be necessary to recalibrate certain aspects of foreign policy to break the perceived international isolation created by its predecessor and reinsert the country onto the global stage, especially through the repositioning in agendas such as environmental protection, regional integration, and a reinforcement of multilateralism (Lima, 2023, p. 82). This scenario is linked not only to internal conditions but also to the external context: following Trump's defeat to Joe Biden in the 2020 elections, some analysts argued that Brazil's distancing from its tradition of supporting multilateralism had become less viable, including due to potential American pressures (Hirst & Maciel, 2022).

In this context, Brazil reaffirmed the need to prioritize environmental protection and combat climate change, reversing the previous administration's stance on Amazon deforestation — although criticisms regarding the effects of territorial preservation persist. The Lula administration implemented more rigorous

environmental oversight policies and reaffirmed Brazil's commitment to the Paris Agreement, aiming to restore the country's credibility as a leader in the global environmental agenda. This commitment led to the confirmation that the city of Belém, Pará, would host COP 30 in 2025.

The Lula III government also resumed an active engagement stance with multilateral institutions and international forums, contrasting with Bolsonaro's skeptical view. The Lula administration reaffirmed Brazil's commitment to the UN and the WTO, advocating for multilateral cooperation as essential for addressing global issues, including economic, social, and environmental matters. Under Lula, Brazil sought to strengthen its regional alliances through Mercosur and the revitalization of Unasur. These shifts in foreign policy signaled an attempt to rebuild Brazil's image as a responsible and collaborative actor on the international stage, including presenting criticisms of multilateralism management and the global governance dominated by the central powers, as evidenced in the 2023 United Nations General Assembly speech (Lula da Silva, 2023a).

In his inaugural address for the third term, Lula emphasized what his government proposed for international relations:

Our protagonism will be realized through the resumption of South American integration, starting with Mercosur, the revitalization of Unasul, and other regional sovereign coordination mechanisms. On this basis, we will be able to reconstruct an assertive and active dialogue with the United States, the European Community, China, the countries of the Middle East, and other global actors; strengthening the BRICS, cooperation with African countries, and breaking the isolation to which the country had been relegated. (Lula da Silva, 2023b).

Joe Biden had been in office in the White House since 2021 when Lula was elected in Brazil. One of the first "tests" of the new relationship came with the anti-democratic riots of January 8, 2023, which culminated in the invasion of the Brazilian Congress by supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro. In that context, the reactions from the U.S. government, including President Biden's statements, were unanimous in condemning the acts and reinforcing the importance of respecting democratic institutions. The similarity between the events in Brazil and the Capitol invasion on January 6, 2021, seemed to reaffirm the Democratic administration's concerns about the strength of extreme-right movements, suggesting that Biden's stance could also be interpreted as a response to the internal context in the U.S., which was still intensely polarized at the time.

Since then, relations between Brazil and the United States under the two presidents have been marked by a revitalization of bilateral dialogue, partially hindered by the tensions between Bolsonaro and the Biden administration, and an emphasis on environmental issues, human rights, and economic cooperation. Still in 2023, Biden and Lula held their first official meeting during the Brazilian representative's visit to the White House. During the meeting, the two leaders reaffirmed their commitments to environmental agendas and the preservation

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of democratic institutions; they also promised to revitalize the Joint Action Plan Brazil-U.S. for the Elimination of Racial and Ethnic Discrimination and Promotion of Equality (Embaixada e Consulado dos EUA no Brasil, 2023), indicating the reemergence of human rights issues on both administrations' agendas. Investments for the Amazon Fund were discussed, and intentions to expand commercial and technological partnerships between the two countries were reinforced, though no specific agreements were finalized on the matter.

In September 2023, during a new bilateral meeting at the United Nations General Assembly, Lula and Biden launched the "Workers' Rights Partnership," a cooperation program aimed at the promotion of decent work, structured around five points: a) promotion and dissemination of labor rights; b) guarantee of job opportunities and encouragement of the transition to clean energy; c) enhancement of the importance of labor issues in multilateral forums; d) protection of labor rights on digital platforms; and e) involvement of the private sector and combating workplace discrimination (Presidência da República, 2023). The plan introduced a relatively novel dimension to bilateral relations and resonated with both administrations' domestic priorities regarding job creation.

Despite the return to a friendly and cooperative pattern, U.S.-Brazil relations have also been marked by disagreements during this period. In particular, three aspects stand out: Lula's critical positions on the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza; the Brazilian moves to expand South-South cooperation and promote "BRICS Plus"; and the debate over the UN Security Council reform.

Regarding international conflicts, the Lula III administration sought to reaffirm Brazil's mediating role, suggesting, for example, the creation of a "Peace Club" involving participants such as the U.S., Turkey, India, and the European Union (Poder 360, 2023). However, statements made by President Lula during a visit to China in 2023 blamed the U.S. for "encouraging war" (Haubert, 2023), causing some strain in the bilateral relationship. Subsequently, the U.S. government sought to promote a meeting with the Brazilian leader to discuss the Ukraine conflict during the G-7 Summit in 2023 in Japan, but the request was met with hesitation by the Brazilian administration. During the summit, President Lula maintained a critical tone towards U.S. positions, stating that President Biden was exerting pressure on Russia without discussing peace (Yazbek, 2023). Subsequent meetings were characterized by some degree of accommodation, especially after the meeting between President Lula and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during the UN General Assembly in 2023. Nonetheless, Brazil maintained a pro-ceasefire stance, including a joint proposal with China for the creation of a peace conference to resolve the conflict (Presidência da República, 2024).

In the case of Israeli military incursions in Gaza, Lula also supported ceasefire measures and humanitarian aid to the Palestinian population, comparing the events to the Holocaust, which provoked disagreements from U.S. representatives (Poder 360, 2024). The Brazilian head of state criticized U.S. positions on maintaining

military partnership with Israel and blocking attempts within the Security Council to the formulation of multilateral resolutions to end the conflict.

Relations with China and the Global South also remained a focal point of indirect questioning of U.S. influence in the international system. During Lula III's administration, Brazil promoted the expansion of the BRICS arrangement (through the so called "BRICS Plus"), with the accession of Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran². Besides expanding and diversifying the group, this move also suggests perspectives for increased commercial relations among its members, potentially promoting a reduction in dependence on the U.S. dollar.

Finally, although President Biden has indicated support for a possible expansion of the Security Council, there were no explicit mentions of Brazil's inclusion, frustrating Lula's government expectations regarding the country's historic bid for a permanent seat. This position, however, maintains continuity with the U.S. stance on this issue, which, despite possible rhetorical fluctuations, preserves an approach that favors the status quo and the maintenance of the existing order.

These points suggest that while Biden-Lula relations have reestablished bilateral partnership in a path of "normalization" – represented by the return of both countries to active roles in multilateral forums and cooperation on priority agendas – disagreements and divergences persist, reinforced by Brazil's renewed projection, especially in the South-South relations axis, and the intensification of Brazil's critical stance on international conflicts and institutions.

2 The invitation was also extended to Argentina, but it was declined by President Javier Milei.

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Aspect	Bolsonaro Administration (2019-2022)	Lula III Administration (2023-)
Diplomatic Orientation	Strong alignment with the United States; focus on privatization, deregulation, and economic reforms.	Recalibration of foreign policy; emphasis on multilateralism, environmental protection, and regional integration.
Relations with the United States	Emphasis on strategic partnership with the U.S.; support for U.S. policies; significant cooperation in military and economic areas.	Revitalization of bilateral dialogue; focus on environmental issues, human rights, and economic cooperation. Some tensions over international conflicts.
Environmental Policy	Minimal focus on environmental protection; criticism from the international community for deforestation and climate policies.	Strong commitment to environmental protection; re-engagement with global environmental agendas; hosting of COP 30 in 2025.
Multilateral Engagement	Skepticism towards multilateral institutions; withdrawal from Unasur; creation of Prosur.	Strong commitment to multilateralism; re-engagement with the UN and WTO; revitalization of Unasur and Mercosur.
Regional Integration	Shift away from regional integration; focus on bilateral and commercial agreements.	Focus on regional integration through Mercosur and Unasur; promotion of South-South cooperation.
Relations with China	Increased alignment with U.S. positions against China; continued economic cooperation with China.	Expansion of BRICS Plus; promotion of closer ties with China; diversification of international partnerships.
Military and Technological Cooperation	Enhanced military and technological cooperation with the U.S.; use of Alcântara base; dependency on U.S. technology.	Continued emphasis on defense and technology partnerships; cautious approach to U.S. military influence.
International Conflicts	Support for U.S. positions on Venezuela and other international conflicts.	Critical stance on U.S. involvement in conflicts; emphasis on Brazil's mediating role in international disputes.
UN Security Council	Support for status quo; no significant moves towards expanding the Council.	Continued push for reform and inclusion of Brazil in the UN Security Council; frustration over lack of U.S. support.

Table 2: Brazilian Foreign Policy Between Bolsonaro and Lula III

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the initial discussion proposed by Vidigal (2019).

Final remarks

This paper has explored the transformations in the bilateral relations between the United States and Brazil during the administrations of Donald Trump and Jair Messias Bolsonaro, and Joe Biden and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The analysis reveals that the partnership between Trump and Bolsonaro was characterized by an ideological and submissive alignment, which deepened Brazil's dependent insertion into the international system, particularly in the military and technological fields. However, this alignment did not affect the relations with China, which continued to be Brazil's primary commercial partner, despite the presidential rhetoric critical of the Chinese power.

The arrival of Joe Biden and Lula da Silva as presidents of their respective countries introduced a perspective of normalization and pragmatism into the bilateral relationship, marked by convergences — particularly on environmental, humanitarian, and labor issues — and divergences concerning international conflicts and the reform of international institutions. In this new context, there is an increased emphasis on Brazil's engagement with China, not only in trade but also in broader debates such as peace-building in Ukraine and the expansion of the BRICS.

Despite these developments, the question of whether US-Brazil relations are in decline is complex. While there have been some setbacks, particularly in the economic domain, the bilateral relationship has demonstrated a notable capacity to adapt to political changes and transformations experienced by both countries. It is also important to note that the United States continues to exert significant regional and local influence, particularly in the military sphere. A study published by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) in 2024 indicates that the United States remains the primary focus of Brazil's external defense interactions (Barros, Lima, Barros, 2024). This is reflected not only in arms transfers but also in military joint training and the application of Brazilian military doctrine.

These elements underscore the importance of studying US-Brazil relations to understand not only the foreign policies of both countries but also the critical impacts of these interactions, especially for Brazil.



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БРАЗИЛ И САД: СТАГНИРАЈУЋИ ОДНОСИ?

Апстракт: Током протеклих неколико деценија, водила се опсежна дискусија о уоченом стагнацији хегемоније Сједињених Држава. Ове расправе често приписују такав пад спољним факторима, као што је успон сила у настајању, попут Кине и Русије, као и домаћих снага – углавном представљених растућим политичким утицајем екстремно десничарских покрета. У овом замршеном и изазовном контексту, постаје релевантно да се утврди утицај ових трансформација на билатералне односе између Сједињених Држава и Бразила, односа који се често сматра каменом темељцем спољне политике обе земље. Међутим, савремени догађаји, као што је све већи утицај Кине у Латинској Америци и недавне политичке трансформације које су претрпеле обе нације, представљају нове изазове за ове односе. Овај чланак има за циљ да се удуби у ове догађаје, фокусирајући се посебно на администрацију Доналда Трампа (2017-2021), Жаира Месијаса Болсонара (2019-2022), ране године Бајденове администрације (2021-2024) и почетак Луиза Председништво Инасија Луле да Силве (2023-2024). Методолошки, чланак ће се ослањати на анализу садржаја и преглед литературе.

Кључне речи: БРАЗИЛ, САД, ДОНАЛД ТРАМП, ЖАИР МЕСИАС БОЛСАНАРО, ЏО БАЈДЕН, ЛУИЗ ИНАЦИО ЛУЛА ДЕ СИЛВА