

CHANGING PLACE: THE NEW INTERNATIONAL ORDER AND BRAZIL

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“The great decisions that move the world are taken in other places, far away from our table. It’s necessary to build nearnesses in our region as to be heard at the international level. The challenges we face as humankind need more than ever collective efforts and innovative proposals.”

Pepe Mujica, **Letter to Lula**²

Introduction

“Brazil is back” is a phrase repeated in several international media since Lula took office as president for the third time and resumed the country’s international agenda. Member of the BRICS, leader in Latin America, friend of Africa and Asia, and well-liked by Europe and the United States, the South American nation has a vast horizon of possibilities at a time when history is open to the new. After centuries in which its center was one of the European cultural powers of the North Atlantic, the configuration of the international order hegemonized by the West is decomposing. Its replacement is something that is at stake in the movements of states and social forces at work on a global level (Cox, 2002).

To evaluate these challenges and prospect their consequences in the change of Brazil’s international insertion, this text will address the fracturing of the world order hegemonized by the United States and the decline of its phase of unilateral dominance that began in the 1990s after the end of the Soviet Union. Then, it will seek to situate the Brazilian national interest in the possible change from the peripheral condition to the one of an agent with free will and greater global influence. Next, to address this possibility, it is

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² “Las grandes decisiones que mueven al mundo se toman en otras partes, lejos de nuestra mesa. **Es necesario construir cercanía en nuestra región para hacernos oír a nivel internacional.** Los desafíos que tenemos como humanidad necesitan más que nunca esfuerzos colectivos y propuestas innovadoras.” (José “Pepe” Mujica is former President of Uruguay.)

necessary to evaluate Brazil's relations with its neighbors in Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of what it provides to the country in an international repositioning. Finally, the work will evaluate the domestic conditioning of foreign policy, identifying the role of class struggle between different social forces that define the national social formation, its will for power in the world system and its international alliances for its repositioning in global hierarchy.

2. From Disorder to a New Order

To understand the problem, it is necessary to assume the analytical perspective that Braudel (1987) called *longue durée*, the centuries in which History and the world economy evolved. There is a recurrence of long periods of stability and expansion, always followed by other periods of crisis, which have come to define the way international capitalism evolves. Contemporary events point to the fact that we are experiencing one of these moments of change. International order was struck by one of its great historical crises, a recurring movement since its formation in the seventeenth century. The origins of this system, as the French thinker has shown, go back much further when, in the interstices of feudal Europe, the institution of the market evolved to its configuration in national spaces under the domination of a new social class of merchants and bankers, the bourgeoisie. In this process, the bourgeois class assumed power in the national states, which were in the process of being built, at its center and became internationalized with the establishment of the interstate system in the Treaty of Westphalia. Even though it spread worldwide in the twentieth century, this system continues to be directed by European civilization, including its projection in North America.

Its expansionist trait was explained by Arrighi (1996) as the combination of two logics of power, the territorialist and the capitalist, respectively the command of human geography and the control of the accumulation of wealth. Rosa Luxemburg (1976) said that the triumph of its world expansion, by taking the capitalist regime to the ends of the entire planet, would indicate its terminal moment: there would be nothing more to conquer. On the other hand, the never-ending accumulation of wealth is limited in its material form producing concrete use values. In the form of money – like mathematics, an abstraction – infinity exists. Alongside this social and geographical limit, the endless accumulation of material wealth initiated in the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, and which intensively exploits non-renewable natural resources, indicates another limit, the destruction of the environmental balance that supports all forms of life

on Earth.

Since the 1970s, the impulse to increase social wealth and at the same time distribute it so unequally, has lost strength in its historical hegemonic core of the North Atlantic. The engine of the system has shifted to Asia and is increasingly independent of the US-run Western core. In its last great wave of expansion in the second half of the twentieth century, the historical center of the world system eventually transferred most of its productive activity to other regions of the planet, first Latin America and then South and Southeast Asia. This new circumstance ended up emptying the industrial structures of the old center that had been its dynamic core for the past three centuries.

In the area of its inception as a mode of production, the accumulation of fictitious capital in the form of financial rent originated in the relation of interest-bearing capital to productive capital predominates today. The former became the creditor and conductor of the latter in the form of debts or control of its property. As a great part of these assets are on the periphery of the system, their return takes a second form of imperialist rent from the exploitation of these peripheries and their indebted peoples. Two other forms of rent originate from monopolistic domination over international trade flows, i.e. unequal exchange, and from the control of technological innovation that collects royalties, patents, and licenses (Carchedi; Roberts, 2021).

These forms of imperialist exploitation, precisely because of the relocation of economic activities driven by the old center, are now under pressure, on the one hand from the increasing presence of Sino-Asia in the flow of goods and in scientific research and development. And on the other hand, from the institution of forms of financing and foreign direct investment between countries of the Global South and in monetary circuits independent of the dollar.

Increasingly, the American empire is showing signs of decline. After a period of reaffirmation of its hegemony in the 1980s (Tavares, 1985), the US initiated the so-called neoliberal globalization in the 1990s. The collapse of the USSR and the incorporation of its old rival, Russia, into the capitalist system seemed to herald what the conservative leadership intended to become the “New American Century” (Kristoll, Kagan, 1996). However, this circumstance did not provide a new phase of development under the hegemony of the West led by Washington. Instead, there was a short period of expansion in the 1990s, which was followed by turbulent times that culminated in the great crisis of 2008 and 2009. Triggered by household indebtedness, a financial collapse at its world center, the United States, soon spread around the world. Trillions of bailouts for banks and credit organizations have prevented a domino of bankruptcies, but the crisis is far from any solution and has been

further amplified by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the ongoing genocide in Palestine.

On the other side of the North Atlantic, Europe's continued economic stagnation has deepened with the return of inflation and a political crisis that has resurfaced the terrible shadow of Nazi xenophobia and supremacism. This adverse situation stems from the loss of dynamic capability by Germany, the continent's central economy, which had experienced reduction in its labor productivity gains from an average of 4.42% per year between 1950 and 1990, to just 1.27% between 1991 and 2022 (Bergeaud et al, 2016). As Palma (2023) has shown, income has been concentrated by the virtual freezing of real wages and the investment rate in relation to GDP, which had been around almost 30% in the 1970s, fell to 21% in 2019. Productivity, which grew by 2% a year in the 1980s, plummeted to around 0.3% in 2019.

The U.S. action to prevent the rapprochement between Russia and Europe, especially the possibility of a Berlin-Moscow alliance, ended up definitively blocking an European alternative way out of the crisis. The support they had always provided for European integration and economic development had changed in the 1980s, at the beginning of the movement to regain its hegemony. Then it sought to contain the competition that the economic expansion of Germany and Japan represented for its uncompetitive productive system (Tavares, 1985). Since then, Japan has been in chronic stagnation while the reunified Germany has lost dynamism, despite the space given by the European integration agreement.

The war in Ukraine has accelerated the trend of dissolution of the old-world order by resolving two historical ambiguities affecting the two largest countries belonging to what for 300 years was imagined to be Europe, Germany and Russia. Having twice tried to assume a hegemonic position through the two world wars it lost, the reunified Germany took a central place in the European Union through the vacillation of the British and the realistic retreat of French pretensions. With its eastward opening in the agreements of economic complementarity with Russia, the possibility of a German detachment from the US was posed. In turn, the country that inherited the Tsarist empire, and was europeanized since Peter the Great and Ekaterina, was finally assimilated into what it imagined to be its civilizational destiny.

During this period, the United States made a complete U-turn in its policy toward Russia. If in the 1990s the largest country in the world was a good pupil of its policies, since the beginning of the 21st century this has changed. In addition to forcing Russia's economic decoupling from Western Europe, an intense encirclement of Moscow, acquiring military positions in countries on its borders was carried out. Feeling trapped, Russia eventually

reacted by invading Ukraine. The war has accelerated change, with Russia moving closer to the Global South, reinforcing its Asian alliance, and taking on a new personality of non-European civilization (Volosyuk, 2023; Trenin, 2023; Likhasheva, 2023). Europe, for its part, submits to American will by increasing its military spending, funding for NATO, and support for Ukraine, which deepens its double crisis, political and economic (Sapir, 2023; Palma, 2023).

In addition to fueling the confrontation in Europe, the US continues to promote instability in West Asia. Although it has ended its military incursions into Iraq and Afghanistan, it maintains its strategy of encirclement and aggression against Iran and of encouraging discord between neighboring countries. To this end, its unconditional support for Israel is central since the continuing colonial war against the Palestinians reinforces the role of “aircraft carrier on the ground” assigned by the Americans to that country. Interoperability between the two-armed forces greatly facilitates any attempt to use force in the region to destroy and try to thwart initiatives considered undesirable by Arab and Muslim states. The genocide in Gaza is just another brutal expression of this strategy.

At the same time, and in another radical turn, the US leadership began to regard Chinese development as an existential challenge. His national security strategy shifted from the fight against terrorism to preventing the rise of the Middle Kingdom. References for the “Thucydides Trap”³ have been present in the talks in Washington for some years now (Allison, 2017). Then, an economic siege of China begins, with the use of sanctions and blocking of business, and then also a military action with the escalation of defense spending by it and its allies in the Pacific, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

China, for its part, remains on its development path toward what it has defined as a moderately prosperous society. Its stance on the US move was released in February 2023 in a rather harsh tone (China, 2023). Before that, on the eve of the invasion of Ukraine, China and Russia announced the deepening of a strategic partnership. (China; Russia, 2022). At the same time, China (Pyng, 2023) expanded its economic integration movements with Asia and Africa on the Belt and Road Initiative and in a series of investments in infrastructure and exploitation of agricultural and mineral goods also in Latin America (Bernardi, 2023). Completing these movements, the BRICS

³ The idea developed by the Greek historian in his classic “The Peloponnesian War” explains the beginning of that military event by the growth of the power of Athens that had forced Sparta to attack it. In its words “...it was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable.” (Thucydides, 2020)

partnership has deepened and assumed an alternative reference position to the US-Europe axis. The next steps in this global change will be taken with the development of an alternative logistical and financial system to the one controlled by the US, a de-dollarization of debts, payments and assets, and the construction of alternative channels of trade and investment, as is already being done in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Belt and Road Initiative by China is the most visible action in this prospect. As for Brazil, not integrated in the BRI, there is IIRSA (Initiative for the Integration of South American Infrastructure), an ambitious plan of building an integrated infrastructure in South America. The New Development Bank, the BRICS bank, with former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff as its CEO is playing an important role in this process.

3. The Pink Tide and Beyond

Latin America and the Caribbean have existed since their independence 200 years ago as a kind of “West of the South”, a space dependent on and associated with the hegemonic centers of world capitalism. This position allowed the region to experience a very vigorous process of industrialization that had begun around 1930, at the same time as the “Glorious 30 Years” of the Post-World War II Era were happening in the capitalist center. It all fell apart in the 1980s, when the great foreign debt crisis happened. At the same time, and combined with the exchange rate problem, the concentration of income – which favored the growth of the rate of profit by reducing real wages – narrowed one of the engines of economic growth due to the atrophy of the internal market. The fall in investment led to the end of development (Faria, 2004, 2016, 2020, 2022).

The crisis led to the abandonment of the National Developmentalist Project in the 1990s and the adoption of the neoliberal prescription, the “Washington Consensus”, which resulted in continued stagnation until 2003. In the neoliberal era, US relations with Latin America changed radically. In the previous mode of development, Fordism, the neighbor to the North, was a partner in industrialization in the South of the Rio Grande. Its foreign direct investment has located numerous branches of its multinational companies in the region, contributing decisively to the composition of its productive and industrial structures. In the new neoliberal model, which could be described as non-development, industrial investment has been delocalized to Asia, especially China. The type of economic policy that Washington has imposed through financial coercion of foreign debt and interference in the internal

affairs of countries has produced deindustrialization, economic stagnation and impoverishment.

At the turn of the 21st century, crises of great intensity in Argentina, Brazil and throughout the region resulted in political changes that in turn enabled a cycle of growth between 2004 and 2014. Known as the Latin American “Pink Tide”, a sort of developmentalist program was implemented with its national specificities, a new expansion project driven by domestic consumption boosted by social policies that caused income redistribution and increased exports. A decade of economic growth led to the overcoming of the two previous bottlenecks, the external imbalance, and the insufficiency of the domestic market.

This development period was limited in time, about a decade, which was motivated not by any insufficiency of the project, but by the comings and goings of politics. Its achievements were the reduction of poverty, the increase in real wages, the redirection of public spending in the expansion of social policies of assistance, health and education and the restoration of the inductive role of the State, in addition to overcoming external constraints.⁴ At the same time, organized in their regional institutions, Mercosur (Common Market of the South), UNASUR (Union of South American Nations) and CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), the countries of the region distanced themselves from the historical Western perspective and assumed the non-aligned position as nations of the Global South.

The new policies were firmly opposed by the ruling classes.⁵ Their reaction was somewhat surprising because it implied a complete reorganization of the political leadership of these social forces, in some way replicating what happened in the Northern hemisphere. An extreme right-wing ranging from ordo-liberal to neo-fascist has taken over the leadership of the bourgeoisie. With the firm support of the United States, a neoliberal restoration has taken place in several countries, either in the electoral form with the option for a neoliberal right in Argentina, or by coup d'état as in Bolivia or a combination of the two in the case of Brazil.⁶

⁴ The results measured in social and economic indicators were quite expressive, as shown in the analysis of the Brazilian case by Fiocca (2023).

⁵ During the period, the rate of profit falling process that had been going on since the 1970s accelerated to the extent that the counter-remaining forces of wage squeeze or the new profit opportunities of privatizations were no longer present (see, for the Brazilian case, Faria, 2022 and Marqueti et al, 2023).

⁶ A “constitutional” coup d'état with the use of lawfare was responsible for the deposition of Dilma Rousseff in 2016. Bolsonaro's election in 2018 was favored by Lula's imprisonment, another case of lawfare, and brought to power a right that, in its extremism, recalls the Nazi-

Right-wing governments have made a shift in foreign policy, re-establishing unconditional alignment with the US, and dismantling the engines of previous growth, cutting public spending, concentrating income and increasing poverty. Their actions restored the interests of the ruling class and took away rights from the dominated, without any concern for what could be defined as a national project. At the same time seeking a position of hegemony in the Gramscian sense through an intense cultural war, they bet on the division of society and the action of eliminating and silencing divergent social groups. The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 only amplified the crisis.

4. Brazil and its Challenges

Meanwhile, in this third decade of the 21st century, a new “Pink Tide” has formed, with special importance for Lula’s return to power in Brazil in 2023. The international circumstances in which it took place allow for a much wider range of action.⁷ There is room for the continent to situate itself in a more autonomous position between the West and the new poles of power on the rise, through a strengthening of its alliance with the Global South, where Brazil’s leading role – the largest country in the region – is very important.

This is what the signs coming from Lula’s third presidency indicate. The attempt to repeat the good economic and especially social performance of his first government requires more than economic growth and redistributive social policies. The country, like the entire region, has been taken over by the same financialized and rentier model as the West. Investment is very low and, apart from the rural and extractive sector, productivity has barely grown in 40 years. Brazil’s manufacturing industry was reduced to 12% of GDP, against 30.7% in 1985 (IBGE, 2023). It already had 2.5% of world industry in 1990 against 1.3% in 2020 (CNI, 2023). Early deindustrialization interrupted a process of development and incorporation of technology that had caused per capita income to grow to US\$ 5,600 in 1980. In the neoliberal period, GDP per capita stagnated.⁸ In the first “Pink Tide” of this century, GDP per capita grew again, reaching 8,000 in 2014, an increase of 40.4%. With the restoration of the far-right, income fell 12.5% to 7,000 in 2022.⁹ The

fascism of the 1930s.

⁷ It is not the same in its internal affairs. An empowered far-right and a parliamentary majority opposition narrowed political options to Lula.

⁸ In 2002, the value was still 5.7 thousand in constant dollars as of 2015 (World Bank, 2023).

⁹ This movement coincides in the main Latin American countries. Thus, the values for Argentina are 8.6 in 1980, 6.8 in 2002, 11.8 in 2013 and 9.7 in 2022. In the case of Mexico,

phenomenon of deindustrialization and economic and social regression has been repeated throughout Latin America, except for Mexico's industry, which has remained stable at 19% of GDP since 1985 due to its relationship with the United States.¹⁰

Lula's third presidency makes a choice between the stagnation of globalized financialization and the development of the productive forces with a reduction in inequalities. That is why his government, in addition to emergency policies to combat hunger, had increased the minimum wage, and transferred income to the poorest, presented an agenda of reindustrialization and scientific and technological development, investment in infrastructure, green energy, improvement in education and health, and environmental sustainability. This necessarily implies the action of the state through investment, government procurement, tax reform and financing by public banks. A new industrial park will need to be built for the creation of capacities in the new technologies for which development has taken place so far away from Latin America. A significant increase in per capita income will be necessary to achieve the position of a more prosperous society.

In the period 1990-2002, Brazil and the entire region compassionately accepted US pressure and abdicated or abandoned any action that resembled an industrial policy. Previous efforts in the development of alternative energies, information and communication technologies, the defense industry, chemicals and pharmaceuticals have been lost due to an indiscriminate market opening without any counterparts from its trading partners. Overcoming the current backwardness will require an effort to correct this mistake and follow the Asian example by producing the necessary capacities to achieve productivity gains, which requires, in addition to investment in production, more education, science and technological development. To this end, Latin America cannot count on the United States and Europe, which are only interested in preserving the pattern of asymmetric relations of imperialism.

The process that took place in a disorganized and unintentional way and that made China the main trading partner of a large part of the countries of the region needs to be modified to allow the redefinition of its position in the international division of labor. To this date, the trade flow between Latin America and Asia is composed of the export of primary products with low value added and the import of industrial goods with greater technological intensity. This situation will have to change for the region to resume its

which did not experience the first "Pink Tide", there was barely stagnation: 7.1 in 1980, 7.2 in 2002, 7.3 in 2013 and 7.0 in 2022, always in 2015 constant dollars (World Bank, 2023).

10 It is the "maquila" phenomenon, an activity that specializes in the assembly of industrial goods, the labor-intensive link in the value chain.

development while maintaining the partnership with the Asian country.

A central instrument in this repositioning in the world is regional integration in its various dimensions. If Mercosur has increased the flow of trade between its members, especially that of industrial products, it has had until today little capacity to expand its scope. As former Uruguayan President Pepe Mujica said: “...until now, when talking about integration we have been purely Phoenicians, how much I sell to you and how much you sell to me; and the Phoenicians, who were formidable merchants, did not create any civilization”¹¹ (Mujica, 2023). The creation of UNASUR and CELAC, the former involving South America and the latter all Latin America and the Caribbean, broadened the integration agenda to include political and defense issues. It also gave birth to a shared investment agenda, that of the IIRSA initiative integrating infrastructures of transport, energy, and so on. To cease to be Phoenicians has become a necessity.

Nevertheless, any alternative has to be constructed by foreign policy. As it is proper for its importance, the academic sphere has an important debate on Brazilian foreign policy that is fertilized by its dialogue with the outstanding professional staff of the national diplomatic service. Although it is not the objective of this article, it is possible to have a look at this intense debate by fixing two axes of discussion. On the one hand there are the opposite views of pragmatic institutionalists and autonomists (Saraiva, 2010) derived from how to deal with the peripheral condition of Brazil. Take it for granted and pragmatically explore opportunities or fight to change it.¹²

On the other hand, the causality of policy choices is stressed, looking at structure and agency (Reis da Silva, Pérez, 2019; Pinheiro, Soares de Lima, 2018). Structural conditions are those of world order and its hierarchy of states from center to periphery and to regional and worldwide arrangements. Also structural is national politics, class struggle and forms of state. Agency is assigned to the relative power of interest groups and their international alliances and alignments. It results from the degrees of freedom of foreign policies and relative autonomy of the state.

South and Latin America space and the significant parallelism of countries' histories are important points of academic debates (Pecequillo, Carmo, 2013; Saraiva, 2020, Faria, 2004). In this sense, great moves in South

11 “...(h)asta ahora, cuando hablamos de integración hemos sido puramente fenicios, cuánto te vendo y cuánto me vendes tú; y los fenicios, que fueron unos mercaderes formidables, no crearon ninguna civilización”.

12 There is another point of view considering Brazilian foreign policy as independent and self-confident since Cardoso's term (Cervo, 2010).

American history seem to have some degree of synchrony as was the case of the two so-called “Pink Tide”. This reality spurred regional integration. And integration is a matter of importance both to the biggest country in the region and to the smaller ones because it favors economic and political empowerment. As for Brazil, its regional leadership ought to be constructed in the necessary movement of regional integration. Pioneering this movement should be a decisive baseline for changing its place in the world order.

In fact, the process of regional integration has been expanding the interdependence of Latin American countries beyond trade, with the construction of transport, energy, and communication infrastructure via IIRSA projects, as well as political institutions. Its financing has been provided by CAF, the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean, and by Brazilian public banks, but given the magnitude of these investments, the region needs external financing.

The diversion of trade within the region or towards China has already caused annoyance to the US. In its view advancing the political agenda of autonomy is anathema. As Sapir (2023) recalled, if the dissent of smaller countries, Cuba or Nicaragua, was responded to with the known violence, then it would be unacceptable to Washington that the large countries, such as Brazil or Argentina, would seek to leave their area of influence. The devastation of Venezuela’s economy and society is a grim wake-up call.¹³

The reaction to the crisis of its hegemony engages the US movement to preserve control of what it calls its “backyard,” as is visible in numerous statements and, even more, in actions of veiled or explicit intervention in the internal affairs of Latin American and Caribbean countries in recent years¹⁴ and the reinstatement of the Southern Command of its armed forces.¹⁵ Its objective is, first, to maintain the isolation of Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, then to prevent relations with China or Russia from advancing even on economic issues – the investments of the Belt and Road Initiative are seen as

13 Venezuela’s GDP per capita in current dollars, which was \$12.7 thousand in 2012, before the effect of US sanctions, fell to 1.7 in 2020 and a mere 3.5 thousand in 2022, while total GDP went from 371.3 billion in 2013 to 111.8 in 2021 (STATISA, 2023 and World Bank, 2023). Oil production, which was 2.4 million barrels per day in 2012, fell to 512 thousand in 2021 (OPEC, 2023).

14 The recent political turmoil in Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Bolivia, Argentina exemplifies this type of action.

15 The Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) Commander Gen. Laura Richardson made a statement about the importance of Latin America to her country, saying that control of the region’s natural resources (Amazon rainforest, lithium, rare earths, gold, copper) were vital to her country’s national security, as well as preventing China’s presence (Richardson, 2023).

a threat to their security – and, finally, that interstate relations only take place under US supervision.

5. The Will For Power

These are the conditions of the space in which the States and social forces of Brazil and Latin America move in the redefinition of their place in the international constellation. I think that this repositioning in the world is ultimately determined by the internal dynamics of the class struggle in each country (Faria, 2020). Nowadays there is a cleavage within the societies of the region: there is a conservative bloc that struggles to maintain the position of dependency and association with American imperialism, formed by most of the bourgeois class. Even in countries where developmentalism has generated some degree of industrialization, its support in the ruling classes has always been in the minority. This block, which had been hegemonized by the industrial bourgeoisie until 1980 and had the support of an ascendant middle class in the public and private bureaucracies and in small businesses, has changed. Today its configuration is quite diverse, with the complete hegemony of financial capital, a noisy participation of the rural bourgeoisie empowered by the commodity boom, and which has the support of a middle class resentful of its social decay and the rise of the popular classes.¹⁶ Its leadership is with the far-right.

Against this new version of a dependent and associated “buyer (comprador)” bourgeoisie – which in the past had been developmentalist and is now rentier – the coalition that won the 2022 elections with Lula was organized. Its social base was made up almost exclusively of the workers and other poorer popular classes, to which were added a small fraction of the middle class in the state bureaucracy, educators and scientists and an even smaller portion of the bourgeoisie, mainly in industry and commerce, frightened by the nazi-fascist inclinations of Bolsonaro and his allies who defend the return of dictatorship. The 2022 electoral map in Brazil clearly showed this political divide, a class and income split in Lula’s voters, the poor, black, and residents of less developed regions. Only the group of voters with incomes of less than \$500 voted overwhelmingly for the left-wing candidate.

Its project is the resumption of developmentalism with a stronger classist imprint. In addition to redistributive policies, social inclusion and protection of vulnerable groups assuming centrality in the government’s

¹⁶ The same middle class that, since the struggle against dictatorships in the 1970s, had sustained social progress...

agenda, the popular coalition wants the return of an independent and assertive foreign policy. Changing the place of Brazil and all of Latin America and the Caribbean in the world has been the banner of the new government's foreign policy, which translates into a great activism that seeks to integrate the region, strengthen the alliance with Africa and Asia, and reinforce the BRICS initiative, for which the recent increase in the number of participating countries is an important step in this direction.

The coalition of the great representative countries of the three continents of the Global South is going through a moment of definition of its identity, which will be decisive for its proposal for the creation of a multipolar world, a historic change in the form of the capitalist world order due to the absence of a single hegemony. Up to the present this has been a passing circumstance – of anarchy or systemic chaos – in the process of transition between two systemic cycles of accumulation (Arrighi, 1996).

For such a hypothesis to materialize, a transformation at the level of social relations, the result of the evolution of the contradictions of the mode of production, would have to take place. One possible path is the one proposed by Oliveira (1998). For this author, the contradiction between accumulation and the reproduction of society is taking form with the emergence of a new social form, the anti-value. The inability of the commodity form to provide stability and guarantee the subsistence of society means that a set of necessary activities such as health, education, infrastructure, planning, and control of inter-capitalist competition has increasingly been produced by the state or other non-capitalist forms of social organization that it has defined as the anti-value.¹⁷

The current debate over the nature of Chinese society¹⁸ brings to a greater level of concreteness the discussion about the nature of the transformation underway in the world system. The understanding of the social formation of the Middle Kingdom at the beginning of the twenty-first century appears as an interpretative key in the understanding of the ongoing transition of the international order. In opposition to the perception of a change within the world order, another look sees in the contradictions of the capitalist system, which have been made explicit since the end of the twentieth century, the emergence of insurmountable limits, indicating that the current crisis of US

¹⁷ The theme was deliberated over an historical and anthropological approach in the work of Karl Polanyi (1946 and 1977).

¹⁸ On the nature of Chinese society from an outsider's perspective, Gabrielli, Jabbour, 2023 and Weber, 2023, and in the view of authors from that country Ping, 2023; Tiejun, 2021 and Zhongqiu, 2023.

hegemony is also a terminal crisis of capitalism itself.¹⁹

If the announced goal of the BRICS alliance is an international order without hegemony, something completely unprecedented in the 300-year history of world capitalism, its realization would take place in the form of two parallel and simultaneous systems. In the former, the old capitalist order would be in decline, but persist for a long time to come, while the latter would be formed, accumulating quantitative changes that at a given moment would make a leap in quality towards a new order that will emerge (Ping, 2023; Zhongqiu, 2023). The various national social formations would participate in both systems if there was no final dissolution of the old and the affirmation of the new. It would be a revolutionary and unprecedented episode.

6. As a way of conclusion, if possible

The falling US hegemony, the new stronghold of Russia and the rising of China and other Southern nations are redefining the world order. If it is not the end of its capitalist nature, it should be the end of its centralized structure around one and only one imperial power. As is argued by the BRICS coalition, a new international system with a multipolar organization may be rising. And it could be peaceful and not chaotic or anarchic as Arrighi had seen in the past, in other moments of the world system. It is not out of reason to foresee an imbalance of power and shared prosperity as the mode of the international order, even if it is unprecedented. And it should be necessarily unprecedented if a transition in the very core of societies is going on from capitalism to another mode of production.

This changing world gives unseen opportunities to what is called The Global South, Brazil in its milieu. As I wrote above, it depends on the capabilities developed by those countries to achieve a higher position in the so-called concert of nations. It is far from the sight of some kind of international democracy, but cooperation could be improved and the exploitation of the periphery by the old imperialist center can be minimized.

As one of the biggest countries in the South, Brazil can have an important role in the new world order. This depends on the improvement of its regional leadership in Latin America now weakened by political divergencies. And it also depends on the building of a national will of autonomy and self-determination. None of the two are supported by the dominant portion of the national bourgeoisie, that of finance. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the

¹⁹ In this perspective are the works of Desai, 2023 and Hudson, 2022.

XXIst century, and despite the strong opposition by the capitalist elites and by the US, the popular governments of the Workers Party – PT have played what they call an “assertive and active” foreign policy, one that aims a protagonist role in the international arena and its transformation. But the road map is uncertain.

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ABSTRACT

The fracture of the world order and the falling of US hegemony are the context in which Brazil's national interest must be built. The possible change in its peripheric position to the place of a player with more global influence is examined. In order to do this, Brazilian relations with its Latin America and Caribbean neighbors are examined, and how they could help to redefine its place in the world order. Finally, this article will address domestic issues that affect foreign policy, by identifying the role of class struggle between different social forces that define our national social formation, its will for power in the world system and its international alliances for its repositioning in global hierarchy.

KEYWORDS

World Order, Brazilian Foreign Insertion, Development

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