

BRAZIL AND ITS REGIONAL PROJECTION: PERSPECTIVES ON HEGEMONY AND REGIONALISM IN SOUTH AMERICA IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

Brasil e sua projeção regional: perspectivas sobre hegemonia e regionalismo da América do Sul no pós-Guerra Fria

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, Brazil has turned to the international scene in a more incisive way, something unprecedented in the history of its foreign policy, also changing its behavior, subsequently, concerning South American regionalism. Its projection is based on the values already found in the international community, and the same happens through the conquest of new attributes and activities within the international system. This insertion is linked to the reconfiguration of the international plan itself after the bipolar conflict. Now, regarding the domestic plan, this projection took place right after the rearrangement of the Brazilian political system, that is, in the process of democratization in Brazil, which is inaugurated with the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRASIL, 1988).

In this way, in the search for a greater sphere of influence in both regional and international terms, the Brazilian foreign policy adopts a dual aspect in which, at first, normally and historically, it aligns itself with neighboring countries, in other words, it is initially projected to South America; as Scheider (1996, p. 218) states, “Never before has Brazil enjoyed such close relationships with its South American neighbors or found itself in as good repute in more distant parts of Latin America”. On the other hand, secondly, Brazilian diplomacy has tried to project this performance to the global level, presenting itself as a leader of a peaceful

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and developing region, projecting an image to the international community of effectiveness in exercising this leadership, even though this narrative is not necessarily accepted by other regional actors.

Historically, Brazil has adopted a less bellicose stance, giving priority to diplomacy, negotiation, the promotion and construction of regional peace and security. Since the consolidation of borders, in the management of the Baron of Rio Branco (1902-1012), the Brazilian diplomatic discourse has sought to emphasize the importance of peace in the region, to guarantee to Brazil conditions to dedicate itself with full force to the economic development, the main objective of its international relations. In parallel to the objective of development, it was also a basic objective of Brazilian foreign policy (BFP), the search for autonomy; thus, the consolidation of a peaceful space in its geographic surroundings also contributed to avoiding the possibility of external interference to guarantee continental security. Finally, the guarantee of peace in the region also assures Brazil of political and diplomatic capital to project an image of benign leadership at the regional level, presenting itself as a consensus builder and mediator of international conflicts, disputes, and controversies (FILHO, 2013; VARGAS, 2017).

At the same time, it also seeks to leverage its sphere of influence globally. Under this aegis, the strategy used by Brazilian diplomacy was autonomy - in its various aspects, such as participation and diversification - essentially through participation in international institutions and the search for an expansion of partners, regardless of domestic specificities in these countries. However, this foreign policy provision has been in transition since 2016, culminating in a paradigm shift that, gradually, has also been (de)constructing this Brazilian position in South America.

Although the capacity for the Brazilian influence is still limited and restricted, the very nature of Brazil's international operations is ambiguous. At the same time that it seeks an insertion, it is only achieved in a limited way (GARDINI, 2012, p. 1). Nowadays, this regional projection is still open, going essentially through the challenges presented by the conjuncture of the regional and international systems. These changes in regional positions, especially concerning the understanding of regionalism by the South American countries, clearly alter the Brazilian capacity to exercise this hegemony.

The ambiguity of the Brazilian leadership in South America helps to perpetuate regional instabilities, as exposing the weaknesses of its performance. We can verify these aspects regarding the cooptation of values, ideas, and ideologies in most South American countries (in this particular case). Following this line of thought, the present article has the central scope of investigating Brazil's exercise of hegemonic projection through its participation in the regional integration processes in South America in the post-Cold War era. Supported by the theoretical framework on the Gramscian concepts of hegemony, we argued that Brazil has not acted more forcefully in the region, nor has it taken advantage of its dimension to impose its interests. Working with it in a regional range, we analyze Brazilian use of instruments, that is, regional organizations, to better position itself in South America by exercising a leadership whose ultimate goal is to increase its *status quo* in the international arena. Therefore, despite participating and leading several regional initiatives, Brazil prefers holding its autonomy by maintaining a low level of institutionalization in regional integration.

This article is subdivided as follows. In the following section, we present the methodology used in our case study of Brazilian hegemonic projection in regional integration processes. Then, taking into account the conceptual diversity related to the analysis of the term hegemony, we will approach its conception through two contemporary characterizations of hegemony: cooperative and consensual. After, we analyze how Brazil articulates its regional activism, aiming to point out its paradoxical nature. In other words, while seeking to exercise its regional hegemony as a form of global projection, it also prevents this activism from encompassing high political, economic, and ideological costs. We conclude the article by defending the argument that the various coordination and integration arrangements with neighbors are fundamental points for the exercise of Brazilian hegemony in South America, while the Brazilian preference to maintain a low level of institutionalization, limits its employment.

Methods

We use the qualitative method, with a single case study design to defend our argument that Brazilian leadership in the regional integration agenda is a fundamental instance for its hegemony in South America but is limited by its strategy of a low level of institutionalization.

We do so with a brief review of Brazilian foreign policy history from the 1990s to the present using simple documental and bibliographical reviews. Regarding the former, we resort mainly to news reports, meeting declarations and documents, speeches, and the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE or Itamaraty) reviews. The latter relies on books and articles on Brazilian regional strategies, collected by the use of keywords related to our subject.

Brazilian leadership in South American regional integration is investigated as a typical case. This a case study that should represent a central tendency, or a what would be a representative case (SEAWRIGHT; GERRING, 2008, p. 299), in other words, a case that follows a theoretical expectation. This kind of case study serves to provide insights into a broader phenomenon, the exercise of regional hegemony, suiting for an exploratory role (GERRING, 2006, p. 91).

Our main concern is to describe a phenomenon (Brazilian hegemony in South America) with the main objective of descriptive inference (GERRING; COJOCARU, 2016, p. 396). It includes two different case study types – distinct but not mutually exclusive – a descriptive and a preliminary illustration of a theory (ODELL, 2001, pp. 162-163). It is a descriptive case study, as we do not consider it to have direct external validity, nor is our intention to make a generalization to other regional powers. We aim only to contribute to the literature on Brazilian foreign policy and South American regionalism. Complementarily, we do this descriptive effort using Gramsci's theory of hegemony, trying to illustrate this theoretical idea, while at the same time pinpointing its limitation to fit Brazilian regional activism.

The formation of Brazilian regional hegemony: two possible interpretations

Theoretically, regionalism is far from reaching a consensus among scholars. It can mean different things at different times, sometimes confusing with cooperation, free-trade, economical agreements, among

many others. There are several interpretations and perspectives on regional integration across the globe and, depending on the region, they are more prone to be employed. However, apart from that remark, it is possible to grasp a few theoretical approaches to regionalism.

For instance, Fawcett (2005) distinguishes what is regions, regionalism and regionalization. Whereas, regions are defined by territorial aspect; regionalism is seen as coordinated policies and project within a certain region in order to achieve a certain degree of harmonization and regional cohesion; and, finally, regionalization it is more likely a process, such as globalization, in which concentrate activities (political, economic, cultural and social, and so forth) at the regional stratum and tends to be continuum (FAWCETT, 2005, pp. 24-25). In that sense, Wunderlich (2007) also define regionalism as being a process, considering external factors that led to a remarkable blast of regional integration after the end of the Cold War, as he notes,

Regionalism is rarely an isolated process and must be regarded as driven by complex socio-historical processes and exogenous factors. It, therefore, has to be situated in its historical and global context. In particular, more attention has to be paid to exogenous factors such as globalisation and the international order (WUNDERLICH, 2007, p. 36).

From a historical point of view, Mary Farrell (2005) advocates that there are two waves of regionalism since World War II. On one hand, the first wave corresponds to the regional integration during the Cold War (from, approximately the 1950s to late 1980s). The rise of regionalism, in this period, coincides with the creation of the European Steel and Coal Community (ESCC) and drew its attention to avoid war and the role of supranational organisms (in contrast to sovereign and centralized states). The eurocentrism inhere is clear and that was the main critic of this era of regionalism. On the other hand, the second wave emerged along with the end of the Cold War, in the 1990s, and represents more complex and broader aspects of regionalism. Fredrik Söderbaum (2003) separates old regionalism from new regionalism, whereas the former corresponds to the first wave presented; and the latter to the second wave³. Thus, the new regionalism, in this sense, has had incorporated a multidimensional approach, as Farrell points out,

[...] regionalism was regarded as a multidimensional form of integration embracing economic, cultural, political and social aspects, thereby extending the understanding of regional activities beyond the creation of free trade agreements or security regimes. Regionalism is also considered to have a strategic goal of region-building, of establishing regional coherence and identity (FARRELL, 2005, p. 8).

It is important to stress the fact that global conjuncture after the end of the Cold War has changed dramatically, also within and across International Relations theories. Regardless, the new regionalism took the same path in theoretical terms. Tried to distance itself from the Eurocentric view, as integration spread around the world, in South and North America, Africa and Asia.

³ As he points out “The first wave had its roots in the devastating experience of inter-war nationalism and the Second World War. It emerged in Western Europe in the late 1940s and, although exported to several other regions in the South, it died out in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The second wave began to emerge in the mid-1980s, again starting in Western Europe (with the White Paper and the Single European Act) and gradually turning into a more widespread phenomenon” (SÖDERBAUM, 2003, pp. 3 - 4).

Nonetheless, another attempt to theorize about regionalism is advocated by Neumann (2003), considering that regions would follow the same path of nation-building theories. In sum, the author emphasizes that external and internal narratives (outside-in and inside-out approaches, respectively) of a given region can have different results in terms of regionalism, relying upon the narrative adopted⁴. The notion of hegemony would present a challenge for Brazil's projection towards South America, bearing in mind that it was extremely influenced by exogenous factors (outside-in) over regional-building construction from inside-out. The creation of Mercosur, Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Group of Lima represents that, following a major turning point on global politics regarding nationalism, regional integration and protections in recent years. It is also important to mention that the current turmoil within and across the international system, has been paying its dues around the globe and, certainly, will have an impact on the role of regionalism (or, region-building).

The notion of hegemony, advocated by Gramsci (1971), differs from realistic thinking, as a synonym of power relations (AGNEW, 2005; DAALDER; LINDSAY, 2003; LAYNE; THAYER, 2007), in the sense of seeking an approximation of the state reality that is not only based on the economic plan but also includes the ideological, social and political plan in its premises. Such axioms were made valid at the international level essentially through Robert Cox (1981, 1983, 2007) who defines hegemony as being,

Hegemony is a structure of values and understandings about the nature of order that permeates a whole system of states and non-states entities. In a hegemonic order these values and understandings are relatively stable and unquestioned. They appear to most actors as a natural order. Such a structure of meanings is underpinned by a structure of power, in which most probable one state is dominant but that state's dominance is not sufficient to create hegemony. Hegemony derives from the dominant social strata of dominant states in so far as these ways of doing and thinking have acquired the acquiescence of the dominant strata of other states (Cox, 1990 *apud* Gill, 1993, p. 42).

The study of hegemony, therefore, should not be seen as an object of static analysis, but as a complex organic phenomenon of interdependent social and political relations (JOSEPH, 2002). In this sense, Hegemony must be considered as a structure (COX, 1983), an arrangement of economic, social, and political values, structured to perpetuate the maintenance of a certain group in power.

Brazil's regional and international position is intrinsically linked to its ability to influence the international system. This capacity, therefore, is related to the Brazilian hegemonic position in ideological, political, social, and economic terms. In this sense, three possible interpretations about Brazilian hegemonic power can be applied to the construction of regional peace in South America: cooperative and consensual.

Pedersen (2002, pp. 683-684), discusses the relationship between power, institutionalism, forms of domination and leadership, based on what he calls "cooperative hegemony". Emphasizing the different interpretations of regional integration at the heart of International Relations theories (neoliberal, rational choice, realism, neorealism, and institutionalism, among others), this author argues that the traditional view

⁴ As advocated, "Closer to the outside-in end of the continuum, there is a sizeable literature where the interests and interaction of the great powers relevant to the region take centre stage. Whereas the inside-out approaches operate with a plethora of different regional actors – international NGOs (INGOs), nations, states, bureaucracies, parties, commercial enterprises, trade unions, cultural personalities – the outside-in literature tends to stress systemic factors, states, and geography" (NEUMANN, 2003, p. 164).

of the concept of hegemony must be revised, taking into account, especially, the institutional state-centrist version as a scenario of relative gains for its members, thus coinciding with national interests. Following this line of thought, cooperative hegemony boils down to a “great strategy”, adopted by certain countries, usually those with low military capacity, but characterized as important in the international system in other aspects, economic, political and ideological, with realistic dimensions and institutionalist.

The adoption of a cooperative perspective does not necessarily mean the inclusion of idealistic values, which can be offensive, where actors tend to expand their sphere of influence, or defensive where the benefit of stability is your overall objective. Taking into account the Brazilian participation in South America and its corollaries for the construction and maintenance of peace in the region, it can be said that, on a smaller scale and in very specific aspects (such as integration in terms of defense), its policy starts from a cooperative matrix, thus distancing itself from unilateralism, although a low level of institutionalization can be noted in the processes of regional integration in South America.

However, in both cases, as by unilateral hegemonic or cooperative power, there are certain costs for this endeavor, as stated “co-operative hegemony promises benefits, especially long-term benefits, it also involves costs” (PEDERSEN, 2002, p. 687). Those costs, as argued by Lafer (2007), Brazil is not willing to pay, which possibly restricts the exercise of a more incisive hegemony in South America.

Another conception about the typology related to hegemonic projects and their dynamics to find consensus is in the attribution of the concept of “consensual hegemony” by Burges (2008). This author argues the possibility of exercising hegemonic power without necessarily resorting to forms of domination, and at this point, Petersen's (2002) cooperative hegemony can result in consensual hegemony in the light of Gramscian thinking (BURGES, 2008, pp. 69-72). However, Brazil does not exercise its economic, political, and ideological capabilities to influence decision-making in terms of regional integration and, concomitantly, in greater participation in terms of building and maintaining regional stability. Therefore, the lack of more incisive participation in South America departs from the requirements for the stipulation of a hegemonic project pointed out by Nye (1971). Still, Burges (2008, p. 64) notes the fact that the alliance system built over time by Brazilian foreign policy, in contrast to Venezuela's foreign policy, for example, is more likely to create consensus among South American states since the end of the Cold War.

Thus, the concept of hegemony presented by this author suggests that the Brazilian actions and interests, first, necessarily advance to the South American region. Secondly, Brazil has an essential role in shaping regional base development, thus achieving a prominent position in the region related to developed countries, creating a non-coercive aspect of Brazil's consensual hegemony in South America (BURGES, 2008, p. 76). This power, whether voluntary or involuntary, which is exercised by Brazil in the region, presupposes a certain level of legitimacy, supported by other states, in this case, other countries in South America concerning the exercise of this leadership - mainly through deepening of regional bodies.

Up to the present moment, we cannot disregard any of these interpretations of the concept of hegemony regarding Brazil's performance in the South American scenario and its consequent insertion in the international system. Thus, Pedersen's notions advance towards an understanding of regional cooperation as

a result of the globalization process, as pointed out by Robinson (1996, p. 35), “Globalization upsets the ability of individual states [...] to regulate economic activity within national borders, to capture and redistribute surpluses, to harmonize conflicting social interests, and to realize their historic function of sustaining the internal unity of nationally conceived social formation”.

Although with some reservations, the concept of consensual hegemony advocated by Burges (2008) is still relevant to the understanding of the balance of power in South America. For example, Brazilian foreign policy has opted for the practice of non-interventionism, although it does exercise its hegemony. Brazil is one of the key states for the construction of South American regionalism, both in the construction and deepening of Mercosur, and in the initiative to create the UNASUR.

Brazil and its hemispheric regionalism: a road to regional hegemony?

To better understand how Brazil acted at the regional level, we will discuss external initiatives from the 1990s to the present. In an attempt to mitigate the gradual increase in the gap between developed countries and the rest of the world, Brazil has instrumentalized regional cooperation/integration as a way to increase its bargaining power in international negotiations.

The phenomenon of regional integration (building blocks) (BALDWIN, 2005; SJURSEN, 2003), following a new model that was asserting itself at the international level (with the European Union as a paradigm), was also a reality in Latin American countries. As it is contained in Article 4 of the Brazilian Federal Constitution, foreign policy is aimed more definitively at its neighbors. However, this Brazilian positioning, both in terms of the new configuration of the international system and concerning the internal positions of the South American States, must be considered as a process in constant evolution. There is, therefore, a paradigm shift at the regional level which - although we do not consider it as a rupture - will certainly have repercussions regarding the Brazilian projection in terms of power. The weakening and emptying of UNASUR in 2018 and the creation of the Lima Group, as well as the current Venezuelan crisis, are clear examples of this paradigmatic shift.

According to Vigevani *et al.* (2008), at least in the period from 1991 to 2007, Brazil opted for a type of regionalism designed to guarantee a leadership position, while maintaining conditions of autonomy, due to the low institutionalization of these arrangements. The authors put two concepts as confluent in the construction of the Brazilian foreign policy: autonomy and universalism. Those two concepts would have been kept during the regional integration process. The first would have retained its primordial character even with its commitment to the construction of Mercosur; this, therefore, would not be a limiting arrangement, as it served the national interest of international projection. The second would take on a new meaning, linking national and regional interest. To guarantee these axes of the Brazilian foreign policy, the regional arrangement should develop with low institutionalization and intergovernmental character, which would make the process more agile, which would guarantee Brazil autonomy in its foreign policy, since a greater institutionalization could restrict the independence in the bilateral relations, and with other regions of the globe.

This structuring would be adequate to the interests of the elites, since it would maintain international alternatives, by guaranteeing Brazil freedom for negotiations with the World Trade Organization (WTO), with the European Union and with the United States, while keeping the possibility of widening the block. The protagonist and universalist aspirations of the elites would be maintained by this format of regionalism without restrictive agreements and conditions related to the concessions of smaller State-members, necessary in integration processes as asymmetrical as Mercosur. The authors conclude that Brazil has avoided the costs of minimizing regional asymmetries due to the characteristics of its political system, its representatives in Congress and poverty in several regions (solving internal problems would have priority over those existing in other countries) even if that integration in the Southern Cone was a priority for the State, government, and Itamaraty (VIGEVANI *et al.*, 2008).

In order to present himself as a modernizer of the Brazilian State and its foreign policy, President Fernando Collor (1990-1992) took the first steps to reduce international mistrust regarding the conditions to guarantee domestic stability and exercise regional leadership. In addition to the macroeconomic agenda following the guidelines proposed by the countries of the center and multilateral financial institutions, the president also proposed initiatives to increase cooperation on security issues. For example, in September 1990, it closed the Serra do Cachimbo nuclear test field and informed the world that Brazil would stop carrying out any experiments for nuclear weapons at the XVI Session of the United Nations General Assembly (MINISTÉRIO DAS RELAÇÕES EXTERIORES, 1990).

To overcome the mistrust of the international community, but also of the neighboring countries, a process of institutionalization of the refusal to use nuclear material for war purposes began. In a meeting, with Argentine representatives, in Foz do Iguaçu, in December 1991, he signed the “Declaration on Common Nuclear Policy Brazil-Argentina”, which led to the creation of the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC). This initiative started the joint negotiations between Brazil and Argentina with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), for the countries' simultaneous adherence to the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) (MINISTÉRIO DAS RELAÇÕES EXTERIORES, 1991).

Another important step was the proposal, alongside Argentina and Chile, to revise the Treaty of Tlatelolco. Between 1990 and 1992, resolutions 267, 268 and 290, revised some rules of the agreement to facilitate the parties' adherence through the construction of mutual supervision mechanisms that could increase transparency and create the necessary conditions for the joint ratification of the treaty. These three countries also signed the “Joint Declaration on the Complete Prohibition of Chemical and Biological Weapons” in Mendoza, Argentina, in September 1991, considered by Rezek, the then head of MRE, as a step further after the revision of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, and an important measure maintaining the region as the least conflictive in the world (MINISTÉRIO DAS RELAÇÕES EXTERIORES, 1991).

In parallel with those cooperation initiatives in the security area, the Collor Government also advanced in the institutionalization of regional integration mechanisms, especially within the scope of Mercosur, continuing the work begun during the Sarney Government (1985-1989). Collor starts to use the integration mechanism as a platform to increase Brazilian competitiveness in the international economy. At

the same time, it served as a way to increase Brazil's bargaining power in future negotiations for a free trade area in the Americas, or a free trade agreement with other regional blocs.

An important step by Collor towards this institutionalization, when the Buenos Aires Act was signed (1990), in which the neighbors committed themselves to form a common market by the end of 1994. Casarões (2011) notes that Mercosur started to be a multilateral platform for its members to be able to liberalize their markets, reducing the impacts of global trade competition, while enhancing the position of its members in multilateral negotiations, as in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Collor's next step was the signing of the Treaty of Asunción in 1991, which formalized the creation of Mercosur.

Following similar guidelines, and aware of this new international configuration under construction since the end of the Cold War, the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) (1995-2002) gave central importance to the sub regional integration process (through Mercosur), going as far as to affirm that "Mercosur is not an option, it is a destination" (VIGEVANI; OLIVEIRA; CINTRA, 2003). The president attributed importance to the integration process in a close geographic space - respecting the concept of "autonomy through participation" (CARDOSO, 2006) of his government - as can be seen in the first presidential meeting of the Mercosur countries, Bolivia and Chile, held only the day after his inauguration, on January 2, 1995.

The basis of diplomacy and the consequent worldwide insertion of Brazil was precisely the deepening of Mercosur. This is considered a fundamental step for the projection and improvement of Brazil's international identity along the lines of a globalized world. Thus, in the area of regional integration, it can be said that there was an extremely pragmatic, conscious, proactive, and innovative action in driving the deepening of the customs union between the member states, as well as the consolidation of agreements between the bloc with Bolivia, Chile.

Several points contributed to the affirmation of Mercosur as a model of South-South integration. For example, the approximation of energy policies with Argentina, in which the Brazilian administration chose to change its oil suppliers, where in the past was almost entirely located in the Middle East (VIGEVANI; OLIVEIRA; CINTRA, 2003; CARDOSO, 2006). There was a considerable increase in imports of this product to Brazil, coming from Argentina, that allowed Brazil, in addition to geographic advantages, to enjoy a greater political leeway. This exchange of suppliers brought advantages that must be taken into account in political games: in addition to decreasing its dependence on oil-exporting countries (OPEC), the Brazilian government intensified Mercosur's intra-block trade (AZEVEDO, 2004). Thus, in addition to the advantages related to the proximity between the two countries, they enjoyed the advantages of negotiating within the customs union. As pointed out by Vasconcelos (2003, pp. 302-303), there was substantial growth in trade between Brazil and Argentina. Between 1990 and 1992 the growth rate in the total flow of trade between Brazil and Argentina was 221.3%, with intra-industrial trade representing 43% of this growth. For the two subsequent periods - 1994 to 1996, and 1996 to 1998 - the contribution of intra-industrial trade represented, respectively, 78% and 89% of the growth rate of total trade in the periods.

However, in addition to the relationship between Brazil and Argentina, the entire commercial process for the Brazil-Bolivia gas pipeline, as well as the agreements that prevail over the import of electric energy from Venezuela (CARDOSO, 1998), are also important for a variable between South American countries. This declaration of the Brazilian role, as an actor in South America, took place through Mercosur and, more recently, UNASUR.

At the 10th meeting of the Common Market Council (CMC), in 1996, the "Presidential Declaration on Democratic Commitment in Mercosur" was already mentioned as a mechanism for maintaining democracy within the States Parties (FAGUNDES, 2010). The existence of an indirect causal relationship between democracy and regional development has ensured, to a certain extent, stability and development at different levels (economic, political, and structural, for example).

Here, it should be brought to mind that the South American integration process is the result of its regional historical function, and should be understood based on its regional roots and, above all, as part of a *sui generis* evolution process typical of South America (ACCIOLY, 2008; DUINA, 2006; SAVINI, 2001; VENTURA, 2003).

Brazil's role as mediator was also an instrument of regional projection, as in the collaboration for the signing of the Declaration of Peace between Ecuador and Peru in October 1998 (BIATO, 1999; CARDOSO, 1998). The success of this Brazilian incursion proved to the international society that the problems of Latin America (even those in the area of security) can be solved by Latin America itself, without the need of foreign intervention (COUTO, 2007). However, this direct Brazilian participation concerning its regional projection could only be carried out through Mercosur, since the regional organization attributed legitimacy to the Brazilian position as a mediator of international conflicts. According to Oliveira and Onuki (2000, p. 113), it was through this mechanism that Brazil managed to expand its leadership role, with the bloc taking on greater geostrategic significance.

The transition period between the governments of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) and the Workers Party (PT) was marked by the consolidation of the South American space as a primary reference for the regional projection of the Brazilian foreign policy. The three South American Summits represent well this process that initiates the institutionalization of a regional arrangement that includes all the South American countries. The document signed by the participants, the "Brasilia Communiqué", deals with peace in the subcontinent,

The deepening of the dialogue on security in South America will be encouraged, taking into account even the human, economic, and social aspects of the issue. In this context, it was agreed to create a South American Peace Zone. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs will take the necessary measures to implement this decision. The construction of the Peace Zone will start from the base represented by the Declaration of MERCOSUR, Bolivia, and Chile as a Zone of Peace and free from Weapons of Mass Destruction (1998) and the Andean Commitment to Peace, Security and Cooperation (1989) (FLACSO 2007).

The meeting also marked the launch of the Initiative for the Integration of South American Regional Infrastructure (IIRSA). Although not related to the theme of peace, the project aimed to improve the connections of energy, transport, and telecommunications in the region and may have future impacts on

peace, since many of the tensions occurred in border areas, generally, geographical accidents to be overcome by progress in regional infrastructure.

The second summit of presidents, which happened in July 2002, in Guayaquil, Ecuador, resulted in the signature of the document entitled “Guayaquil Consensus on Integration, Security, and Infrastructure for El Desarrollo”. Of special interest here is the Annex II, “Declaration on the South American Peace Zone”. In it, the guidelines proposed in the previous meeting are followed, with priority being given to increasing cooperation, trust, and permanent consultation on defense and security issues. The consequence of this process, the decrease of military spending, would give economic breath to solve social problems in the region. Also is highlighted the importance of coordinating positions in international forums on the subject and of respecting the existing regime on the topic based on the “Inter-American Convention on Transparency in the Acquisitions of Conventional Arms” and the “Register of Conventional Arms of National Nations” (FLACSO, 2007).

About IIRSA, it is possible to consider that it was another axis of action for the consolidation of this leadership and the insertion of Brazil as an alternative for the development of autonomous regional infrastructure. In this context, the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) played an important role. According to Novoa (2009, p. 200), the BNDES is the mainstay of IIRSA's works and gradually occupied a position dominated by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) with strong American influence, from its original matrix position. The large projects developed within the scope of IIRSA would make the internationalization of Brazilian private oligopolies feasible, which came to dominate a significant part of the domestic markets of its neighbors, consolidating the economic aspect of the Brazilian projection in hegemonic terms.

Finally, the third, which took place in 2004, will mark a definitive step in the institutionalization of this new arrangement, from which the Cusco Declaration emerges. In it, the main novelty is the creation of the South American Community of Nations (CASA), whose letter reinforces the Declaration of Guayaquil regarding peace in the region.

The initiatives of PT governments (2003-2016) for the region will mark a new adaptation in the format of regionalism in relation to Cardoso. Even so, it maintained its basic interest in guaranteeing a peaceful and democratic environment in South America, as a way to increase the Brazilian international projection, while guaranteeing national autonomy to act at the global level with the credentials of a regional leader.

In this way, Lula's Government (2003-2010) was marked by an even greater international activism and dialogue with the region. This activism was aligned with a low institutionalization so that the country was guaranteed autonomy to engage in other areas. So much so that it generated criticism, due to the lack of what would be concrete results in regional arrangements, as stated by Rubens Ricupero (2010, p. 46) “should be less concerned with multiplying new structures than with making existing structures or processes effective and operational, especially when justified by concrete and valid reasons”.

Despite that criticism, the expansion of forms and mechanisms for coordinating regional policy, with a low level of institutionalization, was in line with the objectives of the Brazilian diplomacy, which was intended to avoid possible “ties” to a global projection. Such enlargement was facilitated both by a period of strong economic expansion in South America - resulting from the boom in international commodity prices - and by the political-ideological proximity of the main governments in the region - the so-called “Pink Tide”.

An example of that was the launch of the “Buenos Aires Consensus” by Presidents Lula da Silva and Néstor Kirchner, which represented a clear contrast to the previous Washington Consensus. The latter marked a low point in the autonomy of countries in the region, as they underwent strong pressure from the United States to implement reforms in their economic policies as a condition for the renegotiation of foreign debts. The document proposes another form of economic development and regional integration, comparing the neoliberal model of the 1990s and the Mercosur model as proposed by Collor. Highlight can be given to the defense of public policies for equitable benefit distribution, the reduction of high unemployment rates, through business development, investment in the productive sector, with the State having a strategic role in this process. Regional integration is seen as a strategic option to strengthen the conditions for negotiation and insertion of countries in the region into the world.

A direct result of this regional activism was the creation of UNASUR, whose constitutive treaty was signed by the 12 independent countries of the subcontinent, in 2008, Brasília. The statements by Cuzco (2004), Brasília (2005), and Cochabamba (2006), within the scope of CASA, were the base foundations of this new regional arrangement. As part of the results of work within the scope of UNASUR, Lula da Silva's Government has advanced in institutionalizing mechanisms for the coordination of defense activities in the region. It is worth mentioning the creation of regional mechanisms for consolidating peace in the region, such as the South American Defense Council (CDS), for coordination, cooperation, training, and capacity building linked to the security activities of member countries; the Center for Strategic Defense Studies (CEED-CDS), a resort for developing strategic studies and advising the CDS; and the South American Defense School (ESUDE), for training military and civilian agents on regional defense and security issues (UNASUL, 2008).

These initiatives also aimed to present the security agenda in the United States-dominated region as an alternative, as in the Conferences of Ministers of Defense of the Americas (CMDA), within the framework of the Organization of American States (OAS), and with a strong influence of American interests. The non-participation of the power in South American negotiations guaranteed Brazil a leadership position, while excluding the greatest source of asymmetry in these security arrangements.

Fucille, Barreto e Gazzola (2016, pp. 86-87) consider that the creation of the Ministry of Defense (MD) (1999), still under the FHC Government, gave strength to a specialized bureaucratic instance to break the traditional predominance of the MRE in international cooperation in the military scope. The creation of the MD, although designed to increase civilian control over the Brazilian armed forces, guaranteed the legitimacy for signing high-level international documents related to the CDS, generating progress in regional cooperation for security, such as measures of mutual trust.

In UNASUR, Brazil assumed an important role until its emptiness in 2018, when alongside Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Peru, and Paraguay suspended its participation, conditioning its return to the appointment of another secretary-general - a position held by Venezuela. The lack of UNASUR's institutionalization seemed to have a determinant impact, as the end of the Pink Tide and ideological homogeneity in South America led to its emptiness. Casarões (2016) considers that José Serra's diplomatic activism with electoral objectives during the Temer Administration (2016-2018) generated internal divisions in regional integration processes.

One of the causes of gradual weakening of UNASUR, the Lima Group, created in 2017, marks a new regional initiative, with even less institutionalization, representing a regional break between center-left and center-right regimes. Even so, it is important to highlight the role that this group represents both for the Brazilian regional projection and for the construction and maintenance of security and peace in South America. The initial intention of these meetings in Lima was to resolve the issue of the crisis in Venezuela always with moderate decision-making (NIÑO, 2018) on topics such as refugees, for example.

However, the worsening of the crisis in early 2019 and the closure of borders as a Venezuelan countermeasure leads to an impasse on the regional balance of power. The Brazilian projection - supported by the security contention in South America - will, once again, instrumentalize its role as a regional player, through the conceptualization of hegemonies. The Venezuelan crisis is an issue which demands regional and/or global powers mediation but that could be highly favorable to regional consensus-building.

While during the 2000s and early 2010s, South American countries successfully managed to solve independently regional affairs and had a common security agenda, currently, the Venezuelan issue brought the US back to South America, a direct result of both a Brazilian power retreat both in global and regional boards, since the mid-2010s, and its approximation to the US started with Temer, took to an extreme level since Bolsonaro's inauguration (2019).

The activation of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR) to pressure Maduro's regime, by divided voting with the support of 12 among 18 members, represented a backsliding in South America self-management a clear division among its countries, and a comeback of the OAS, strongly influenced by the United States to the subcontinent affairs (ALVES, 2019). The sole consideration of military intervention, including with the participation of the United States, represents a significant throwback in Brazilian hegemony, and a return to Cold War dynamics.

Most recently, Fernandez's decision to withdraw Argentina from Mercosur's free trade negotiations was a severe blow to the decadent bloc (DYNIEWICZ, 2020), which seemed to have won vitality after closing an agreement with the Europe Union, in June of 2019. That might be temporary as domestic, regional, and global instability difficult further definitive answers, but under Bolsonaro's ruling, Brazilian diplomacy doesn't seem able to recover Mercosur.

Vigevani and Ramanzini Junior (2014) state that, although there were differentiations in the phases of the BFP, as a result of changes in government, which culminated in the different strategies for international insertion, regional integration has always been a primary interest of the BFP. As long as they do not make

national conditions impossible to project efficiently on the global plane, and they acted to weaken the unilateralism of the powers, reducing the pressure conditions on Brazil and guaranteeing greater autonomy.

The logic of Brazil's international projection was essentially based on the search for diversification of regional integration initiatives - albeit with low institutionalization - and served as a source of appeasement of disputes between States. Thus, in the final analysis, Brazil's international projection appropriates regionalism as a source of exercise of Brazilian regional hegemony.

Nevertheless, we consider that Brazilian exercise of hegemony in South America might not necessarily represent a typical case as one of the main drivers of its foreign policy, autonomy, limited its regional integration level of institutionalization, which attributes to Brazilian hegemony some characteristics of a deviant case⁵.

Final considerations

Throughout this article, we sought to present and infer the main theoretical and practical forms of regional insertion in Brazil through the exercise of hegemony. This confirms the argument that this BFP's projection instrumentalized regional integration to reach new international levels. In other words, the Brazilian performance in the integrationist arrangements contributed to its limited affirmation as a *regional player*.

The Brazilian performance in South America conditioned its role. Up to the present moment, we can verify which of these inferences carry out the construction of a less beautiful, more peaceful region, aimed at its stabilization. The constant reorganizing history of regional integration processes, added to the concept of hegemony, brought by this article, defines the complex and multidimensional nature of Brazil's regional projection. The sum of the perceptions of Pedersen (2002) and Burges (2008) offers us a better understanding of the cooperative and - gradually - consensual formation of the Brazilian hegemony. Since the process of re-democratization, the main stage of discussions that makes this hegemonic activity centered on the regional arena viable.

The diversification of initiatives and arrangements served the Brazilian interest in expanding its regional importance since they guaranteed the consolidation of its hegemony, albeit limited, in the most diverse spheres since the end of the Cold War. In the political sphere, since the initiatives between Brazil and Argentina in the 1990s and even the presidential meetings in the scope of South America, has given Brazil an important leadership role in coordinating a common regional position, reducing the traditional American influence on the subcontinent. Security cooperation, which ranged from limiting the use of nuclear weapons, and joining the NPT to consolidating the CDS, increased transparency in the military sphere, allowing greater stability, less distrust and technical advancement in the armed forces. In the economic sphere, in addition to the advancement of intra-regional trade, the expansion of national oligopolies driven by the state machine

⁵ A case linked to a surprising behavior, when the case "do not conform to the predictions made by the theory or theories under investigation" (BENNETT; ELMAN, 2007, p. 176).

meant the internationalization of large Brazilian companies, dominating important slices of the neighboring domestic markets through the merger with large competitors.

Although we have argued that there has been a relative success of Brazil in regional terms since the re-democratization, especially concerning the previous period, there are still several factors that prevent it from exercising its interests in the international arena strongly. Therefore, boosting up the sphere of international influence is directly related to the capacity to exercise Brazilian hegemony at the regional level.

In more recent moments of Brazilian protagonism, we have seen the replacement of these spheres (such as the emptying of UNASUR, in 2018, for example) by meetings (importance given to the Lima Group, for example). Venezuela's case brings a new configuration for the construction of the Brazilian hegemony, calling into question the efforts made by the region so far. Although at an early stage, we can notice a greater American interest and participation in issues related to South America, showing in part the retraction of Brazilian hegemony, a division between regional leaders, and finally, resulting in a regional hegemonic rearrangement.

Our findings have limited external validity as we consider that the Brazilian policy towards South America does not entirely represent a typical case of Gramscian hegemony, in other words, its foreign policy on regional integration is not a full representation of Gramsci's concepts of hegemony. Nevertheless, the used theoretical framework seems to explain a lot more than traditional views of hegemony based mainly on hard power variables, a not common form of actuation in Brazilian diplomatic history.

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ABSTRACT

Brazilian projection towards South America has been an important issue since its re-democratization process in the 1980s. Still, Brazil's regional behavior could not be considered as a hegemony, under the realist point of view, that is, exerted by its hard power. Nor liberal, considering the option for multiplicities initiatives and a low level of institutionalization. Therefore, we propose to apply the Gramscian concept of hegemony to analyze if Brazil could exert hegemony towards South America throughout its participation in regional integration processes. To do so, we have chosen to use a qualitative method of analysis along with a typical case-study to develop a preliminary theory illustration, based upon a literature review of the Brazilian foreign policy (primary and secondary sources). This inquiry leads us to argue that there is a dubiety regarding Brazil's regional action. Firstly, due to the lack of institutionalization of South American regional organizations and; secondly, because Brazilian foreign policy was not able to wield coercive power during regional crises. However, even considering that Brazil's projection towards the region do not represent a typical case of hegemony (realist), bearing in mind the findings low rates of validity beyond this case-study, there are enough evidences that its actions in many arrangements as leader and constructor of consensus it is a way to employ hegemony (Gramscian) in regional terms.

Keywords: Brazil; Hegemony; South America.

RESUMO

A projeção brasileira sobre a América do Sul foi destaque desde sua redemocratização, ocorrida na década de 1980. Ainda assim, seu comportamento não pode ser considerado hegemônico em seu sentido realista, exercido pelo poder duro. Nem liberal, já que optou pela multiplicidade de iniciativas, de baixa grau de institucionalização. Propomos a aplicação do conceito gramsciano de hegemonia para analisar se o Brasil exerce a sua na América do Sul por meio de um ativismo nos processos de integração regional. Para isto, utilizamos o método qualitativo com um estudo de caso único típico para desenvolver uma ilustração preliminar de teoria, baseado em uma revisão bibliográfica da história da política externa Brasileira (fontes primárias e secundárias). Esta análise nos leva a argumentar que há dubiedade na atuação brasileira regional, já que optou por não aprofundar o grau de institucionalização das organizações regionais e por não exercer poder coercitivo durante crises regionais. Ainda que o comportamento brasileiro não representa um caso típico de hegemonia, tendo os achados pouca validade externa para além deste caso, há evidências sua atuação em diversos arranjos regionais como líder e construtor de consensos é uma forma de exercer hegemonia (gramsciana) na região.

Palavras-chave: Brasil; Hegemonia; América do Sul.

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