

## Chapter 9

# Brazil: The Underlying Ideas of Regional Policies

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### 1. Introduction

There is now a substantial body of knowledge on the role of ideas in international relations. Recent work has focused on the place of ideas in systemic change (for example, Tannenwald/Wohlforth 2005, Risse-Kappen 1994) and on the pattern of ideational change within regions and regimes (for example, Acharya 2004, 1997, Keck/Sikkink 1998, Finnemore 2003, Foot 2000). The focus on ideas has also left a mark on the study of the foreign policies of major states (Goldstein 1993, Rose 1998, Foot 2001).

This chapter explores the connections between strategic ideas and the regional activism Brazil has pursued in the last ten to fifteen years. The goal is to map core Brazilian concepts and beliefs about the region and the nature of power in the region as they have evolved in strategic circles and have shaped Brazil's current posture. If one were to explain Brazil's regional policies with reference to ideas, what would these ideas be and how would they help account for behaviour? Under which forms do ideas and other factors interact in the shaping of Brazil's regional power profile? Do these ideas reflect fundamental ideologies, or are they mostly instrumental? Do they ever translate into a coherent normative vision? Are they built upon an explicit understanding of what 'regional power' might mean? And how have these ideas been institutionalized, if at all?

The chapter unfolds in three parts. The first section describes Brazil's pattern of regional activism in the last ten to fifteen years. The second looks at core ideas and strategic concepts behind Brazilian behaviour in this period. And finally the piece turns to the voids and silences that recur.

### 2. Brazil Engages South America – Does It?

Since the end of the Cold War, Brazilian governing elites have sponsored a move to the region (Burgess 2008, Flesher 2006, Soares de Lima/Hirst 2006). A nuanced narrative shows increased attention to the region and renewed (if often frustrated) attempts to strengthen the record of regional cooperation. Successive

administrations have consistently expanded their regional agendas, and Brazil has been the major force behind the sprout of regional initiatives in South America. To the extent that Brazil's regional activism has occurred, it can be traced back to the 1980s, gaining momentum in the late 1990s and the 2000s. Over the years Brazilian political elites consciously set out to revamp regional strategy and recast policy priorities for their vicinity. After several generations of neglect, the region now sits at the heart of Brazil's international posture.

And yet, looking at Brazilian foreign policy and Brazilian power in international relations from the perspective of the region remains 'a study in ambivalence' (Hurrell 1992). Even after several years of sustained economic growth and an expanding foreign-policy agenda, Brazil is not your typical regional power. It covers half the territory, population, and wealth of South America, and its military spending far surpasses that of its neighbours. Yet it has not sought to develop the capabilities to control these neighbours. It has sought to anchor and embed its power in a new network of regional institutions, and it has become the major institution builder in the region, but the institutional architecture that results is thin and weak (to a significant extent because Brazil pushes in that direction). Its governing elites are wedded to traditional understandings of national autonomy and do not consider pooling regional sovereignties into supranational bodies. They are equally reluctant to pay the costs of regional prominence, preferring to deal with smaller neighbours on an individual, ad hoc basis. For all its power, Brazil has not pushed smaller neighbours into complying with the new, increasingly institutionalized rules of the regional game.

There is much evidence to support the claim that Brazil has pursued an activist regional policy. Compare the 1980s, with their probing of rapprochement with former rival Argentina and the attempt to facilitate regional concert through the Rio Group, to the complex set of regional policies emerging in the 1990s. Or consider the earlier paucity of regional travel by Brazilian chief executives (as late as 1981 no Brazilian president had ever set foot on Peru or Colombia). Today, regional commitments, working meetings, official summits, and informal gatherings take up the president's largest chunk of foreign-policy time. The same applies to his foreign-policy team, with regional shuttle diplomacy now a major feature of regional order. In his inauguration speech, Lula's foreign minister described the policy to come as one of 'responsible activism' (Amorim 2003). The merits of the new posture have been open to debate, but there is no doubt that policy has been active. Particularly in the case of Lula's administration there has been great rhetorical and practical effort at showing Brazil's interest in the region.

At first glance at least, the pattern of Brazil's institution-building in the region also supports the activist claim. It suffices to see the reorientation of Brazil's overall regional strategy from a policy of distancing in the early 1970s to the 1990s with MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market) – a four-member trade bloc that purportedly sought to increase political and social integration in the region. Brazil was the major force behind MERCOSUR and its later opening to new and associate members. Surely, MERCOSUR always was – and remains – a

thin institution, with Brazilians often (but not always) reluctant to deepen its core administrative units. But Brazilians have not blocked the move towards greater institutionalization, albeit grudgingly and only partially: today MERCOSUR has an independent chairman, a court for adjudication, and an incipient forum for parliamentary debate. Its technical secretariat in Montevideo issues a growing number of norms and regulations that on close inspection are significantly intrusive. In 2000, the government in Brasilia invited South America's heads of state for their first summit ever, and it then sponsored a fusion between MERCOSUR and the Andean Community of Nations to launch a South American Community of Nations. Brazil also agreed to respond to demands by smaller neighbors to support the set up of a regional development bank. Considering the course of history, these developments have been both unusual and bold.

At least to some, Brazil's reliance on the region and notions of regionalism in its negotiations with countries outside the region also indicate that there is an activist regional policy underway. There are numerous instances in which Brazilian diplomats appeal to the region as a bargaining-chip when dealing with others. This is particularly the case in trade negotiations, which at important times (but not always) have been conducted under the banner of either MERCOSUR or the Community of South American Nations. Notions of regionalism also appear prominently in Brazil's dealings with international norms of democracy and human rights, nuclear proliferation, international security, and migration. The region has also been a recurrent theme in Brazilian arguments about the need for a UN Security Council reform that grants Brazil a permanent chair (albeit one that has been overtly challenged by other regional states).

When neighbours faced crises in the last ten to fifteen years, Brazil has also shown some commitment to the idea that it ought to be deeply engaged. During the 1997 coup attempt in Paraguay – a MERCOSUR member that Brazil considers to sit at the heart of its regional sub-area of influence – Brazil signalled it would throw its weight against the plotters, and the coup never happened. From 1995 to 1998, Brazil took the lead in mediating a territorial dispute between Ecuador and Peru, and in 2002 it took the lead again in mediating a solution to a coup attempt against President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela. The Brazilian Government then manifested its serious interest in the Colombian conflict for the first time, and some members of the administration signalled their willingness that Brazil should play a political role in solving that conflict. When the UN Security Council mandated action in Haiti, Brazil came to the fore to lead a South American force to which it made the largest commitment of troops and funding. And when Colombian troops chased and killed FARC operatives in Ecuador in 2008, Brazil flouted ideas about sponsoring some form of region-based collective security that would bring regional defense elites together under a South American Defense Council. This is a major development since Brazil had been in vocal opposition to institutionalizing regional security in the 1990s.

By the standard pace of change in Brazilian policy these are important transformations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that back in 1997 and 1998 Brazilian

diplomats began to try and justify their increasingly intrusive stance in regional affairs. The argument had it that at least on issues of democracy and democratic rule Brasilia could not afford to turn a blind eye to developments among neighbours. In his inaugural, President Lula's noticed that "many of our neighbours today live difficult situations", and signalled that Brazil would be willing to take part in making a "contribution". In 2004, these arguments found doctrinal expression for the first time in a speech by President Lula in China: "Growing approximation and consolidation of Brazil's relations with its region require that the situations of instability in regional countries deserve a more attention follow up on the part of the Brazilian government, which is oriented by the principle of non-intervention, but also by an attitude of 'non-indifference'" ('Lula' da Silva 2004a). He then reinforced the point at the UN General Assembly by saying that "[we] do not believe in external interference in internal affairs, but we do not seek refuge in omission and indifference before the problems that affect our neighbours" ('Lula' da Silva 2004b).

The point here is that a Brazilian looking at the region in the 1988 would have had trouble recognizing the regional environment in 2008. This recent proactive regional posture is reflected in economic, diplomatic, and military policy spheres. But what can be said of Brazil's deeply rooted ambivalence to the region?

Brazil's regionalist policies have been checkered and at times contradictory. For all their initiatives, Brazilian leaders have resisted any efforts to pool sovereignty. Diplomats have been unwilling to integrate policies across borders on scores as border controls, cattle vaccination, and the circulation of goods. Furthermore, the regional organizations that Brazil has sponsored can be hardly described as instances of deep integration. They are not supranational in character, and at times they have actually been instrumental to reinforce the norm of national sovereignty. This is important because it reveals an aspect of Brazilian understandings of the region that has helped shape its behaviour as a regional power, namely, that regionalism is never seen as a project to transcend the limits and problems inherent to a world of sovereign units, but as a tool in reinforcing an order that is strictly pluralist.

Thus, notions of complex regional interdependence have not taken root in Brazilian elite circles. Even on scores that outsiders might consider fertile ground to interdependence thinking, such as environmental protection, the terms of the debate inside Brazil are fundamentally skewed towards notions of autonomy and *national* economic development. The result is a regional policy that, for all its ambitions, is in the end relatively low-key and predominantly risk-averse. Deep engagement with neighbours does not figure prominently in Brazil's policy menu.

This, neighbours perceive clearly. While those in Brasilia may well see themselves as actively engaged in the region, the evidence is not equally compelling from the standpoint of neighbouring capitals. The fact remains that in the view of its smaller neighbours, Brazil has been a difficult centre of power with which to bandwagon precisely because it is so unwilling to engage. It has either resisted

or responded only selectively to calls for deepening regional institutions. It has defined its own trade, finance, and migration interests in narrow 'national' terms. While neighbours do not necessarily fear Brazilian domination or have a negative image of Brazil's intentions, they do feel that Brazil has been unresponsive to their unhappiness about power asymmetries. What is important to highlight here is not so much that Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, and even Argentina feel neglected by Brazilian interests – this is a recurrent component in settings of unbalanced power. The point is that Brazil has not yet designed policies to deal with anti-Brazilian sentiment when it flourishes. As a result, neighbours do not necessarily look to Brasilia for regional leadership, and it is not clear that they think Brazil is a dependable catalyst to shape regional order. If followership matters for the construction of regional power, then Brazil's regional power credentials are very much subject to questioning.

The problems of regional activism are well reflected in the institutions governing regional policy within Brazil. For several generations, such policy was the remit of the foreign ministry. Under President Lula since 2003 the post of diplomatic advisor to the president gained relevance in all things regional, and the decision-making process was split up in two, with both the foreign minister and the presidential adviser playing a role. This has given the administration greater room to manoeuvre in order to navigate important crises with neighbours, but it has also made some of those negotiations more difficult, especially when there is overt disagreement between the two. An influential argument says that in choosing a party apparatchik to act as his diplomatic advisor, Lula has in effect sought to turn Brazilian diplomacy into an instrument to advance the Leftist cause across South America. In fact, Lula has openly sided with his allies during elections in Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador. For all these indictments, however, it would be hard to argue that Brazil's move to the region follows a party rationale, not the least because such a move well precedes Lula's arrival in power. Also, it is important not to overdo the degree to which Lula's sympathies translate into actual support. To measure the full extent of this, we ought to wait until diplomatic archives pertaining to this period open for public research. The key point to be made here is that whatever the motivations behind the move to the region, this is a move that relies on individuals more than institutions. The institutions – inside and outside Brazil – supporting regionalism remain thin.

Part of the ambivalence towards the region is also reflected in Brazilian public opinion. Recent poll data shows that Brazilian elites see South America as a source of 'problems and concerns'. This partly has to do with the perceived return of populism and autocratic forms of governance in neighbouring countries. It also has to do with the sense of heightened insecurity regarding the Amazon and drug trade, and with the perception that MERCOSUR suffers from the protectionist policies of neighbours (not of Brazil). When asked what trade priorities they would like their government to follow, Brazilian elites mention talks at the WTO first, bilateral dealings with the industrialized world next, and only in the third place do they support a push for deeper integration with South America. Support

for MERCOSUR, for instance, dropped by half between 2001 and 2008 (CEBRI 2008).

Public opinion is indeed one of the important forces that limit Brazil's capacity for regional engagement. As successive chief executives have learned, outward pushes very quickly tend to elicit public opinion responses that emphasize domestic weaknesses and advocate caution. Ideas about the value of regional activism have yet to be internalized in Brazil, and to most commentators the merits of security multilateralism are not self-evident. Expansionist ideas, when they arrive on the scene, have to compete in a marketplace where perceptions of internal frailty retain the upper hand. Outwardly policies are seen to be costly, risky, and challenging. Indeed, the most cursory glance at the press coverage of the past ten years shows the degree to which activism has been challenged from all ends of the political spectrum. As the policy cycle evolved into the 2000s and the first diplomatic setbacks began to hit home, criticism grew stronger. Vocal critics of Lula's foreign policy were particularly keen to target activism. Some of the qualifiers that recurred in the press commentary in this period are 'hyperactive', 'exhibitionist', and 'pretentious'. Regional activism – be it under Cardoso or Lula – has been both contentious and difficult to legitimize at home.

There are two final considerations regarding Brazil's regional activist mood. What if what some take to be greater engagement with the region is but a reflection of Brazil's wider activism in the world? After all, starting in the 1990s, successive administrations widened their official commitments abroad. President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1994–2002) visited more foreign countries than any of his predecessors, while also receiving the largest number of foreign visitors that Brasilia had ever seen before then. Towards the end of his tenure, the *New York Times* reported that Brazil had now begun to "take a role on the world stage" (NYT, 30 August 2000). In his turn, President Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva (2003 to date) far exceeded Cardoso's range of international commitments. Maybe it is not that Brazil has developed a regional engagement program to undergird its quest for greater power, influence, and prestige in the world. Maybe it is simply that its diplomats have generally done more around the globe.

By the same token, what if Brazil's greater involvement with the region merely reflects (or follows) a more general growth of regional activities on the part of all South American countries? Since the end of the Cold War, connections and networks have proliferated across the region at an impressive pace. All of the major countries have experienced a move towards the region. Think of the trajectory of Argentina's official discourse from the early 1990s, when the foreign minister used to refer to 'a European country in Latin America', to the current emphasis on connections with La Paz, Caracas, and Brasilia. Or consider the foreign policy priorities of Venezuela, building-up a substantial set of links southwards. Indeed, from a Venezuelan perspective Caracas, not Brasilia, is the leading force behind the recent regionalism in South America, where the emphasis is on projecting and developing norms alternative to those of liberal economic governance that dominated the scene in the 1990s. Even Chile, Peru, and Colombia, for all their

emphasis on the Pacific and relatively close ties with the US, actively partake of numerous regional initiatives today.

In sum, since the end of the Cold War, Brazil has sponsored an ambiguous move to the region. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the serious limitations of this move, the origins of Brazil's increased regional awareness and behaviour, especially since the late 1990s, need explanation. There are many important factors at play here, not the least increasing frustration in Brazil with the relationship with the United States (Hirst 2005). Without wanting or being able to cover the range of causes that lay behind Brazil's regional activism, the following section tries to pin down the ideas that have mattered most and their inherent tensions.

### 3. The Ideas that Help Explain Brazilian Motivations

This section focuses on two sets of explanatory ideas: ideas about geography and ideas about the nature of Brazil's power.

#### *Geographic Imagination*

The existing literature on regionalism shows that regions are social constructs contingent to the perceptions of key players inside and outside the region. The notion of 'region' is often politically contested among the major players, who set out to define regional borders with a view to advancing their interests and values.

Brazil's readings of its own region's geography are the case in point. Starting in the early 1990s, arguments began to circulate within the foreign ministry that questioned the utility of defining Brazil's region as 'Latin America'. Part of the problem was Mexico – both as a source of division through its move towards the United States and as a source of financial instability. In Brazilian eyes, Mexico had chosen to adapt to the end of the Cold War by relinquishing an independent foreign policy and a national economic project. As Brazilian leaders saw it, Mexico had 'sold out' and challenged Brazilian notions of 'self-reliance' as the safest method to cope with increasing levels of globalization and interdependence.

The other problem with Mexico had to do with its record of financial instability. This perception came to boil during the Asian financial crisis that struck both Mexico and Brazil in early 1998. The crisis was strong enough to threaten the survival of Brazil's 1994 domestic stabilization plan – the Real. In the eyes of Brazilian policy-makers, international financial stability was the single most important asset Brazil had for coping with the wider world in an era of globalization. Because it had ended a decade of economic decay and hyper-inflation, the Real was now a 'credential' that Brazilian officials could use not only for attracting foreign investment but also to show their major partners that, in the aftermath of the Cold War, Brazil was moving towards 'the mainstream'. As the crisis struck, Brazil negotiated a massive rescue plan with Wall Street, the US Treasury, the IMF, and President Clinton that, in the end, prevented an inflationary spiral and financial

collapse. But in the process they reinforced their earlier perceptions of the costs that belonging to 'Latin America' imposed on Brazil.

Brazilian leaders noticed that in negotiating the terms of a rescue package they spent much of their time trying to reassure creditors that their country was a dependable debtor, and belonging to 'Latin America' had made things more difficult at the negotiation table. Memories in financial circles of the 1980s, with its record of financial decay and political instability, tarnished the notion of 'Latin America'. As a label, 'Latin America' only added to the problems of image that Brazilian leaders had to confront in their dealings with financiers, bankers, and treasury officials in the industrialized West. In this sense the region was in effect working against investor confidence. Soon the argument gained force that Brazil should better decouple from 'Latin America', defining its 'natural' region as 'South America' instead. In the spirit of those sponsoring change, this was a marketing operation that had major strategic significance.

The idea of 'South America' was then reinforced by developments in the relationship with Argentina in the course of the financial crisis. From the standpoint of Brasilia, the leadership in Buenos Aires had behaved uncooperatively and was simply unreliable: when the Real looked as if it would implode, the Argentines recommended dollarising the Brazilian economy in public (a policy anathema to Brazilian economic thinking). Buenos Aires also negotiated association to NATO as an extra-regional ally without consulting Brazil first, and, in violation of the MERCOSUR agreement, it sought to block Brazilian imports when the Brazilian government floated the currency. As Argentina plunged into a major economic recession of its own, the relationship came under great strain. In the Brazilian press the tone was acrimonious, and anecdotal evidence shows the remarkable degree to which this position reflected the sentiment of the key actors on the Brazilian side.

By late 1999, the arguments were firmly in place for the expansion of MERCOSUR with the view of diluting Argentina's relative power within the bloc. This is of course ironic: Brazil's reaction to the perception of regional frailty and weakness led not to retraction, but to further expansion. Behind this thinking there was an understanding that pushing in the direction of a loosely-knit South American entity might take MERCOSUR out of its state of paralysis. In September 2000 the heads of state of all countries in the region met in Brasilia (the Mexican foreign minister was issued a formal invitation after hard-edged exchanges between Mexico and Brazil). What stands out here is that Brazil's push for an imagined 'South American' region did not follow the perception that shared governance problems required collective action that promoted regional coordination. Rather, the move was seen as a tool to improve Brazil's room for financial and political manoeuvre, and to shake up a moribund MERCOSUR. Yet the notion of 'South America' helped Brazil rally neighbours' support, persuading them to sign up to the new regional endeavour.

Prior to the events described above, Brazilian leaders had not fundamentally reassessed their place within the region. As mentioned before, since the 1980s there were plenty of occasions when they expanded their regional commitments

in South America. But there was little serious attention to the notion that the very boundaries of the region needed adapting if Brazil was to succeed in a new, far more integrated international environment.

### *The Nature of Brazilian Power*

As we look back, one of the peculiar things about Brazilian ideas of national power in the twentieth century is the paucity of references to the region as an important component of that power. Consider the demands for special status in international society – be it in relation to the US in the late nineteenth century and 1900s, the Hague Conferences, the League of Nations, the San Francisco Conference, and Bretton Woods. In all these instances, Brazil claimed special status on the back of arguments about its own diplomatic traditions of peaceful conflict resolution, adherence to multilateral institutions, its massive territory, and its general interest in contributing to international harmony. Brazil's quest for a permanent seat in a reformed UN Security Council – reintroduced after several years in the 1990s and then intensified in the early 2000s – has followed a similar pattern (not the least because Mexico and Argentina have effectively undermined any 'regional representation' arguments Brazil might try to deploy). The argument never fully develops that Brazil is a candidate for special status *because* it either represents its region or it is willing and able to manage order in it.

The assumption here is that it is possible to be powerful in international relations without necessarily being powerful in one's own region. This is precisely what we see in the first explicit attempt by a Brazilian strategist to specify the nature of Brazil's power in international relations (Araujo Castro 1958). Successive generations of foreigners have found this confusing: when President Richard Nixon and national security advisor Henry Kissinger offered Brazil a plan for engagement that involved policy coordination in South America, they heard the ruling military say they had no interest in flexing their increasingly powerful muscles in the region, and that Brazil had no solutions for neighbouring states. Brazil, the military said, was an upwardly mobile country; that did not mean it should be a *regional* power at that (Spektor 2007). More recently a foreign minister said that "Brazil can and must contribute to constructing world order...conscious of its demographic, territorial, economic and cultural weight, and of being a great democracy undergoing social transformation" (Amorim 2003). No references here either to the fact that Brazil 'can and must' add value to order because it alone possesses over half the material resources at the disposal of South American states.

Yet, since the end of the Cold War there have been important conceptual changes regarding the place of the region in Brazil's strategic horizon. There are three major ideas that coexist. The first one holds that the region matters because it is a major source of instability. Indeed, the region contains several weak states – Bolivia, Paraguay, and Ecuador immediately come to mind. Instability affects, or has the potential to affect, Brazilian immediate interests (for example, investment and the large migrant communities living in those countries) and Brazil's standing

in the wider world. In particular, it can complicate the democratic credentials of South America that contemporary Brazilian diplomats believe to be a prerequisite for successful performance in international relations today. Instability also opens room for greater US attention to the region, a development Brazil has been keen to avoid. This is particularly the case in contemporary South America, where some countries are closely attached to the United States (Colombia and Chile) while others are defiant of US authority (Bolivia and Venezuela). If the region is an Achilles heel for Brazil, the argument goes, then regional policy ought to try and turn the region into a more benign environment. The goal is protection and hedging against risks, not necessarily power accretion. The objective is to secure, when possible, a modicum of regional stability, as exemplified in the hope that a South American security organization might reduce the need for a security architecture that relies too heavily on *ad hoc* cooperation (and on the United States).

The second relatively novel idea – dating back from the late 1980s, but much developed since – is that the region may work as a shield. The argument is most sophisticated with reference to trade: from this perspective, the longer-term goals behind Brazil's regional policy are to control globalization and protect the national economy against external shocks. Note that here the emphasis is on regionalism as a tool to facilitate national, not shared goals.

A third idea goes in a different direction by highlighting that the region can be an important source of power accretion to Brazil. Being the dominant economy in the region, Brazil can use the regional grouping to shape regional politics, manage disagreement within the region, and leverage its influence and bargaining power with the industrialized world. It is difficult to come by explicit references to this vision because the tenor of discourse tends to highlight weaknesses and frailties: “even a country as big as Brazil is a small country in a world like this ... we do not have the capacity to speak alone ... I believe that Brazil does not have full existence without being united [with South America]” (Amorim 2006b). But the underlying logic is one that sees the region as a launch pad for Brazil. This idea has been clearly weaker than the notion that the region might work as a shield. And its emphasis has been on what the region can add to the power resources of Brazil, rather than a vision in which Brazil is the primary regional state that works as a magnet that attracts others by the sheer weight of its economy and power.

These three ideas – that ‘regional’ power is not a prerequisite for power, that the region can work as a shield, and that the region can work as a launching pad – sit together uncomfortably. Their uneasy interaction goes a long way in explaining the pattern of ambiguity that has marked Brazil's latest move to the region. It also points at an important tension underpinning Brazilian ideas about power in international relations. For several generations, Brazilian strategists believed that the dominant mechanism of power in South America was balance: in the face of an assertive Brazil, neighbours would be prone to form a counterbalancing coalition. Starting in the 1970s (but only gaining root much later) there were arguments that pointed in the opposite direction – the dominant mechanism is bandwagoning: in the face of a powerful Brazil, smaller neighbours will follow suit rather than

oppose their leader. These two largely contradictory readings sit side by side (sometimes in the head of the same decision-maker). This might help explain why simple models of power-maximization will not do to describe the 'regional power' behaviour of Brazil.

#### 4. Voids and Silences

It is clear by now that whatever regional priorities Brazil may have, they have evolved against a set of important voids and silences. First, there is no indication that regional activism results from a perception in Brasilia that the array of regional problems on the agenda forcefully requires multilateral solutions. Rather, regional activism is construed as a tool for protection (against regional instability, US interference, and globalization) or, in the less influential version, as a tool for power accretion and leverage. On both accounts, the emphasis falls on maintaining a relatively calm region, some level of economic cooperation among states, a set of formal and informal instruments that might help restrain the activism of others (for example, Hugo Chávez), and a network that might make South America less penetrable by the United States. Because these institutions are conceived as tools to maximize Brazilian freedom of action, they are to be kept under control relatively weak.

Second, arguments about the region are not framed in terms of regional governance or the role that regional governance may play in global order. Consider Foreign Minister Amorim's argument that a policy of engagement in South America "is a goal to be pursued not only because of natural solidarity, but also in view of our own progress and well-being" (Amorim 2003). What is lacking here is the notion that such policy might be an instrument to facilitate governance in this part of the world. Although Brazilians see South American integration as a need, but also as a project, the components of that project are never laid out explicitly (Amorim 2006a). For all the pledges committing Brazil to greater 'regional cooperation', the assurances give little clue as to what precisely leaders they have in mind. This void appears in full force in President Lula's speech at a seminar entitled 'Brazil: Global Actor': "The expression 'global actor' can produce two misunderstandings. The first is the belief that Brazil, a country with social problems and without important means to project military power internationally, cannot aspire to be a full actor globally ... The second mistake is to think that Brazil, merely because it owns vast territory, abundant natural resources and a numerous population, will automatically have a relevant role in the international sphere. Happily Brazil is far away from these two extreme perspectives" ('Lula' da Silva 2005). He never said what the accurate Brazilian perspective actually was.

Additionally, Brazil has not seen the region as the foundation of a normative project – the types of regional institution that Brazil sponsors do not speak of a 'South American Way' along the lines of 'ASEAN Way' or 'Asia Pacific Way' (for the latter, see Acharya 1997). From a Brazilian standpoint – and differently

from Venezuela's current revival of 'Bolivarianism' – the region is not a container for a distinctive culture and set of values (Hurrell 2007a). In this sense there is no perception in Brazil of shared community or common ethos to support the regionalist move. This has in turn helped shape a pattern of regional activism that pays only scant attention to notions of distributive justice in South America. From a Brazilian perspective there is no detectable notion that the region should or possibly could share a response to globalization – even if the subcontinent has shown a significant tilt to the Left in the 2000s.

The third void refers to how Brazilians see neighbour opinions of them. Most of the time regional activism has not been defined in terms of defusing fear on the part of smaller neighbours. Unlike China, for instance, Brazil does not believe that neighbours' insecurities are strong enough to warrant a policy of reassuring engagement. This is odd for a country that is so clearly the most powerful and influential state in its own region, since one need not be a firm believer in balance-of-power theories to see that Brazil's regional policies are bound to arise suspicion.

The fourth glaring void in Brazilian ideas about the region and regional power refers to the place of the United States. In 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Brazil was "emerging as a global power... a great [partner of the United States] for the future" (Rice 2005). She spoke of Brazil's "growing global role" and the ability of Brazil to lead "the way forward for all of Latin America" (ibid.). *The Economist* reported in April 2005 that many in Washington hoped Brazil could play a moderating influence as "a bulwark against instability" in the region. Order in the hemisphere, the argument implied, could only be gained if the two largest, wealthiest, and most powerful states in the hemisphere were to engage. As the 2000s began, independent task forces in both countries also put forward robust arguments for closer cooperation (Council on Foreign Relations 2001, Centro Brasileiro de Relações Internacionais 2002). But what is striking about Brazilian ideas about the region is how little Brazil sees itself at the cornerstone of the American alliance system. To a large extent this is to do with the fact that Brazilian leaders find it difficult to envisage a situation in which Brazil would actively cooperate with the United States in securing order and stability in the region. In Brazilian eyes few structural factors grant it greater room for manoeuvre than the fact that the United States takes its hegemony in South America for granted and often focuses its attentions elsewhere.

If anything, the United States has featured in Brazil's move to the region in a negative way. When President Bush Sr. announced plans for a hemispheric-wide free trade area in 1994, the voices arguing for a regional grouping to resist that push gained influence in Brasilia. Consider also the pattern of Brazilian interests in playing a political role in regional crises: the argument is that, taking up some responsibilities there, Brazil might reduce the perceived need in South America for a security architecture that relies too heavily on the United States. American concerns about South America – be it linked to drug trade, political turmoil, or the fate of Hugo Chávez's 'Bolivarian Revolution' – cause Brazil considerable

disquiet. This is the one area of the world where the United States are indeed a regional hegemon with overwhelming power, and it is in the interest of Brazil to deepen the layers of political relationships and institutions that might shield the region from overt US intervention.

However, Brazil's behaviour should not be seen as a simple attempt to undercut US influence. Although Brazilians never make their views explicit on how best to deal with the US in the realm of regional management, they are always aware of the imperative to keep the US engaged in debate rather than alienate it. Take, for instance, Brazil's 2008 proposal for a South American Defense Council: from Brasilia's standpoint this is an initiative to provide Brazil with a venue to defuse potential US interventions, ensuring that its interests are not overridden, and assisting with the building of security cooperation. But the emphasis is on a multilayered system where close consultation with the United States remains crucial. It was not a coincidence that before consulting the first draft of the council proposal with his South American colleagues, the Brazilian defense minister visited Washington first. Trying to deflect American attention from South America might pass like a 'ducking strategy', but in fact Brazil has tried to project a more sophisticated view of the region, and a more nuanced set of foreign policies, than that which was prevalent in the 1990s.

## **5. Conclusion**

Conceptual change plays a part in explaining the pattern of Brazil's renewed activism in the region. For most of the twentieth century, Brazilian leaders saw their vicinity as too complex a place to engage systematically. In the face of problems there, they often directed their interest elsewhere. Attempts to engage the region have been on the rise since the 1980s, and have gathered momentum from the late 1990s onwards. This is not to say that Brazilian images of its region have undergone a drastic rupture and that we now see a major attempt to engage the region. The story here is dominated by the continuing power of a national ideology of autonomy, self-help, and suspicion about neighbours' intentions.

But it is nonetheless important to acknowledge the degree to which change has actually occurred. What was a relatively passive understanding to the region was replaced with ideas that are more active and pave the way for real policy content. Consider the shift from 'Latin America' to 'South America', the doctrine of 'non-indifference', and the willingness to move forward with institutionalising diplomatic exchanges in South America even in the field of defense and security. While these new ideas have produced a regional policy that is fundamentally ambiguous, ten to fifteen years of slow-paced but steady change have made a difference to the conceptual resources available to Brazilian leaders. They may not answer many of the questions that go to the heart of what might mean to be a regional power in international relations. But these new ideas have worked as important resources in the hands of national leaders.

