

BRAZIL: CRISIS AND ROLE AS A GLOBAL PLAYER

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The arrival of Lula in power in Brazil implies that the country once again has a policy focused on its role as a global player. It is the only country in Latin America that has this role, which was abandoned during the Presidency of Jair Bolsonaro. The question today is to what extent this situation could be affected by the serious episodes that took place on January 8 with the taking of the headquarters of the three branches of government by supporters of the aforementioned former President. From an international point of view, there are clear similarities between what happened in the US Congress on January 6, 2021, and what has now taken place in Brazil. In regional terms, Brazil is the first electorate in Latin America, but in a global vision, it is also the second electorate in the West. The interaction between the extreme right in the United States and its counterpart in Brazil becomes a global political fact. Lula received strong support from the Biden Administration, which during the Brazilian electoral process that took place in 2022, clearly favored him. The US President is now going to speed up the bilateral meeting requested by Lula. The Washington-Brasilia relationship shows in historical terms that Brazil has been the main reference in South America for Washington. This dates back to World War II, when President Getulio Vargas fought alongside the Allies. Since then there has been an oscillating relationship, but within the framework of a realistic priority, as stated half a century ago by Henry Kissinger, then Secretary of State: "Where Brazil goes, South America will go."

The role of Brazil as the leader of South America and an actor that is projected - although with less intensity- throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, is a point of interest for the US, which does not change what happened on January 8. In 1964, the Brazilian military coup, whose governments lasted for two decades, defined the predominance of this line in the region. With the return of democracy, in the mid-1980s, Brazil implemented the neoliberal model in force after the failure of communism, until the beginning of the 21st century. In the nineties, Brazil was the one that also defined a government administration that, with nuances, prevailed in Latin America. Once Lula came to power in 2003, a third stage began, in which the progressive governments marked the

characteristic of the political-ideological orientation of the region, with distributionist models that allowed the global economic situation. But the arrival of Jair Bolsonaro to power broke this trend. His orientation, which had points of contact with Trump in the United States and the European right, did not have them in South America. The Biden-Lula relationship implies that the United States once again sees Brazil as the country that sets the direction of the region, and based on this, it seeks to coordinate and coincide. Regardless of the differences, the “moderate progressivism” of the Democratic Biden government seems to coincide with Lula's similar line in the region.

The European Union expressed itself homogeneously in support of Lula in this crisis, Europe being another axis of the administration of the new Brazilian President. Most EU governments view European far-right forces as a growing threat. In this context, they perceive Lula as an ally. In the second half of 2023, the Presidents of the European Union will meet those of CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), from which only the United States and Canada are excluded. The meeting will take place in Spain, the country that will hold the rotating EU Presidency at that time. The goal is to reinvigorate a link that the dominance of competition between the United States and China for global hegemony left in the background. The war in Ukraine has led Washington to consider that for a better relationship between Europe and Latin America it will be useful to curb the growing Chinese influence in the region. On January 24 and 25, the Summit of Presidents of the 33 CELAC countries, including those of the Caribbean, will take place in Buenos Aires. It will be preparatory to what will happen in Spain with the 27 Heads of Government of the EU. But it is not easy to advance in this area. MERCOSUR, in which Brazil is the majority partner with more than three quarters of the bloc's GDP, has not made progress in the free trade agreement signed with the European Union in 2019. The reality is that, without any progress with MERCOSUR, it can hardly be sought with the European Union.

But Brazil's full role as a global player will take place in September in India, at the BRICS Summit. This group is made up of the emerging powers: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. All these countries strongly supported Lula in the emergency, seeing a protest of this magnitude as a threat to their own regimes. The priority will undoubtedly be China due to its economic and strategic importance. It is already Brazil's main bilateral relationship in trade

terms. Taking up a traditional line in Brazilian diplomacy, Lula will seek to maintain a balanced position between Washington and Beijing, which will influence the region. The relationship with Russia is important for the new Brazilian government, more for strategic than economic reasons. Neutrality is the line that he will maintain, as Lula already anticipated during the electoral campaign, generating criticism from Ukrainian President Volodimir Zelenzky. The relationship with India will acquire greater relevance, at a time when this country becomes the most populated one in the world according to the demographic estimates of the UN -it will exceed 1.4 billion inhabitants- its GDP has become the fifth in the world and it will be higher than the United Kingdom, and it has the fifth largest military expenditure. This year New Delhi, its capital, will host two important Summits: the G20 Summit and the Shanghai Group Summit. South Africa is a member of the BRICS representing the entire African continent.

But Brazil's role as a global player will be on full display at the G20 Summit in the Indian capital in September. On this occasion, Lula will meet with the world's most important leaders, given that this Summit, which meets annually, is made up of 19 countries plus the European Union, which is recognized as its 20th member. The group is made up of the 7 largest economic powers that have a liberal-democratic political system and constitute the G7; the 5 emerging that make up the BRICS, and the remaining 7 that are considered medium-sized countries with regional influence. The meeting that Lula attended was in 2009. It took place during the last year of his second term. That meeting was held to contain the consequences on the global economy of the crisis triggered by the imbalances generated in the US real estate market. None of the 18 Heads of Government who were present then are still in power today, beyond their different political regimes. The 12 years between the last G20 summit that Lula attended and the one that will take place next September give an idea of how much the world has changed since then. Understanding and assuming this situation will be the key for Lula as a global leader, at a time when he has suffered a strong internal crisis unprecedented in the last 4 decades. All the G20 countries, without exception, supported him in this circumstance. For his part, the US President announced that he will ask the Group that the African Union be incorporated as a member, as is also the case with the European Union, an initiative that Brazil could share.

In conclusion: Lula has received unanimous support against the taking of the headquarters of the three powers by supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro. The United States and the European Union see it as an ally against the growth of the extreme right on that continent; the emerging powers, in turn, perceive it as an ally in the face of the growing opposition faced by most of their leaders in their countries. In Latin America and the Caribbean, most countries see it as a balancing factor that can contribute to the stability of their respective governments. Finally, the first reaction of the Brazilian President showed his ability to avoid an institutional crisis, but now he must demonstrate that he is capable of maintaining governance.