# CABLEGATE and the Continuing U.S. Penetration of Brazil

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

By 2015, it is clear that the United States is no longer in a position simply to "change the regime or those who govern" in Brazil, as Jan Knippers Black described one key element of US penetration of Brazil in her 1977 book. The rapid progress of the global "neoliberal project," if nothing else, seems to have drastically attenuated the US role in hemispheric international relations, based, as they have increasingly become, on market forces. In short, Brazil is no longer as economically vulnerable to US resource and market needs alone, having become a dominant member of Mercosul, a founding member of BRICS, and a world economic force in its own right, the current economic and political crises to the contrary notwithstanding.

The long term US-Brazilian relationship, rather, has been described as "so complex and so different from US relations with the countries of Hispanic America that, even among hemispheric policy makers, few in the United States understand it" (HRINAK, 2005). Indeed, academic works over the last two decades (*e.g.*, HIRST, 2005) have themselves seemed to misunderstand the complexity of US-Brazilian relations in the age of BRICS, the "Pink Tide," and political crises, tending to minimize the importance of Brazil to US policy makers, while paradoxically pointing to Brazil as a "regional giant," and arguing that "the deterioration in the quality of US relations with the region as a whole…increases the importance of maintaining an open channel of understanding with Brazil" (SOARES DE LIMA and HIRST, 2006: 35). In the age of Chinese influence and BRICS, moreover, Brazil's significant influence in a range of foreign policy areas, both regional and global, is now undeniable, even if US policy makers are often confused by the complexity of US-Brazilian relations.

Evidence of a continuing, quiet intervention in Brazilian politics, what Black referred to more comprehensively as a full menu of "penetration" strategies, apparently persists, albeit in a more covert form. The publication of hundreds of confidential US State Department cables, to and from US Embassies around the world, were published on the *WikiLeaks* website in 2010 and 2011, and then re-published in news media and internet sites over the next several years, under the title of "Cablegate." Hundred of these, directly involving US activities in Brazil, were republished in their original English language format in the Brazilian national newspaper, *Folha de São Paulo*, and have been used as sources in this study. Like most researchers in this area, I was overwhelmed by a vast quantity of evidence.

Many of these cables directly reference the continuing penetration of US interests and influence in contemporary Brazilian domestic and foreign politics. In short, they seem to fit James Rosenau's general definition of foreign penetration, summarized by Black in her book, as "members of one polity serv[ing] as participants in the political processes of another" (Black 1977: xiv). I was only able to examine partial and incomplete evidence in the form of a few of the 251,000 confidential and non-confidential US diplomatic cables, most of which were posted between 2004 and 2009 beginning in February 2010. I was also dependent upon the *Folha de São Paulo* for their choice of which cables they chose to publish.

I hesitated to use stolen US State Department cables released through a highly questionable source, *WikiLeaks*. The background to the acquisition and release of the thousands of confidential and secret cables is well documented (e.g., NICKS, 2012; MITCHELL, 2011; EL PAÍS, 2011), as are the vagaries of the *WikiLeaks* organization, whose founder, Julian Assange, remains in refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in order to prevent his extradition to Sweden or the US on a variety of serious charges relating to various charges including the release of the stolen cables (DOMSCHEIT-BERG, 2011; NEW YORK TIMES, 2011; SIFRY, 2011).

The cables themselves, however, have appeared in thousands of secondary sources worldwide, and have become integral to political interpretations of US foreign policy. The *Folha de São Paulo* published them in their original English language and formatting, for example, and they are now deeply embedded in popular culture, and have resulted in significant responses which cannot be explained except through reference to them. Moreover, I am presenting only a light sampling of the evidence in this abbreviated study. There were 19 cables, for example, that mentioned Defence Minister Nelson Jobim by name, describing his unexpected role in providing inside intelligence to US policy makers, and despite the stated intent in several of the cables to regard him as a "protected source." His role is only one limited aspect of this study, however. The concentration, rather, is on a limited selection of cables in several categories, a few, mostly confidential and secret, cables that reveal insights into the continuing, if much diminished, US penetration of Brazil.

## 2 DECLINE AND FRUSTRATION IN US PENETRATION, AS OUTLINED IN "DIPLOMATIC" CABLES

The cables, many of which can only very vaguely be described as "diplomatic" in the common use of the word, offer unique insights into US attempts to penetrate, or re-penetrate (as often appeared to be the case) Brazilian domestic and foreign politics in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and their release appears to have reversed their original intension in most cases. Perhaps the most blatant example, however, was inscribed graphically in a 2009 confidential briefing cable regarding a visit by US Assistant Secretary of State Arturo Valenzuela, in which the diminishing capacity of the US government to penetrate the Brazilian polity was succinctly stated:

> ...we face significant historical baggage in the way Brazil's foreign policy establishment views the United States, which slows our ability to build a fully cooperative relationship with Brazil. Much of Brazil's foreign policy establishment remains cautious and mistrustful toward the United States. Bilaterally, a growing and pragmatic interest in cooperating with the United States on a range of technical and practical

> issues is often caught up in fears that Brazil will lose sovereign control or will find itself a junior partner on its own soil to better funded, staffed, and organized USG partners. This has led to persistent problems with visas for U.S. law enforcement agencies (particularly, but not exclusively, on counterterrorism issues), refusal to accept USG assistance, and seemingly unreasonable demands and strictures on various types of cooperation.[1]

The United States penetration of Brazil was not what it had been. Was its re-establishment now to be regarded as a high priority?

### 2.1 The US and the Brazilian Military

The United States and Brazilian military forces had maintained a close bilateral relationship after WWII, as outlined in Black (1977). By the late 1970s that relationship virtually collapsed, mostly because of President Jimmy Carter's emphasis on human rights, and US resistance to Brazil's expanding nuclear power and weapons programs. With the end of the military dictatorship in 1985, Brazilian military politics were at a turning point. Although officers involved with the 21-year military regime were still in command of the military, and influential in national politics, Brazil was rapidly democratizing.

A new civilian president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, soon moved to create a civilian-led Ministry of Defense, and a civilian--led intelligence agency, both of which had previously been the political provinces of the military high command, the Estado Maior. A new generation of officers were poised to step into command positions, moreover, and to redefine the previously hallowed concept of "National Security," emphasizing Amazônia as both a crucial and a threatened element of that concept, while retaining a manifest suspicion of, if not open hostility to, the US military presence in South America under the Southern Command, known

1 Kubiske, Lisa (2009) "SCENESETTER FOR THE DECEMBER 13-14 VISIT OF WHA ASSISTANT SECRETARY ARTURO VALENZUELA," confidential State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, 10 Dec 2009 16:08 UTC.

as SOUTHCOM. The threat seemed to be based, at least to some extent, on perceptions that the US (primarily) or European countries had designs on the Amazon region, either for environmental reasons, or, in more paranoic expressions, for eventual imperialistic absorption. The "lungs of the earth" argument (e.g., SILVER, 2002: 237), voiced widely by environmentalists in the West, was often cited as proof of these designs.

In the late 1990s a Brigadier General serving as the president of the Military Supreme Court, and thereby not bound by the RD (*regulamento disciplinar*) restrictions on officers (prohibiting them from speaking on political matters), was asked in a magazine interview who it was that the Brazilian military now regarded as a potential "enemy," and he famously replied that it was the United States (FEROLLA, 1998)[2]. Although a good deal of effective "defense diplomacy" was expended by SOUTHCOM (and particularly by General Barry McCaffrey, a commander of SOUTHCOM in the 1990s), putative comments by other senior US military officers during that time periodically triggered political misunderstandings between the US and Brazil, as when a senior US Army general, Patrick Hughes, was said to have remarked in a speech in 2000 at MIT that if an ecological disaster began to unfold in the Brazilian Amazon, the US military might have to intervene to save this global resource. Two years later, the commanding Brazilian General in the Amazon, perhaps consequently, declined US offers of assistance to fight massive fires that had been set illegally in Amazônia and had expanded alarmingly during an unusual dry spell. Well before 2010 senior Brazilian military officers were largely opposed to anything even vaguely resembling US penetration of the Brazilian policy.

### 2.2 The Curious Case of Defense Minister Nelson Jobim

It is no exaggeration, then, to affirm that the military Estado Maior was utterly opposed to the new, civilian-led Ministry of Defence implemented by the Cardoso Administration in 1999.

2 When asked by an interviewer, Marina Amaral, "*Quem é o inimigo?*" He responded, "*É o hemisfério norte, principalmente os Estados Unidos*."

The first five civilian ministers of defence were openly and covertly resisted by the senior commanders, three of whom had lost their *ex-officio* presidential cabinet position in the change. Initially, the open resistance was limited to the three branch commanders, and typically led to the implication of civilian appointees to the Minister's position in political scandals, leading to their successive removal. It was not until Minister Nelson Jobim's appointment by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2007 that the senior military officers openly approved of their civilian overseer. Jobim appealed to military sentiments, adopting the military command's open resistance to Lula in the establishment of an Indian reserve, Raposa/Serra do Sol, in 2008 and 2009, and supporting senior military commanders in most of their concerns. He was a former leader of the PMDB, and had been the President of the Brazilian Supreme Court until just before his nomination. He remained in office for more than 4 years, and resigned under pressure from President Rousseff in 2011 after apparently intentionally provoking her by publicly denigrating his fellow cabinet ministers. It appeared to be a staged political attack, perhaps just ahead of a mob of angry military officers.

The "Cablegate" scandal had shockingly revealed in 2010 that Jobim may have been acting as a US intelligence asset. A 2011 version of his *Wikipedia* page (in English) identified him as a "US intelligence agent." This was soon "edited" to read "a pro-US ally within Brazil's government" and an "identity-protected source"[3] of the US government, quoting directly from released cables. US penetration seems to have been applicable in this case, as several "secret" and "confidential" cables revealed. In the most important of these, dated January 25, 2009, the US Ambassador, Clifford Sobel, described Jobim's collaboration with the US in his struggles with a fellow cabinet minister, Celso Amorim (who replaced Jobim as Defense Minister in 2012) and his own Vice-Minister, Samuel Guimarães, in an attempt to implement a "defense cooperation agreement" (DCA) with the United States:

3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nelson_Jobim , accessed May 18, 2013.

> Jobim responded that Guimaraes posed a serious problem, not only on the DCA but on a variety of issues. Jobim said that Guimaraes "hates the United States" and is actively looking to create problems in the relationship. Jobim said that he has had to beat back more than one outlandish proposal by Guimaraes calculated to upset relations with the U.S. and other industrialized countries.... [Jobim] told the Ambassador that he does not want to "win the battle and lose the war" and expend too much political capital on the DCA, so will have to proceed carefully. In particular, he said, if Guimaraes and FM Amorim join forces against a DCA, that could be a serious problem[4].

Perhaps the most indicting evidence of Jobim's "unusual" collusion with the US, and arguably the best example of US penetration of the Brazilian Defense Ministry, came in a January 22, 2009 cable in which Jobim advised the US Embassy that Evo Morales, President of Bolivia and a strident opponent of US influence in the region, was suffering from a highly secret and potentially serious nasal tumor, and that President Lula had confidentially offered Brazilian medical assistance in its treatment[5]. It is difficult to interpret this disclosure, unlike many of the more than two dozen other Jobim disclosures reported in numerous cables, in other than that

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4 Sobel, Clifford (2008) "BRAZILIAN DEFENSE MINISTER ON DCA, TRIP TO FRANCE AND RUSSIA, CIVIL AVIATION", *confidential* State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, 2008-01-25 14:53:00. In this cable, it is also reported that Jobim "told the Ambassador [Sobel] that the primary purpose of his upcoming trip to France is to discuss design issues for a nuclear-powered submarine. He also said that he will look at France's Rafale airplane. In Russia Jobim's primary purpose is to ensure servicing for Brazil's Russian helicopters. He noted that Russia wants to open a jeep facility in Porto Alegre, and that he will travel to Russia in an Embraer plane in the hope of making sales there." The reader is left with the possibility, however, that Jobim is using his confidential disclosures to the US Embassy to reinforce his position in his struggle with the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, Itamaraty, noted for its hegemonic position. As the cable ends, "Once again, President Lula may have to play the deciding role between an unusually activist Defense Minister interested in developing closer ties with the United States and an MRE [Itamaraty] that is firmly committed to maintaining control over all aspects of foreign policy and to keeping a measure of distance between Brazil and the United States."

5 Sobel, Clifford (2009) "BRAZIL'S LULA OFFERS BOLIVIA'S MORALES TREATMENT FOR TUMOR", *confidential* State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, 2009-01-22 18:51:00. Jobim, when later questioned by the media about this, was quoted as admitting that "'Morales tinha um problema no nariz', mas afirmou que o telegrama 'não fazia sentido' e que suas palavras foram exageradas" (EFE, 2010).

of a US intelligence agent, an impression reinforced in that same cable by reference to Jobim as an "identity-protected source."

Soon after the release of the cables, reports in the Spanish and Brazilian media emphasized the degree to which the United States had penetrated Brazilian policy through Jobim. In a 2010 article in *Folha de São Paulo*, mention was made of Jobim's apparent collaboration with the United States in attempting to undermine Venezuela's dealings with Colombia over the FARC guerrillas, and his rather weak disclaimer when questioned on it. As *Folha* reported,

> "Falando de temas de segurança regional", diz um desses documentos [cables], "Jobim quase reconheceu a presença da guerrilha das Forças Revolucionárias da Colômbia (Farc) na Venezuela e deu sugestões para aumentar a segurança na fronteira entre Colômbia e Equador". No entanto, Jobim afirma no documento que reconhecer publicamente a presença das Farc na Venezuela impediria um eventual trabalho de mediação do Governo brasileiro entre Bogotá e Caracas. Perguntado nesta sexta-feira se confirmava essa informação, o titular da Defesa respondeu: "Não. Eu disse ao embaixador (dos EUA) que se as Farc vierem ao Brasil, elas serão recebidas a bala. E que havia a necessidade de acabar com as Farc" (EFE, 2010).

By early 2011, cables described Jobim's unusual cooperation with the US Embassy, noting that "Jobim's focus [is] becoming clearer."

> Over the course of several discussions with the Ambassador… the most recent on the eve of his departure on January 25 for France and Russia, Jobim revealed in increasing detail his goals for these visits and his activities in the hemisphere. The key elements that emerged are 1) pursuit of a nuclear submarine, using French assistance on propulsion as well as other systems; 2) a general desire to increase Brazil's domestic manufacturing capability for weapons via technology transfer; 3) more specifically, an interest in becoming a service hub in South America for Russian equipment, driven by a desire to have greater leverage over Hugo Chavez's Venezuela; 4) a focus on rebuilding Brazil's military capacity, including fighter aircraft; and 5) a new, more structured organization of South American defense ministers[6].

6 Kubiske, Lisa (2011) "NEW IMPETUS TO A GROWING RELATIONSHIP," *confidential* State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, 2008-01-31 13:01.

Jobim's position as Minister of Defence was jeopardized following the disclosure of the US State Department cables in February, 2010, given the strong nationalistic tenor of Brazilian military thought, and the deep suspicion held by many officers of US intentions. Although he initially minimized the extent of his involvement with the United States, saying that the quotes were "opiniões de embaixadores. São manifestações pessoais do embaixador (dos EUA) daquela época e que fez afirmações em meu nome, somente isso" (EFE, 2010), Jobim found himself increasingly embattled by these damning cables. In mid-2011 he apparently intentionally created an untenable relationship with President Rousseff by openly criticizing several of his fellow cabinet ministers, and he resigned on August 5. The BBC account stressed that he had been angry at being overruled by President Rousseff over the purchase of fighter jets (BBC, 2011), although it is difficult to imagine how he could have maintained a positive interaction with senior military officers after the disclosure of his role in the US penetration of Brazil.

### 2.3 The US and Brazil's acquisition of fighters, 2000-2009

The State Department was centrally concerned with a matter that bridged many of the most important objectives of US penetration, the sale of jet fighters to Brazil. In previous years Brazil had insisted on extensive technology transfer, in-country manufacture, and agreements to buy Brazilian-made aircraft as integral to any agreement. In a September 2009 cable, Lula shocked the US Embassy officials with his unexpected rejection of what they had assumed to be their influence:

> In a joint news conference with [French President] Sarkozy, September 7, Lula said that Brazil would begin negotiations with France for the purchase of thirty-six fighter aircraft. Lula cited France's willingness to transfer technology and the importance of consolidating the strategic partnership with France as the reasons for his decision. To bolster the French case, Sarkozy reportedly promised to buy a dozen C390 cargo planes, to be developed by Brazil and to support Rio de Janeiro's bid to host the 2016 Olympic Games. The French reportedly also promised to assist Brazil in exporting future French-Brazilian aircraft to unspecified countries in Latin America and Africa….Later press reports indicated that

> Lula did not rule out the USG or Swedish planes.... Over the past several weeks, Mission Brazil has heard the consistent message that any decision would be made after Sarkozy's visit. Air Force contacts informed MLO Brasília that they would be submitting their technical evaluation to the MOD in the week following the visit for review and preparation of a recommendation to the President. The evaluation was never completed or delivered, meaning Lula's decision to favor the French was taken without the benefit of over a year of work by Air Force experts[7].

Aside from reference to the US manufactured planes as "USG (US Government) planes", an odd use of language in the neoliberal and privatized environment of 2009, the cable reveals a lack of sensitivity to the basic ground rules of international capital. Soon, the State Department cables were lamenting what they disparagingly called a "growing love affair" between presidents Sarkozy and Lula, one in which "Sarkozy and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva discovered that they shared 'a vision of a new multilateralism' in global governance and the view of Brazil as a vast market and regional platform for France," and one where

> Brazilian diplomats noted that the two men have very similar personalities and that Lula has often commented that looking at Sarkozy is like "looking in the mirror." The two leaders have put an emphasis on their warm personal chemistry and France's status as the only EU country sharing a border with Brazil, with French Guiana located just north of South America's largest country. The "unique" bilateral partnership and close friendship between the energetic Sarkozy and the charismatic and popular Lula is of particular note given that the Brazilian president does not speak English or French and the relationship is conducted almost exclusively through interpreters[8].

United States penetration of Brazil in this vital area of high tech weapons provision was now in jeopardy, neo-liberalism be damned, and all this despite earlier extensive and cordial contacts

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7 Kubiske, Lisa (2010) "LULA FAVORS FRENCH FIGHTERS -- SITUATION SERIOUS BUT NOT HOPELESS" confidential State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, Wed, 9 Sep 2009 10:20 UTC.

8 Allegrone, Kathleen (2009) "FRANCE AND BRAZIL: THE START OF A LOVE AFFAIR," confidential State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, 2009-11-17 15:21.

between Lula and Jobim, and "over a year of work by Air Force experts." In stark language, the cable warns that "the clear designation of the French as the front runners means that the USG/Boeing bid faces a major challenge in order to level the playing field." Again, what is meant by "levelling the playing field"? The cable concluded with a reminder:

> Given that Lula's decision to begin negotiations with the French was made following a late dinner with Sarkozy, the importance of personal relationships cannot be overstated. Should President Obama speak with Lula in the next few weeks, it would be important for him to mention the fighter sale.

In a cable dated 5 January 2010, Lisa Kubiske reported that although Lula continued to favour the French fighters, "Embassy contacts in the Ministry of External Relations and Ministry of Defense believe that Defense Minister Jobim will meet with Lula later in January to try to make a decision"[9]. The cable continued:

> During October and November, contacts by Embassy officials and Boeing representatives were received politely, but with little real interest as the focus remained on the French. In recent weeks, however, there has been a notable change from the Minister of Defense. Beginning with A/S Valenzuela's December 14 meeting with Jobim…, there has been renewed interest in the USG/Boeing proposal. While Jobim repeated concerns about "bad precedents" for policies regarding transfer of U.S.-origin technology (in reality complaints about export licensing procedures), he said he understood that the USG had a new approach and was interested in Boeing's industrial cooperation offer (*Ibid*.).

By April of 2013, the FX2 decision had been delayed yet again, with the Boeing (and USG) product still in the running (UPI, 2013), until Edward Snowden's release of US National Security Agency documents revealing that the agency had been monitoring Dilma's cell phone and otherwise spying on her, provoking her outrage and threatening to cancel her upcoming visit to Washington (ROMERO, 2013). Within three months, a Swedish firm, Saab, was awarded

9 Kubiske, Lisa (2010) "FX2 AT THE END OF 2009," *confidential* State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, 2010-01-05 19:40:00.

the fighter bomber contract, apparently in retaliation for the US spying incident (HORCH and DREW, 2013).

## 2.5 Brazil's Foreign Relations...and Apparent US Preferences

### Brazil and Its Neighbors

Venezuelan and Bolivian-Brazilian relations have represented particularly challenging subjects for US policymakers, and major temptations to penetrate and divert Brazilian foreign policy, as Jobim's dealings with the US Embassy regarding Venezuela and Bolivia (recorded in dozens of cables) indicated. In some of the cables, Jobim established his *bona fides* as an opponent of Hugo Chávez, as in a confidential 2009 cable involving Brazilian and US activities in Haiti:

> During Ambassador Shannon's introductory call February 5, Minister of Defense Nelson Jobim described the overall bilateral security relationship as strong and transparent. He said he favored expanding it this year, first through a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), then through an information security agreement. He hopes to sign the DCA during his proposed February 23 visit to Washington, if the Ministry for Foreign Affairs approves in time....Jobim praised the U.S.-Brazil partnership in Haiti, particularly the strong working relationship of Generals Keen and Peixoto. He described his visit to Haiti two weeks earlier and called the situation "extremely fragile." Jobim derided concerns expressed by Venezuela of a "U.S. invasion" of Haiti, saying that the proximity of the United States and its capacity to move large amounts of material made it natural for the USG to play a leading role in relief efforts[10].

US policy makers have tended to follow the advice of Jorge Castañeda, the former Foreign Minister of Mexico, in his 2006 article in Foreign Affairs, in which he argued that "distinguishing between these two broad left-wing currents [in Latin America] is the best basis for serious policy, from Washington, Brussels,

10 Shannon, Thomas A. (2010) "AMBASSADOR SHANNON'S MEETING WITH MOD JOBIM," *confidential* State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, 18 Feb 2010 13:08 UTC

Mexico City, or anywhere else" (42). He recommended, among other things, "taking Brazil seriously as a trade interlocutor" (42) as a means to deal with the more difficult leftist countries in Latin America. In that regard, the meeting with Jobim, described in the cable above, offered a key example of this:

> Jobim spoke of his efforts to ameliorate tensions between Colombia and Ecuador following the 2008 bombing of a FARC facility inside Ecuador by Colombian forces. Contacts between Defense Ministers, through the South American Defense Council (SADC), he said, had been key to managing the after effects of the strike, providing a good test case for the SADC. Jobim told Ambassador Shannon that Brazil has offered to help monitor the Colombia-Ecuador border as a confidence building measure. He was less optimistic about Brazil's ability to manage Venezuela and expressed concern about Chavez's increasingly complicated domestic situation. He worried aloud about the impact in Venezuela if Chavez resorted to violent repression of demonstrators (42).

Reading between the lines, Casteñeda's prescription is one of surrogate interference, with Brazil or perhaps Chile (under Bachelet) as the instrument. A number of the cables suggest that this is precisely what the US State Department had in mind.

Another major concern of US policy makers has been the rise of Mercosul and, particularly, the possibility of Brazil's greater cooperation in international relations with traditionally independent Argentina. A *New York Times* article in 2010 picked up on a confidential State Department cable that indicated this "worst--case" concern, although this time it was Argentina that was following Brazil's independent lead:

> More worrisome [than Pakistan's disclosure of the identity of the CIA station chief in Islamabad], given its traditional ties with Israel, the Argentine government's decision to join Brazil in recognizing an independent Palestinian state was likely a response, at least in part, to a leaked cable in which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton questioned the mental health of President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. The damage to U.S.-Argentine relations is likely to be lasting (BREMMER and KHANNA, 2010).

Brazil's growing independence from US policy, it seemed, was even influencing (or acting as a bad influence on?) a traditionally independent Latin American neighbour. US penetration of Brazil

in this area previously regarded as vital was now apparently a hollow shell of its former self.

## BRAZIL AND IRAN

The State Department cables record an almost desperate drive to divert Brazil's growing cooperation with the Ahmadinejad government in Iran, and Lula's attempt in 2010 to work with Turkey in offering an alternative plan to limit Iran's nuclear weapons capabilities. In a 2012 article in the *New York Times*, the authors explained that "Iran is a minor player but one that can be particularly problematic. Iran appears to have used its relations with some Latin American countries to try to circumvent international sanctions on its financial operations" (NEUMAN and ROMERO, 2012). In a 2009 cable, Charge d'Affaires Lisa Kubiske, whose name appears as the author of dozens of Brazilian cables, commented that

> Brazil recognizes that there are serious questions outstanding about Iran's and Syria's nuclear activities and does not see these latest IAEA reports as closing those cases. The GOB, however, doesn't seem willing to go much further than calling for everyone to cooperate more with the IAEA. It strongly opposes unilateral military action and doesn't like the Iran case being with the UNSC. The GOB's interest in the proposals and activities of the P-5 and Germany is more that they want to be well-informed than an interest in trying to contribute to crafting new measures to pressure Iran[11].

While not explicitly mentioning the US concerns with Lula's growing relationship with President Ahmadinejad, the implication that there were US pressures to reverse this were plain. When Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Arturo Valenzuela visited Brazil in 2009, an Embassy briefing cable revealed the enormous discomfort that the US State Department felt regarding Brazil's global foreign policies, and its inability to "penetrate" them:

> Where Brazil's policy is not hesitant, it is often ill-informed or straight-jacketed by the policies of the past. As it steps out on Middle East issues, the GOB does so with a lack of

11 Kubiske, Lisa (2009) "BRAZILIAN VIEWS ON THE LATEST IAEA REPORTS ON IRAN AND SYRIA," *confidential* State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, 9/23/2009 16:39

> expertise on the region. Inclined to take assertions from the Syrians, Iranians, and Hizbullah at face value, it insists that peace can be achieved only if all players are at the table, and seeks to position itself as a neutral party, "the country who can talk to everyone," over against what it perceives as the biased U.S. and European efforts. This penchant for dialogue stands together with respect for sovereignty and non--intervention in internal affairs as the hallmarks of Brazilian foreign policy. But as Brazil plays in a growing number of international arenas, it is finding it more difficult to remain true to these principles, and more difficult to hide its inconsistencies[12].

The level of frustration evident in this cable points both to US efforts to penetrate Brazilian foreign policy, and its diminishing capacity to do so. Subsequent, if oblique, references to US successes in pressuring Brazil on this point were evident in the cable traffic[13].

> When President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran begins a four-nation tour of Latin America on Sunday, showcasing his support in the region against a backdrop of international tensions over his nation's nuclear program, he is set to visit some of the United States' most ardent critics: Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba and Ecuador….But the list of countries Mr. Ahmadinejad will not be visiting is equally telling. Though Iran is reeling from successive rounds of international and unilateral sanctions, Mr. Ahmadinejad is not visiting Brazil, the region's economic powerhouse. Nor is he going to other large countries like Mexico, Colombia and Argentina, underscoring that his visit is limited to nations without

12 Kubiske, Lisa (2009) "SCENESETTER FOR THE DECEMBER 13-14 VISIT OF WHA ASSISTANT SECRETARY ARTURO VALENZUELA," confidential State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, 10 Dec 2009 16:08 UTC.

13 As a 2008 cable concluded, "In light of its traditional hesitance to take firm positions on contentious country-specific issues, and with visits by Ahmadinejad to Brazil and top Brazilian officials to Iran being planned for the next few months, Brazil will have a soft voice in the chorus -- but may prove useful nonetheless if senior GOB officials can be encouraged to whisper into Iran's ear the idea that negotiation and compliance are its best option." Kubiske, Lisa (2008) "BRAZIL ON IRAN: A SOFT VOICE IN THE CHORUS," confidential State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, 11/13/2008 14:21. This was published in English in the *Folha de São Paulo* in English, but under the heading "Brasileiros podem mostrar para Irã que negociação é melhor saída," 23/12/2010: http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/849942-brasileiros-podem-mostrar-para-ira-que-negociacao-e-melhor-saida-leia-em-ingles.shtml , accessed 19 May 2013.

> extensive influence or the capacity to offer much of a major economic partnership (NEUMAN and ROMERO, 2012).

In a confidential cable in 2009 Lisa Kubiske was almost ironic in her observations, evincing a sense of impotence and frustration with Brazil's awkward and independent steps on the world stage.

> MRE reconfirmed that Israeli President Shimon Peres will visit Brasilia on November 11. He said that no dates had been confirmed for visits by Ahmadinejad or Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, but said that the Ahmadinejad visit will happen in late November, which would push back the Abbas visit into December at earliest....Pires also spoke briefly about Brazil's decision to back Egyptian candidate Farouk Hosni over Irina Bokova for the UNESCO Director General....Several local publications have criticized the GOB position on this matter, calling it a "diplomatic defeat" dictated by Lula's desire to strengthen relations with Iran and the Middle East. These same reports, apparently based on leaked sources from Itamaraty, also questioned why Brazil did not make the case to promote one of its own, UNESCO Deputy Director-General Marcio Barbosa. When asked about the matter, Pires smiled wryly, shook his head and said, "these are the things we have to do sometimes"[14].

Lula's apparently close relationship with Iran's President Ahmadinejad led to extensive, if oblique, criticism in the cable traffic, indicating strong US pressure on Lula and, eventually, a weakening of the relationship, as perhaps evidenced in Ahmadinejad's failure to visit Brazil in 2012.

## CHINA AND BRAZIL

China increasingly occupied the attention of the State Department, with fears expressed in one cable regarding the Chinese penchant for computer hacking[15] Brazil's growing

14 Kubiske, Lisa (2009) "REPORT GETS THE BRAZILIANS THINKING," *confidential* State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, 10/7/2009 17:30.

15 As GLANTZ and MARKOFF reported in the New York Times (2010) regarding a State Department cable dated May 18, 2009, "That cable from American diplomats was one of many made public by WikiLeaks that portray China's leadership as nearly obsessed with the threat posed by the Internet to their grip on power — and, the reverse, by the opportunities it offered them, through hacking, to obtain secrets stored in computers of its rivals, especially the United States.

economic relationship with China, in particular, and China's expanding presence in other Latin American countries, triggered a surprisingly small number of cables, tending to underscore the United States' declining penetration of Brazil, Brazil's increasingly high-level political and economic cooperation with China, and consequently the US's declining penetration of the region, particularly after 2003. An especially revealing cable pondered the quixotic moves by Peru to acquire Chinese, Brazilian and Russian weaponry, describing China and Brazil as if they constituted a new power axis:

> Peru is reportedly poised to purchase Chinese tanks with an eye towards replacing its aging tank fleet and building up its "dissuasive" defense posture, and to buy aircraft from Brazil as well as MANPADS and anti-tank weapons from other countries. These defense acquisitions are surprising, in light of President Garcia's high profile regional "Peace and Disarmament Initiative." Neither were they discussed during the wide-ranging strategic dialogue in Lima with USSOUTHCOM's Commander December 1-3. While President Garcia and Defense Minister Rey have defended the purchases and criticized sceptics, most observers believe the prospective tank purchases respond to domestic political pressures fuelled by the perceived provocations of Chile[16].

All of the general concerns of US policy makers, including deteriorating trade relations, seem to have coalesced in this one confidential cable, as well as clear disappointment with declining respect for, and the lack of inclusion of the United States in, elite policy making. The cable continued:

> The planned arms purchases were also notable for their absence during the wide-ranging strategic pol/mil dialogue in Lima between USSOUTHCOM Commander General Douglas Fraser and his Peruvian counterparts December 1-3. To the extent that arms acquisitions were discussed, the Peruvians complained about the slow and complicated U.S. defense procurement process (FMS and FMF) and high price tags for U.S. equipment such as helicopters. After agreeing with their U.S. counterparts regarding the primacy

16 McKinley, P. Michael, Ambassador (2009) "CHINESE TANKS, PEACE PROPOSALS AND U.S. MILITARY SUPPORT," *confidential* State Department Cable, US Embassy Peru, 15 December 2009; 23:08

> of the internal threat arising from drug trafficking and terrorism, the Peruvians also told General Fraser that their main external threat emanated from Bolivia, where they see Evo Morales as consolidating power, eliminating political rivals and seeking to extend his radical brand of indigenous populism beyond his borders, with ALBA's help (*Ibid.*).

## The US and Brazilian Trade Relations

US-Brazilian trade relations have traditionally centered on Brazil's provision of low-priced commodities and industrial support products (*e.g.*, car parts), and its purchase from the US of very expensive manufactured goods. Moreover, after 1972, US-Brazilian trade relations were qualified by Brazil's enormous international debt, the highest in the world for nearly a decade (until it was displaced in that category by the United States and Canada), much of which was owed to US banks, and a structural imbalance in overall trade relations in favour of the US. In the past two decades, however, these patterns have changed markedly. While the US remained Brazil's primary source of high cost imports, it was rapidly being overtaken by China; and as for Brazil's sale of its commodities and industrial goods, China led the list of foreign country recipients by a significant margin. Brazil, on the other hand, shifted from the category of debtor nation to that of creditor.

## The US and the PT Presidencies

Immediately after Lula's election in 2002, the US diplomatic team in Brasília sought to influence the new PT administration. An early confidential cable, perhaps reflecting more wishful thinking than actual influence, painted a particularly favourable picture:

> Assistant Secretary Reich had warm and productive meetings in Brasilia November 20-21 with President-elect Lula da Silva, his senior advisors in the PT, and Brazilian congressional leaders. Both Ambassador Reich and Lula expressed great interest in working together across a range of issues, particularly trade. The PT team floated the idea of concluding a bilateral trade pact with the US, but will first consult with their Mercosul partners and then likely raise some proposals during Lula's December 10 visit to Washington. Lula

> is eager to meet President Bush, sure that "two politicians like us will understand each other when we meet face to face." In keeping with efforts by Lula to distance himself from Castro and Hugo Chavez, PT leader Aloizio Mercadante sought to downplay his participation in the "Sao Paulo Forum" as an attempt to set a democratic example for other Latin American leftists[17].

The cable continued, stressing the awkwardness of the US opposition to Lula during his 2002 presidential campaign, followed by an almost desperate drive to regain influence in the presidential palace:

> Assistant Secretary Reich commented that even after 9/11 the US will continue to pursue a range of interests (commercial, economic, political, security) in the hemisphere. President Bush's phone call to Lula after the Brazilian elections and invitation to the White House are strong signals of the USG's desire to strengthen ties to Brazil under Lula. The message, Reich emphasized, is that the US and the incoming Brazilian government need to get beyond any preconceptions we may have had about each other and focus on things that bring us together (*Ibid.*).

The emergence of Dilma Rousseff in 2009 as a strong presidential candidate likewise touched off a strong response in the US Embassy, especially regarding Brazil's potential foreign relations under a possible Rousseff presidency. US military and civilian officials began a series of meetings with Rousseff, and with Jobim, as a September 2009 cable revealed:

> Dilma Rousseff told [National Security Advisor] Gen. [James L.] Jones that the GOB finds it disconcerting to be faced with questions from the press regarding why the United States needs such bases [in Colombia]. According to Rousseff, issues such as this open the door for radicals who want to create problems in the region. Gen. Jones emphasized Colombia's need for assistance in maintaining its security against drug traffickers and the FARC, and then recounted Uribe's concerns that his fight against the FARC was made more difficult because of FARC positions in other countries. In all three meetings, Gen. Jones explained the nature of the agreement as largely formalizing the current relationship. He said he was willing to send a team of USG civilian and military officials to provide

17 Reiter, Richard (2002) "REICH'S MEETING WITH LULA," *confidential* State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, 2002-11-22 12h01.

> additional information, but stressed that it was unfortunate that others were playing up this issue in the press since USG officials including himself were available to talk whenever GOB officials had concerns about USG actions….Jobim told Gen. Jones that Brazil has great expectations of the Obama Administration, noting that transparency was a very important component of the U.S. relationship with South America. He noted that issues like the Colombia bases become more difficult when the GOB learns of them through the press, but added that Brazil, too, is often surprised by the sensitivities of "Spanish America" regarding issues that would be considered innocuous elsewhere. Gen. Jones encouraged Jobim to call if there were further doubts about U.S. intentions[18].

One cable, briefing Washington officials on the 2010 national elections in Brazil, advised that "the debates will indicate how the two major coalitions, if elected, could address issues of interest to the United States[19], and in early 2010, warned, in a cable full of lightly veiled criticism, that

> With both sides unwilling to promote distinctive alternatives to prevailing economic policy in a pre-election environment, Brazil's two principal rival parties - President Lula's Worker's Party (PT) and front-running presidential candidate Jose Serra's Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) - are increasingly eager to air their differences on foreign policy. Congressional voting and debate over issues such as Colombia-Venezuela, Honduras, and Iran have grown increasingly partisan, with coalition lines enforced. Strongly opinionated individual members, especially those who travel frequently to key countries, have proven more effective than party leaders or relevant committees in shaping the foreign policy debate. In the case of PT, this allows some of their most militant to shape priorities, as seen in PT's new foreign policy platform, tentatively approved in December. PT has addressed its lack of foreign policy outside of Lula by bolstering the credentials of presidential candidate Dilma Rousseff with recent visits to Copenhagen and Germany[20].

Additional developments did not appear to ease US concerns, however. At least in the short term.

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18 https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BRASILIA1113_a.html.
19 Kubiske, Lisa (2009) "BRAZIL'S 2010 ELECTIONS: ONE YEAR OUT," *confidential* State Department Cable, US Embassy Brazil, 10/21/2009 14:21.
20 Kubiske, Lisa (2010) "BRAZIL: FOREIGN POLICY AS AN EMERGING CAMPAIGN ISSUE," *confidential* State Department Cable, US Embassy, 1/8/2010 16:29.

## 3 CONTEMPORARY US PENETRATION OF BRAZIL: CONCLUSIONS

As late as 2006, major scholars of US-Brazilian relations were routinely and inaccurately minimizing the level of US involvement and, especially, US willingness to pursue penetrative policies, while nonetheless exaggerating its power position in Latin America. SOARES DE LIMA and HIRST, for example, argued that "state-to-state political relations between the United States and Brazil primarily aim for prudent coexistence, possible collaboration and minimal collision," insisting that the "the United States moves ahead towards the consolidation of an uncontested power position, [while] Brazil searches for a secure and legitimate economic and political platform in South America" (2006: 33-4). As the hundreds of cables from "Cablegate" have graphically demonstrated, however, the US was (and would continue to be) almost frantic in its efforts to penetrate Brazilian politics, while Brazil's influence with a range of countries openly hostile to the United States was growing proportionally. China was rapidly replacing the US as Brazil's major trading partner, much to the chagrin of the authors of many of the diplomatic cables. Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela were increasingly regarding Brazil as a useful, if not particularly close, ally, and even apparent US "intelligence assets" would only find occasional and marginal information on them to report. And the looming presidency of Dilma Rousseff was regarded as a threat, and this was given high priority in the cables.

It would be a mistake to discount the apparent successes of US penetration at this transformative juncture, and likewise an error to ignore counter explanations of those successes. "Turning" (if that is what it was) Jobim represented a major point for the introduction of US influence at one of the focal points of Brazilian power. Jobim's pressures may have been evident in key outcomes, or non-outcomes, in US-Brazilian military relations. The jet fighter contract, so important to US-Brazilian military links as well as trade relations, was ultimately undermined by awkward efforts at US penetration of the Brazilian foreign and domestic policy process, although the Boeing contract seems to have been a contender during part of Dilma's presidency only because of US

penetration, if the cables are to be believed. Iran ultimately snubbed Brazil in Ahmadinejad's 2012 visit to Latin America after apparent US interference. And even Jobim's quixotic departure from government in 2011 underscored the likelihood that he had, indeed, influenced policy at some point.

The overriding message of the State Department cables as regards Brazil, then, if a single message can be adequately identified, is that the United States by 2008 was struggling, with some success, to reaffirm its penetration of Brazil and Latin America. Even in its most strident concerns, moreover, such as the war on terrorism, the United States policy makers found themselves watching impotently as Lula (with Turkey) "meddled" in UN-Iranian relations, negotiated with Russia, China and India in BRICS, strengthened Brazilian ties with the late Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and with Evo Morales of Bolivia, and generally "flaunted" its political independence from the US, if not the latter's growing impotence in what must now be regarded as the renewed United States penetration of Brazil. As the cables revealed, the ability of the US to stamp its preferences on Brazilian domestic and foreign policy may have lacked a certain penetration, but not for trying.