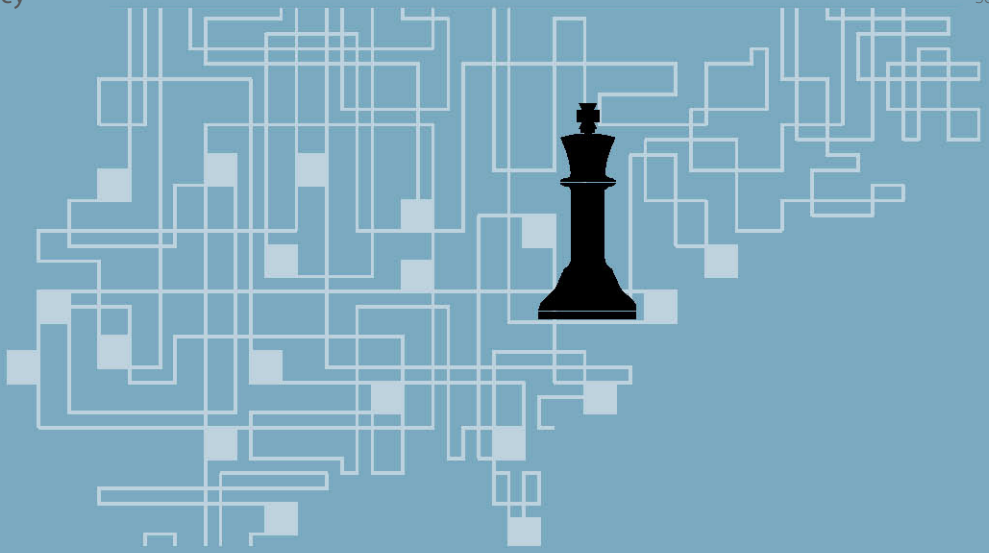


Time for a New Brazil-US Partnership



Walter Russell Mead

Brazil today stands before what could well be the greatest opportunity in its long history. Three factors have come together to create this moment. Two of them are well understood in Brazil and need little commentary from abroad:

First, the dramatic economic development of Brazil, combined with the increasing maturity and capability of Brazilian democracy, has substantially increased Brazil's influence in the region and beyond. Brazil has become an engine of growth, an important source of capital, and a model for many of its neighbors.

Second, Latin America today is divided between countries like Brazil and Chile that seem to have found a relatively stable approach to long-term development and countries still trapped in alternating cycles of ineffective oligarchy and authoritarian populism. Brazil's experience of finding a new and more

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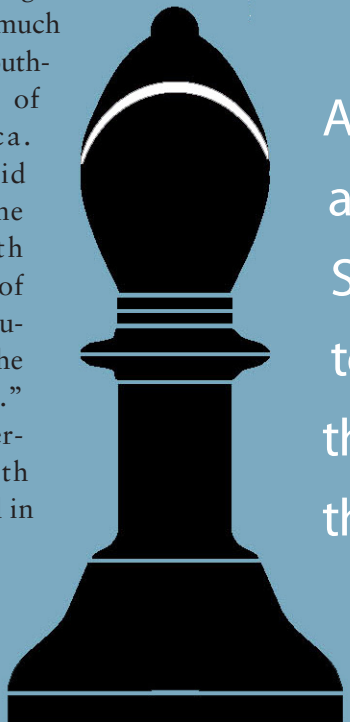
stable development path and avoiding the uncritical adoption of foreign economic and social models, whether manufactured in Washington or elsewhere, offers real hope to citizens in neighboring countries looking to achieve similar success.

The third, less well understood, factor creating a moment of historic opportunity for Brazil stems from changes in the role of the United States in the region. The changes in Washington's hemispheric priorities stem from deep historical forces and are likely to last. From the 1940s until very recently, the US was deeply engaged in the politics not only of the Caribbean and Central American countries close to its territory and to the Panama Canal but also of countries throughout the South American mainland.

Before 1940 it was rare for Washington officials to give much thought to the southern two-thirds of South America. Washington did not at that time consider South America part of what Vladimir Putin would call the "near abroad." Britain and Germany were both more influential in many South American countries than was the United States, and from Washington's perspective, this was not a problem. When Brazil was selected as a permanent member of the Council of the League of Nations (the equivalent of a permanent seat on the UN Security Council today), the US did not perceive this as a challenge to its position in the hemisphere.

Competition — This changed during World War II because the US believed that Axis influence anywhere in the hemisphere could endanger US security. The Cold War saw a dramatic and sustained increase in US interest and concern with the entire hemisphere. Engaged in a global ideological contest with a Soviet communism that, potentially, could find armed allies throughout the world, Washington policy makers in the Cold War believed that the prevention of communist rule in Latin America was an important national interest. They acted accordingly. Some of the policies adopted in these years were farsighted and effective, others less so. However, whether the US was engaged in ventures like the Kennedy-era Alliance for Progress or whether it was supporting military juntas with dismal human rights records, it was more deeply and intimately involved in South America than ever before.

That unusual degree of political interest coincided with an exceptional level of US economic interest and influence. During World War II Germany and Britain had both lost most of their economic power in the region; in the aftermath of the war, US capital quickly



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came to play a dominant role there.

Today, things are changing again. The United States has fewer security interests in South America and, with the rise of Asia, it is once again only one of a number of investors in and trading partners for South American countries.

The United States is, in some ways, very pragmatic. When its vital interests are seriously engaged, it is capable of enormous and sustained engagement. But it does not seek power for power's sake; it does not usually seek influence or predominance in regions or on issues where its core interests are not involved.

Return — With the end of the Cold War the US began to move back toward its traditional bifurcated view of its hemispheric interests. There is a zone of intense concern embracing Mexico, Central America, and the republics of the Caribbean. Beyond this historic focus of American interests, the US seems disposed to return to its historically lower profile in much of South America.

This new approach — or this revival of an older one — can open a new era both in Brazilian foreign policy and in US-Brazilian relations. At a moment when Brazil has a greater capacity to lead, and when there is a greater need than ever before for Brazilian regional leadership, the United States seems ready to take a more benign view of Brazilian power than previously. Managed wisely on both sides, the process of leveraging Brazil's experience and success into a force for regional transformation could bring Washington and Brasilia closer rather than drive them apart. Indeed, managing the bilateral relationship well could enhance Brazil's prospects for playing the kind of regional and global role it has historically sought.

Even farther north, in the Caribbean region of greatest interest to the United States, strong and steady Brazilian leadership can contribute to the economic and social development of the hemisphere in ways that provide the stability that Washington seeks even as authentically regional institutions and approaches replace the current more US-centric models.

This new configuration of forces — a Brazil that is increasingly willing and able to lead facing a United States that has a new openness to a wider Brazilian role — offers the hemisphere an opportunity that is too important to miss. A new and deeper dialog between Brazil and the United States, one that extends well beyond official government channels to include intellectual, political, and social leaders from many walks of life, can help us all explore the new and exciting possibilities opening before us.

