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THE BRAZILIAN FOREIGN POLICY FOR THE GUYANA REGION

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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims to discuss contemporary Brazilian foreign policy for the Guyana region. Suriname, Guyana and French Guiana, inserted in the Transnational Amazon, are the territories that comprise the area in focus. Since the 2000s, South America became the strategic focus of Brazil's foreign policy and projects such as IIRSA and Mercosur are important pillars of this strategy. The Guianas show great potential for exploration of natural resources and its location is strategic as it may represent a rapprochement between the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) through Guyana, the organization's headquarters, and the European Union (EU) through the French Guiana. However, even in this scenario in the Guyana region, the Brazilian approach was timid, standing "backwards" to the South American subcontinent.

KEYWORDS: Brazilian Foreign Policy; Guianas; Amazon

RESUMO:

O presente texto tem como objetivo discutir a política externa brasileira contemporânea para a região das Guianas. Suriname, Guiana e Guiana Francesa são os territórios que compõem a região em foco e estão inseridos dentro da Amazônia Transnacional. A América do Sul desde os anos 2000 passou a ser foco estratégico da política externa do Brasil e o projetos como a IIRSA e o Mercosul pilares importantes dessa estratégia. As Guianas apresentam grande potencial de exploração de recursos naturais e sua localização é estratégica uma vez que pode representar a aproximação entre o Mercosul com a Comunidade do Caribe (CARICOM) através da Guiana, sede da organização, e a União Europeia por meio da Guiana Francesa. Entretanto, mesmo diante desse cenário na região das Guianas a aproximação brasileira foi tímida, seguindo "de costas" para a o subcontinente sul-americano.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Política Externa Brasileira; Guianas; Amazônia;

BRAZIL AND SOUTH AMERICA

Brazil's role in the sub-regional context, in general, is of great relevance. Some data naturally attributed that role: it is the largest country in South America; holds most of the world's biodiversity reserve, the Transnational Amazon (67.9%)[1]; borders almost all South American countries; its population amounts to almost half of the subcontinent's population (49%)[2]; its GDP means more than half of the region's GDP (56%)[3].

In the last two decades - more specifically, the period of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) and Luis Inacio Lula da Silva (2003-2010) governments - the geographical area was more prominent in Brazilian foreign policy. The I Meeting of Presidents of South America in Brasilia, in 2000, promoted by the Brazilian Foreign Ministry still in Cardoso's government, represented the beginning of a new relationship of the country with the subcontinent and set a milestone in South American regional relations by launching major projects such as IIRSA.

Brazil's foreign policy strategies in the governments of Lula da Silva (Lula) and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) had differences and continuities. FHC, as a follow up to its predecessors Fernando Collor de Mello and Itamar Franco, sought dialogue with the world, with international organizations (UN, WTO), with regional initiatives (MERCOSUR) and hemispheric initiatives (FTAA) in a strategy called "autonomy by integration" (VIGEVANI & OLIVEIRA, 2004;.34).

Lula, in turn, had a strategy of "autonomy through diversification", which contributed to a greater international balance, seeking to mitigate the unilateralism of the world post September 11. Also, strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations in order to increase the weight of the country in political and economic international negotiations; thicken diplomatic relations in order to take advantage of the possibilities for greater economic, financial, technological and cultural exchanges; and avoid agreements that could compromise long-term development.

This Brazilian agenda, which aimed to strengthen the regionalization of South America, featured some elements that favored the approach of the countries. For example, after a decade of neoliberal governments, the countries were taken by a wave of leftist governments in the region - which suggests an attitude of skepticism regarding liberal globalization that reproduced the inequalities between North and South.

[1] ACTO

[2] Own calculations based on data available at IMF

[3] Calculations based on GDP data, available at IMF, World Economic Outlook Database, April 08. Cláudio R. Frischtak, 2008. Retrieved from: http://www.interb.com.br/node/22

Furthermore, the convergence of thoughts between the leaders of the region regarding the formulation of the integration project, not limited to "economic and trade issues, expanding its scope to political, social and security aspects; greater consolidation of the idea of South America in the foreign policy of countries of the subcontinent which brings a greater political, economical and security unit then the idea of Latin America" (CERVO, 2008;163), are important factors in strengthening the South American regionalization.

This dynamic of Brazilian foreign policy sought to promote the consolidation of the subcontinent as a transnational political entity with minimum unit and institutional framework based on common principles and macro objectives in international relations (COSTA, 2009).

However, the construction of South America as a Brazilian strategic project in the first decade of this century faced fragmentations of the subcontinent that compromised the development of the project. For Amado Cervo:

> If there is a South American politics, made mostly of leftist governments that have created a favorable environment for strengthening the pole of power, there are two economic South Americas, a liberal and primary, which seeks free trade agreement with the United States, other industrial and developmental, that turns to the deepening integration between neighbors (CERVO, 2008;203).

We can add in the description of the fragmentation proposed by Cervo yet another part of South America remains "backwards" to the rest of the subcontinent: the Guyana region.

THE GUYANA REGION

The Guyana region comprises the territories of Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. Characterized by multiple and distinct identity of most part of South America from the Iberian colonization, since England and the Netherlands were the colonial powers up to the decades of 1960-70 and France still remains with its department, today the region is characterized socio-culturally by an Amazon-Caribbean identity. Below we highlight some features of this border region with the extreme northern part of Brazil.

French Guiana (FG) is one of the French Overseas Departments (*France d'Outre-Mer*) which has a whole area of approximately 84,000 square km located within the Transnational Amazon and has a low population density (2 people per square km in 2011). Its region-department status means that in the political administration of French Guiana there are a Regional Council (*Conseil Régional de la Guyane - Région)* and a Gen-

eral Council (*Conseil Général de la Guyane – département)* that give a limited autonomy relatively to the relation between the Department with the countries of the region.

French Guiana has a peculiar situation in many aspects. As French Department, it is part of the European Union. However, with all of its territory in the Amazon region and with a population concentrated on its Atlantic coast, FG closely approximates to a Caribbean territory, as well as Guyana and Suriname.

Given this scenario, the regional identity of FG remains poorly defined and, consequently, its relationship with South America becomes indefinite as well. Stéphane Ganger notes that:

> In fact, for a long time French Guiana turned its back, for historical and cultural reasons, to the rest of the South American continent, which also marginalized for still being a European territory. However, today, this same European situation makes it attractive to other countries in the region: the political and economic authorities are discovering the possibilities of this amazing situation in the middle of the European Union, the CARICOM, and MERCOSUR. (GANGER, 2008;.1).

Another feature of FG is its status as outermost region (PORTO, 2010) which, in general, has lower development indexes then its metropolis and is a low-density territory such as the Azores and Madeira islands, which belong to Portugal, and the Canary Islands as to Spain.

The outermost condition of FG and its distance from the center of political decisions does not mean less state presence. On the contrary, there is a strong influence of metropolitan France in the Department, stimulating economic and political dependence to central power and the European Union, which means the presence of an external power within the Transnational Amazon. This presence has direct consequences upon the relationship between the countries of the region, especially with regard to the South American integration process. The exclusion of French Guiana in subcontinent agreements such as UNASUR and the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) illustrate the relationship between the French Department and the subcontinent.

Suriname is the youngest independent country in South America. With 100% of its territory located in transnational Amazon and with an area of 163,000 square kilometers, the population of 529,000 inhabitants[4] of Suriname is concentrated in the coastal region and consists of a mosaic of ethnic groups who migrated at different times of the Surinamese contemporary history.

[4] Source: http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Suriname

Located between the French Guiana (west), Guyana (east) and Brazil (south), Suriname has a low interconnectivity with its neighbors. In Brazil, there is no land connection, and with Guyana and French Guiana the connections are precarious and crossings the river borders are still made by ferries.

Suriname's economy was dominated by the mineral and energy sector (gold, oil, and alumina), which represents about 30% of the GDP. Agriculture and manufacturing, though small, remain important sectors. In the service sector, 45% of the GDP is mainly driven by trade and transport activities, while personal services, transport and communication are sectors that have grown faster. The informal sector is also significant and may increase the current GDP estimates up to 16%, according to the World Bank[5] data.

Suriname's political life since its independence in 1975 has been turbulent. Due to military coups and a civil war from 1986 to 1994, the political instability and economic weakness generated a migration of Surinamese people to neighboring countries, especially to the French Department, and an escape of qualified professionals to the former Dutch metropolis (JUBITHANA- FERNAND, 2009).

Still in the wake of the migration issue, another important factor, regarding integration and security in Suriname, is the migratory flow that addresses to the areas of abundant gold-bearing resources. As in French Guiana, mining is the destination of thousands of people in search of enrichment by gold-digging and surrounding activities, such as trade, machinery, fuel, weapons, drugs, and prostitution. Also resembling the case of the French department, the group composition bound for mining is, basically, Brazilians (VISENTINI, 2010).

The Cooperative Republic of Guyana, in turn, henceforth only Guyana, is the third smallest country in South America and the third poorest in Latin America and in the Caribbean. With its territory 100% located in the Amazon region[6], it has the highest per capita forest coverage ratio in the world: 80% of the country is covered by forests, while 10% is a narrow coastal plain where 90% of the population lives[7]. Their environmental potential is explored, among other ways, through the forest as a carbon sink that can generate a new source of revenue for the country.

Influenced by developmental theories that were present in the development models in Latin America, Guyana sought its post-independence path in the 1960s through the

[5] Likewise.

[6] "Geo-Amazonia. Perspectivas del Medio Ambiente en la Amazonia"; PNUD, Ciudad de Panamá, 2008. Available in digital version, retrieved from: http://www.pnuma.org. P. 41

[7] World Bank, retrieved from: http://data.worldbank.org/

substitution of imports and strong state presence in the economy. The 1980s crisis that affected the Latin American development model hit the country, which only recovered in the following decade (VISENTINI, 2010; BYNOE, 2009; BRISTOL, 2009).

In 2012, the Guyanese economy grew 3.7%, with growth prospects for the near future due to increased activity in the production of rice and gold, as well as the improvement in the manufacturing sector. According to the World Bank[8], these projections are supported by the implementation of large infrastructure projects in mining and agriculture, as well as trade agreements with Venezuela.

Regarding cultural and ethnological characteristics, heterogeneity is a defining element of Guyana. Its population of approximately 800,000 inhabitants is divided into Indians, Afro-Guyanese, mixed races, and Amerindians, a composition that influences politics and the economy of the country. The religions present in the country are Christian, Hindu, Muslim and others. As the only English speaking country in South America, Guyana is more geared to the Caribbean than to the sub-region to which it geographically belongs.

The Brazilian community within the heterogeneous and fragmented Guyanese society is expanding. Brazilian migratory waves towards Suriname and French Guiana mines in recent decades also reached Guyana. For marginalized sectors of the country (Indians, local miners and peasants), this migratory flow is uncomfortable (LIMA, 2011).

With border disputes with its neighbors from east and west, since its independence, Guyana is exercising a foreign policy that seeks to resolve impasses through bilateral agreements and international organizations. Contentious with Suriname, regarding the region called the *New River* Triangle on part of the Caribbean Sea and Venezuela in the Essequibo region contested by Caracas are important variables in the design of the Guyanese foreign policy.

BRAZIL AND THE GUYANAS

The territories that make up the Guyanas were not present in the Brazilian foreign policy agenda in a structural way. However, the launch of the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South-America (IIRSA) marks a new look of Brazil's foreign policy in the subcontinent, including the Guyana region. From its launch in 2000, the possibility of greater connectivity and consequently greater integration with the Guyanas is envisioned by the Guyana Shield, one of the Integration and Development Axes

[8] Source: http://data.worldbank.org/country/guyana

(EID), where several projects between Brazil and the extreme northern part of South America are designed and supposedly mark a new phase of Brazil with those territories.

There is a great potential in the area of strategic natural resources still unexplored, but the lack of interconnectivity restricts the development of exploration activities and, thus, IIRSA projects have sought to focus on solving this sectors bottleneck. However, despite the potential for exploration and the IIRSA projects, integration in the region little evolved since 2000, since most of the projects within the Guyana Shield Hub failed to materialize.

French Guiana, as a European territory, was excluded from the direct leading of the projects. However, the area of influence of the projects reaches the French department by Brazil and Suriname and integration initiatives are financially supported by the European Economic Community, and the French state in French Guiana[9].

Among the projects involving French Guiana that most stands out is the International Bridge linking the Brazilian city of Oyapock with the French city of Saint-Georges-de-l'Oyapock. The expectation with the bridge is the formation of an Atlantic Pan American highway mesh, interconnecting Brazil with France and MERCOSUR with the European Union.

However, the difficulties of two regions isolated of their political centers and low decision-making autonomy in foreign policy issues prevail in the relationship between the extreme north of Brazil, specifically the state of Amapá and French Guiana. Completed in 2011, but not operating up until today, the Binational Bridge symbolizes the lack of a strategic look of Brasilia and Paris for these territories.

Suriname has some of its borders with Brazil, but shows no connectivity by land transport with Brazilian lands. The "continentalization" or "south-americanization", from IIRSA perspective of regional integration, should go through the interconnectivity of Suriname with its geographical area, according to the focus of the projects. Connecting roads between Venezuela-Guyana-French Guiana, the bridge construction over the Courantyne River (Guyana and Suriname) and the pipeline Venezuela-Guyana-Suriname are part of the portfolio of projects in Suriname. Even without a direct interconnection project with Brazil, a better exploration of Surinamese mineral wealth with these projects could benefit Brazilian companies in the construction and mining industry.

[9]Among these projects financed by France, we point out the PO, the Amazonie and INTERG. The first is the result of a collaborative work led by French Guiana authorities and partner countries (Suriname, Brazilian states of Pará, Amapá and Amazonas. The second provides funding for interregional cooperation across Europe, which includes French Guiana. It has implemented under the European Community's territorial co-operation objective and financed through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

However, an analysis of the Consensual Implementation Agenda, 2005-2010, of the projects that make up Group 3 in Suriname shows that none of them left the planning or pre-execution and only the Apura-NieuwNickerie road is running. Despite the strategic importance for a more effective integration of Suriname to its geographical surroundings, the country's isolation remains as a predominant feature and the Brazilian proactivity existent in other IIRSA Axis as in Bolivia and Peru (CORREA, 2014) does not characterize the Suriname-Brazil relationship.

With Guyana, Brazil sought to integrate from projects involving the Brazilian states of Amazonas and Roraima. These Projects drove the development of connectivity between Venezuela, Guyana and Suriname. However, out of the 15 projects that make up the three groups that are within Guyana, only the bridge over the Takutu River and Linden-Georgetown roads are performed or in progress[10].

The bridge over the Takutu River is not a project that originated with the launch of IIRSA, since discussions about a link between Guyana and Brazil date back to the 1990s. In 2003, the Agreement on International Road Transport of Passengers and Cargo was celebrated during the meeting of the Presidents of Brazil and Guyana, Lula and Jagdeo, a rare meeting in the history of Brazilian foreign policy and in 2009 the bridge was completed.

The bridge brought a lot of expectations for the region not only because it represents an important link between Guyana and Brazil, but also for generating dynamic expectations of the development of the poorest countries in South America, Guyana, and the Brazilian state in a homonymous economic situation, Roraima. However, the short life story of the link between these territories still do not show substantial impact. Fears of a spread of transnational threats (illegal miners, drugs, and illegal logging) proved to be present with the opening of the bridge (GEHRE & GOMES, 2013), but do not point to a stronger politicization of these issues.

According to the reports of IIRSA (2013), projects with Venezuela and Suriname have had no major evolution in recent years and the reasons for this may be the lack of priority of the countries involved or also disputes that Guyana has with its neighbors.

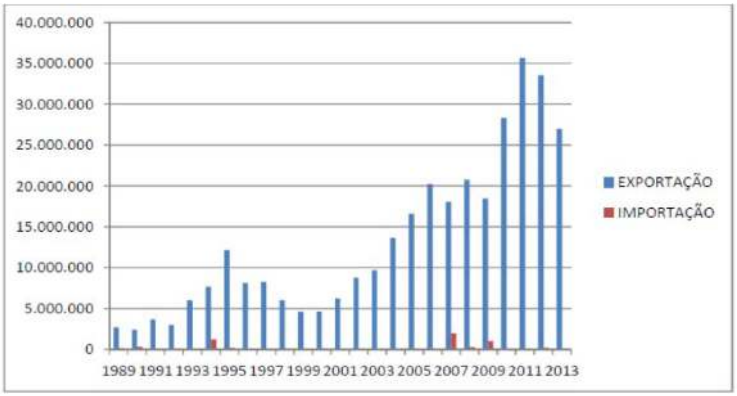
Data from trade are not very significant in approximating Brazil and the region in focus. The academic work of Shirlei Debastiani Cortez (2014) highlights the balance of trade between Brazil and the Guyana region from data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs / Department of Trade and Investment Promotion / Business Intelligence Division. The history demonstrates that the period of Lula's government had an increase of trade

[10] Source: IIRSA, Cartera de Proyetos 2013. (2013, November 09). Retrieved from: http://www.iirsa.org/admin_iirsa_web/Uploads/Documents/cnr23_cartera_2013.pdf.

relations between Brazil and the discussed territories, with the prevalence of exports from Brazil regarding imports. Despite the increase in the trading relationship in the last decade, Suriname, Guyana and French Guiana represent the three smallest Brazilian trading partners in South America and the values of business transactions are of little significance in general.

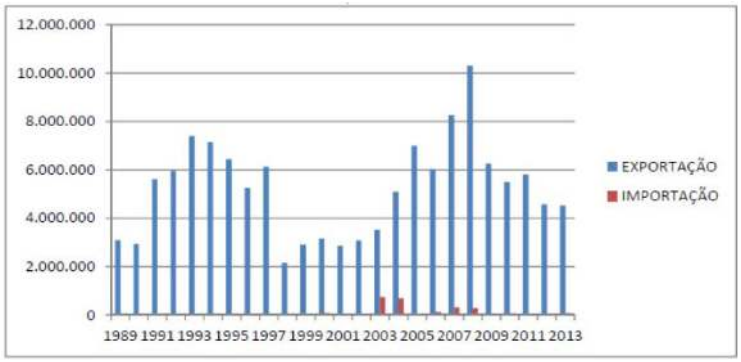
In the balance of trade chart between Brazil and Suriname, it can be noticed a greater Brazilian import in the 1980s. This can be explained by the approach of Brazil still in the military period when General Danilo Venturini went to Suriname to contain the country approach with Cuba, providing support to Suriname through civil and military assistance programs, seeking to persuade the Bouterse regime to abandon its approach to Cuba and stays true to the west. This approach made the Brazilian Embassy in Paramaribo gain some strength and reverberate in the relations between both countries.

Graph 1 - Balance of Trade Brazil x Guyana (US$ millions)



Source: Adapted from MDIC11 (2013) in Cortez (2014; 21)

Graph 2 - Balance of Trade Brazil x French Guiana (US$ millions)

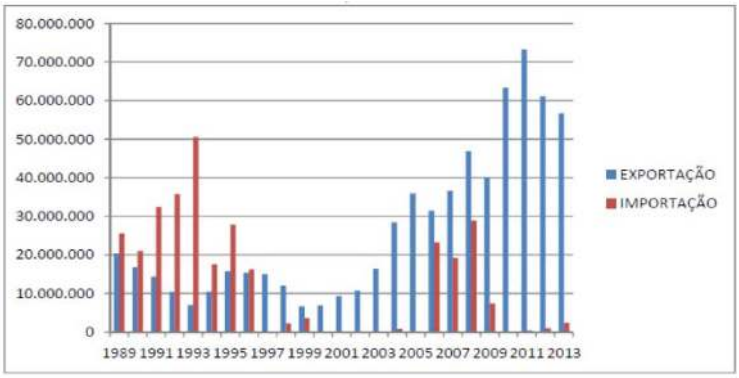


Source: Adapted from MDIC12 (2013) in Cortez (2014; 22)

[11] MDIC stands for the Brazilian Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade, as the acronym in Portuguese.

[12] Likewise.

Graph 3 - Balance of Trade Brazil x Suriname (US$ millions)



Source: Adapted from MDIC13 (2013) in Cortez (2014; 24).

CONCLUSIONS

Brazil's participation in the regional integration process in South America was politically and economically active in the last two decades. The Amazon countries gained prominence in Brazil's foreign policy strategy and Brazilian actors were present in this process, however unevenly when we think of the entire Transnational Amazonian territory.

In face of the construction of a South America as a transnational political entity, the Guyana regions represent "another South America", different from the la Plata Basin MERCOSUR and the Andean region. Vizentini points out that, in this context, the region is "a challenge to Brazil's foreign policy and a kind of 'new frontier' of the South American integration process" (2010; 27), a border with the European Union via French Guiana, and a border with the Caribbean and Suriname via Guyana, headquarters of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

However, the relationship between Brazil and the Caribbean Amazon is marked by the absence of government, but not from Brazilian groups. Migration, mining, arms trafficking and drugs are some elements that are marked by unlawful questions and approach Brazil from French Guiana, Suriname and Guyana.

With the French Overseas Department, the opportunities and potentials sometimes flared-up the governments of both countries, more specifically the territories involved rather than the capital cities. The peripheral-strategic condition of French Guiana and the Brazilian state that borders this territory, Amapá, could create elements that would facilitate the development of integration projects. However, the lack of greater engage-

[13] Likewise.

ment from Brasilia and Paris and the low autonomy of the territories to develop their own integration policies show that the limits are more intense than the possibilities.

The migration of Brazilians in French Guiana and, consequently, the massive Brazilian community in the territory, which represents 10 to 20 percent of the French Department population, is the most intense relationship of FG with Brazil. However, this flow is perceived as migratory pressure, creating a politicization of the theme and extraordinary measures that go against integration by intensifying the relationship between "us" and "them". The cooperation between Brazil and French Guiana intensified with migration control and the illegal miners. This last group consists mainly of Brazilians and it is, according to the French population, the main obstacle in the advancement of cross-border cooperation.

The Brazilian community is also a group present in Suriname and Guyana, as well as Brazilian miners. In Suriname, the association made by Surinamese to Brazilians is directly connected to gold mining, criminality in the mining areas and sex. This perception has fueled a threatening speech in relation to Brazilians and recently generated violent clashes.

In Guyana, in turn, the presence of the Brazilian community is also significant and linked mainly to mining. With little attachment for seasonal migration, there is a low integration of Brazilians in the country. However, unlike what is found in French Guiana and Suriname, there is no evidence of politicization of Brazilians in Guyana.

Before the existing border disputes in the Guyana Plateau (French Guiana / Suriname; Guyana / Suriname; Guyana / Venezuela), that in case of conflict would affect both Brazil and the further integration of the subcontinent, there is no direct involvement of Brazil in the period under study. The recent history of these disputes does not record armed conflicts, but there were episodes treated by outsiders and without greater Brazilian participation.

Finally, we understand that although there is a bilateral engagement between Brazil and the Guyana region by conducting basic agreements, memorandums of understanding, and cooperation agreements, the region was not in the Foreign Ministry's list of priorities, even though these countries were considered part of a strategic area for Brazil's foreign policy. The approximation of the Guyanas with Brazil and its integration with the subcontinent are still marked by the illegalities and migration – sometimes politicized and securitized – and not for integration projects.

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