



Project: America in the World: the US foreign policy and the Brazilian view on the bilateral agenda

Background Paper #1 - Multilateralism and International Organizations

JULY/2022



Background Paper #1

Multilateralism and International Organizations¹

Henrique Rzezinski, Trustee at CEBRI

Fernanda Magnotta, Senior Fellow at CEBRI

Since the end of the Second World War, the American vision and praxis in relation to multilateralism has oscillated, in general, from pro-globalism and free trade with the Republicans in power, to pro-protectionism with the Democrats. Brazil, with some exceptions, has had a position very favorable to multilateralism, but not very favorable to free trade.

The arrival of Donald Trump to the White House in the United States in 2017 led the country to a series of revisions in the field of foreign affairs. Guided by the idea of "make America great again," that administration has taken anti-globalist and protectionist positions, flags that, until then, were characteristically Democrat.

During his four years in office, Trump established what some have referred to as the "withdrawal doctrine" (HAASS, 2020)ⁱ, as it proposed a broad review of international commitments made by the United States, in addition to systematic criticism of existing multilateral structures.

As the sponsor of the new post-1945 global governance, the United States erected and reaffirmed, over decades, a system of global governance that strengthened the liberal order and the growth of the world economy. This has remained relatively stable during administrations of varying profiles: progressive and conservative, pro-engagement and pro-disengagement of international interventions. Behind this was always the belief that the ability to determine the "rules of the game" would be governed by competitive, economic and military advantage when it came to defending the geostrategic interests of developed countries.

Paradoxically, the Trump administration has been marked by a 180-degree turn with respect to traditional Republican positions. Trump has come to question the effectiveness of institutions such as the UN and its acting arms. He has also become critical of groups of allies (especially the G7 and

¹ Contribuíram com a pesquisa e desenvolvimento desse material também os voluntários do CEBRI Ana Carolina Rondino e Ettore Senatore



G20) and has proposed renegotiating important free trade agreements such as the TPP and NAFTA, as well as reviewing NATO funding and environmental negotiations. In short, in the words of David Whinerary (2020, p. 2)ⁱⁱ, “since 2017, U.S. foreign policy has become more nationalist, with greater emphasis on sovereignty and reduced focus on alliances”.

In the case of the United Nations, specifically, the United States not only stopped providing some of its usual political support, strongly questioning the effectiveness of the organization in its actions for international peace, but also started advocating for proportional increases in the contributions of European countries and China and budget reductions in its own participation, in a more equitable way.

Moreover, it is worth remembering that during this administration, the country announced its withdrawal from the Human Rights Council because it disagreed with the criteria for choosing the countries eligible for this Council and even officially notified the UN Secretary-General of its intention to withdraw from the WHO as well. This announcement was made at a time of record increases in worldwide cases of COVID-19ⁱⁱⁱ, and amid accusations that the WHO was complicit with China in neglecting containment measures and transparent information about what was going on.

It is also interesting to note the Trump administration's orientation toward NATO. Although the United States was a major founding member of the military alliance in 1949, in recent years the organization has been the subject of numerous charges and criticisms from Trump about the imbalance in contributions between the United States and European countries. The Trump administration has reduced the U.S. share of NATO's operating budget from 22% to 16% and pressured European allies to make good on their commitments to reach 2 percent of their GDP for defense spending. As a result, NATO allies raised the payment to a total of \$41 billion, which is a 9% increase over 2016-2018 levels, the largest increase in 25 years^{iv}.

In the wake of events involving multilateralism and international organizations in this period it is also important to remember the fact that the United States announced, during the Trump administration, the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, citing mainly the need for increased Chinese commitments.

Finally, it is worth reiterating that during the Trump administration there has been a significant intensification of U.S. trade protectionism, with a focus on China. In the specific case of this bilateral crisis, between July and August 2018 alone, the two countries imposed more than \$50 billion in tariffs on each other's products. In September of that same year, the United States set a 10% tariff on \$200

billion worth of Chinese products and, in May 2019, a 25% tariff on another \$200 billion worth of products of this same origin. China responded to these measures by imposing a 10% tariff on US products worth \$60 billion, and in June 2019, it imposed a 25% tariff on US products worth US \$60 billion^v. It is worth noting that these threats had already been occurring in previous administrations, mainly due to the exchange rate issue and the alleged WTO-banned subsidies for Chinese products.

In summary, it is not an exaggeration to say that the policies and actions of the Trump administration have substantially modified the international prominence of the United States and impacted the North American role in multilateral organizations, at the same time that, in the political field, it positioned itself against the Nuclear Agreement with Iran and modified the political balance in the Middle East following the Abraham Accords

Once elected as Trump's successor, Joe Biden proposed, as a priority, to work to change the country's role in the global arena. Guided by the discourse of rapprochement with traditional allies and the rescue of multilateralism, Biden faced, in his first two years, major problems, given the very division in the Democratic Party and the polarization in the country.

He was also severely criticized after the botched withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. On the other hand, Biden led the application of sanctions against Moscow, mobilized troops in allied NATO member countries, and approved, in a bipartisan way, the sending of resources to Ukraine. It leaves up in the air, however, the still unpredictable consequences of the increasing isolationism decreed to the Russians.

PERGUNTAS MOTIVADORAS PARA O WEBINAR:

- Are there signs that the United States is interested and able to act as paymasters of the multilateral international system, leading the reform of existing organizations in order to accommodate potential destabilizing actors?
- In view of these important transformations in the international scenario, in such a short period of time, what would be the priority topics of the theme "Multilateralism and International Organizations", to be worked on in the BR/US Bilateral Agenda?



- Faced with the progressive deterioration of the effectiveness of the role of multilateral institutions, especially the UN and the WTO, deeply aggravated by the war in Ukraine, how can Brazil and the United States make a positive contribution to the debate on the issue?
- In bilateral relations, what are the agendas that favor coordinated action and minimize the impacts of divergent agendas when the subject is multilateralism?
- In the context of the resumption of discussions about NATO's role in this century, what can be projected for the future of this military alliance and its ramification in the BR/USA relationship? How does the fact that Brazil has become a 'major non-NATO ally' in 2019 change the relationship with the US and NATO?
- How can Brazil be a relevant interlocutor to achieve a ceasefire in Ukraine within this BR/USA bilateral agenda?
- What could be a joint BR/USA strategy to reduce protectionism in world agriculture and strengthen the WTO?
- What are the impacts of the election of Lula or Bolsonaro on the BR/US Agenda on the referred theme?

i HAASS, Richard N. Trump's foreign policy doctrine? The Withdrawal Doctrine, 27/05/2020. Disponível em: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/05/27/trumps-foreign-policy-doctrine-withdrawal-doctrine/>. Acesso em: 30/06/22.

ii WHINERAY, David, 2020. The United States' Current and Future Relationships with the United Nations, (New York: United Nations University). Disponível em: https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:7591/UNU_US_Relations_Whineray.pdf. Acesso em: 30/06/22.

iii GOSTIN, Lawrence. Harold Hong Koh, Michelle Williams, Margaret A. Hamburg, et.al., 2020. U.S. Withdrawal from WHO is unlawful and Threatens Global and U.S. Health and Security. Disponível em: <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2820%2931527-0>.

iv NATO Relationships Spans 70 Years. U.S. Defense News Partnership, 2019. U.S. Disponível em: <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1741621/us-nato-relationship-spans-70-years/>.

v A Quick Guide to the U.S.-China Trade War. BBC Report, 2020. Disponível em: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-45899310>.