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## Brazil's rejection of sanctions against Iran: US-Brazilian relations in context

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Hilary Clinton's failure to get Brazil to sign on to US-backed sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme was to be expected: throughout his presidency, Lula has adopted a conciliatory approach to foreign policy. He has maintained good relations with various antagonists of the US, including Cuba and Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. But the event also shows the contradictory nature of Washington's relationship with Brazil and raises questions about its foreign policy direction after Lula's departure at the end of the year.

On one hand, Washington's request highlights its expectations that Brazil follow the US lead on global matters. And indeed, for much of the past half-century Brazilian foreign policy has done so, especially during the Cold War when it placed itself firmly within the American orbit. Indeed, the US was among the first countries to recognise the anti-communist military regime that overthrew the government of João Goulart in 1964 and turned a blind eye to many of the human rights abuses that followed, reaching a peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

On the other hand, since the end of the Cold War Brazil has adopted an increasingly multilateral and independent line. Under both the George W Bush and Barack Obama presidencies there have been signs that the [US is happy for Brazil to play a greater role, especially at the regional role](#). This is reflected in Brazil's leading role in the continent-wide Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) through which it helped defuse the Bolivian coup crisis in 2008. Similarly, the US has been happy for Brazil to lead the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti since the mid-2000s and has been notably silent over the current Falkland Islands/Malvinas dispute – at a time when Lula has been actively speaking on behalf of Argentina.

However, Brazil's more robust international engagement has also causes headaches for the US. Under Lula's predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002), Brazil was at the forefront against the developed world's use of agricultural subsidies in the current Doha trade round and was active in challenging the global (or arguably American) patents regime by allowing local production of retroviral drugs for HIV/AIDS sufferers.

The question is whether Brazil-US relations will change significantly next year, when Lula's successor is installed in Brasília. If Lula's preferred candidate, Dilma Rouseff is elected, more of the same should be expected. If her challenger, who is likely to be São Paulo state governor José Serra, wins the situation may be less certain. As health minister it was Serra who presided over the controversial retroviral drugs policy. At the same time though, he was critical of the Iranian president's visit to Brazil last November. In this respect he echoed [Cardoso, who saw the visit as 'rhetorical'](#), since Brazil has little influence in the Middle East. Consequently, could a change of leadership therefore herald a change in Brazil's foreign policy generally and specifically on Iran?

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