

COUNCIL *on* FOREIGN RELATIONS

[Home](#) > [Brazil](#) > Making Room For Brazil's Growing Clout

Interview

Making Room for Brazil's Growing Clout

Interviewee: David Rothkopf, Visiting Scholar, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Interviewer: [Aimee Rawlins](#), Production Editor

July 12, 2011

With its growing economy--now the world's eighth largest--and vast resources, Brazil has become a major global power, along with India and other emerging economies. Yet it still is not viewed by the United States as a "global player with a global agenda," says [David Rothkopf](#), member of a new [CFR Task Force on Brazil](#), who points out Brazil's leadership in energy efficiency, climate change policy, and resource management. Rothkopf strongly supports ending U.S. tariffs on Brazilian ethanol, which is produced more efficiently than U.S. ethanol, and he advocates Brazil's inclusion as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Brazil has the capacity to move international institutions from being "developed-world centric," Rothkopf says, and emphasizes that the United States needs to abandon the view that if countries "don't follow [our] worldview, they don't deserve to be in the first tier of international nations."

How do you see Dilma Rousseff's presidency changing Brazil's approach to foreign policy and how will it impact the relationship between the United States and Brazil?

The most important dimension of Rousseff's foreign policy is building on what [former president Lula da Silva] built. Brazil is pursuing an independent role internationally. It is building stature based on economic growth and on its unique resources, and it is continuing to play a role as one of the leading nations of the world. It's not just a hemispheric player anymore; it's truly a global player. I foresee Rousseff further strengthening relationships in the emerging world and with the United States and Europe.

The CFR's Task Force Report makes references to Brazil being a "bridge" between the developing and the developed world. Are there specific policy actions Rousseff will take or certain countries she'll work to forge stronger ties with?

As a global player, one is necessarily engaged with a wide range of countries and on a wide range of issues internationally. Brazil is clearly a world leader in agriculture, and we'll see Brazil playing a leading role there. Brazil is a leading global economy, on its way from being the eighth largest economy to being the fifth in the next few years. It's clearly going to play a leading role in the G20 on international economic issues. It's leading among the emerging countries of the world, so it's going to play a leading role in the BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa]. It also has a role to play in shaping a more diverse international establishment, ensuring that emerging countries have a role, whether it's in international financial institutions or the UN, trying to move from being very developed-world centric to both developed- and developing-world centric. The distinction on how we might have viewed Brazil in the past--which is as a hemispheric player with a limited agenda--and how we need to view Brazil now--which is a global player with a global agenda--is really the critical distinction, rather than focusing on one particular area.

The report was ambiguous about Brazil's role in South America, saying that there is regional interdependence, but also that some South American actors were skeptical of Brazil's intentions. How will the country balance these sometimes diverging priorities?

Nobody asks how the United States is going to balance those priorities or how Asian countries will balance those priorities. Brazil is going to balance priorities in Brazil's interest. The reality is that there is no country in Latin America comparable to

Brazil. There is no other country that has the same kind of global stature, the same kind of global relevance. Naturally, because of that there are historic rivalries with some neighbors, and some countries that wish they were in this position, but they are not.

Brazil is heavily reliant on hydropower, but has limited chances to develop new sites for it. What are other energy opportunities?

Brazil has a huge dependency on hydropower and is blazing new trails on how to efficiently use hydropower. This is a frontier that Brazil was the world leader of for most of the past three decades. The [\[Tupi deepwater discovery\]](#) of offshore [oil] reserves, hydrocarbons, and gas, is obviously the game changer because, should they be of the size that people think they are, Brazil is going to become a major global actor on the energy stage, a major global energy provider in terms of petroleum and gas. That's going to give Brazil even more clout, and it's going to be an area where there's a great deal of opportunity for cooperation and participation of international companies across Brazil's resource markets, whether agricultural, mining, metals, or energy.

One of the things that we in the United States need to come to grips with is either we view these major emerging powers as independent actors who are peers and going to be treated in that respect--or we continue to hold on to old patronizing views.

The report notes that Brazil's existing infrastructure isn't able to match the rapid demands on energy and resources. What steps can Brazil take to keep up with these demands?

Brazil can attract investment, which it's doing. It's attracting so much investment that its currency is now a bit overvalued and there's some concern that it's overheating. But the reality is that foreign capital will help to solve these problems, growth will help solve these problems, and judicious husbanding of resources will help solve these problems. It's a developing country, and naturally one of the definitions of being a developing country is that you have less infrastructure than you need and you work to fill the gap.

The report recommends the end of U.S. tariffs on Brazilian ethanol. Under what circumstances could this happen? And how would ending tariffs impact Brazil's ethanol industry?

The United States should have ended the tariffs on Brazilian ethanol years ago. The United States doesn't produce ethanol as efficiently as Brazil. Brazil, through use of energy [from sugar] cane, is able to produce a sort of biofuel eight times more efficiently than American corn producers, for example. And if you can produce it efficiently, you can produce it more cost-efficiently; you can produce it with less of a carbon footprint. All these things mean it's in the interest of the United States to import Brazilian ethanol to help meet our goals and diversify our supply of energy from around the world. It diversifies our international energy risk exposure, and that's a healthy thing. The conditions are changing in the U.S. Congress where it seems that for the first time, realistically, there is a growing bipartisan consensus that this will happen soon.

How will Brazil move forward in negotiations on climate change?

No country in the world did more to reduce carbon emissions last year than Brazil. Brazil maintains this enormous carbon sink, which is the Amazon rainforest. It preserves the natural resources that it has, which is a positive thing.

Is it in a role to inspire other countries to do the same?

A lot of countries in Latin America and the emerging world view climate change as being a developed-world problem because they are the big emitters. But Brazil is in a position where it could bridge both worlds. It's growing in terms of its industrialization and emissions, and thus shares a whole host of responsibilities and challenges with the developed world. At the same time, among developing countries it's been a leader in protecting its resources in terms of developing alternative energy, notably biofuels and hydropower. It's got a much cleaner energy mix than almost any other country in the world; among major players it's certainly the cleanest energy mix. So it has a particular combination of things that would make it a leader, even if it weren't one of the world's biggest economies.

Brazil has been pushing for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. What effect would this have on the council's dynamics, and what kind of a player would Brazil be?

The UN Security Council is supposed to represent in its permanent membership the largest nations, the ones critical to all

decisions--and who by participating in the Security Council bring to bear great resources and influence over the other countries. It's a very special status that, by definition, only a handful of countries can have. The current permanent structure reflects the power structure at the end of World War II. That was sixty years ago, and it's time for a change. The power structure of the world now is such that several major countries that need to be in this mix aren't. There is fairly well-developed consensus that those countries are India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan.

Brazil deserves to be there based on the size of its population and the size of its economy, and not based on whether or not the United States or any other country feels that it will go along with them every time.

Would Brazil be an advocate for emerging economies and developing countries in the context of the Council?

Brazil will pursue Brazil's national interest, just like any other country. Since Brazil is a developing country and has a big resource base and a lot of the characteristics of a developing economy, it will very frequently represent a point of view consistent with other developing economies. Sometimes, it will present a point of view that is consistent with other countries in Latin America--and sometimes it won't. There shouldn't be a litmus test for how a country is going to vote, or how other countries are going to feel about it. If you're going to add groups to the Security Council, there needs to be criteria associated with the legitimacy of the Security Council, and not whether it makes it easier to run or not.

Brazil's role in a proposed nuclear fuel-swap deal with Iran in 2010 was very controversial. The report notes that the deal, which ultimately fizzled, cost Brazil quite a bit domestically and diplomatically. How does Brazil move forward from this to become a significant global player, particularly in Middle East disputes?

I don't know of a major power that hasn't undertaken an international initiative that was controversial, or had a negative impact on some people's view of the power--whether it's the way the United States is waging the war in Afghanistan, or China's human rights record, or Russia's record on democracy, or Europe's lack of engagement in some issues. Brazil attempted to pursue [a deal in] what it thought was in the interest of containing the Iranian nuclear program and reducing the likelihood of conflict in the region. They may not have done it in the most artful way, and it may not have been highly successful. But until we know whether the initiatives of the rest of the world were any *more* successful in precluding Iran from pursuing its nuclear program, it's premature to compare the outcomes.

One of the things that we in the United States need to come to grips with is either we view these major emerging powers as independent actors who are peers and going to be treated in that respect--or we continue to hold on to old patronizing views, which suggest that if they don't follow the worldview that we have, they don't deserve to be in the first tier of international nations. One of the big breakthrough outcomes of this report is that it is seeking to participate in a transformation of the U.S.-Brazil relationship from its traditional hemispheric, limited, and rather patronizing relationship, to one where Brazil is truly seen as a first-tier, leading global power in its own right, and treated accordingly.

Weigh in on this issue by emailing CFR.org.

The Council on Foreign Relations takes no institutional position on policy issues and has no affiliation with the U.S. government. All views expressed in its publications and on its website are the sole responsibility of the author or authors.

Copyright © 2011 by the Council on Foreign Relations, Inc. All rights reserved.