

Brazil Tries To Evade Imperial Game-Plan

by Silvia Palacios

It will not be easy for Brazilian diplomacy to construct an independent foreign policy whose immediate objective would be to put together a South American bloc, capable of preserving the independence and sovereignty of member-nations.

The difficulties to be faced are varied. First, there is the imperial impulse of the group of Utopian “chicken-hawks” in the Bush Administration, which is using the institutional instability of the subcontinent—and especially of the Andean region from Venezuela to Bolivia—to impose an interventionist policy even worse than that of President Teddy Roosevelt in the early days of the 20th Century. Second, there are the insurrectionist tendencies of various radical groups allied to the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, whose effect is to demoralize the serious efforts of nationalist groups within Itamaraty (as the Foreign Ministry is called). This latter problem is reflected in the clumsy interventions of President Lula’s foreign policy advisor Marco Aurelio Garcia, with regard to neighboring Colombia. Garcia, in answer to Colombian President Alvaro Uribe’s request that neighboring countries declare that the drug-running Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas are “terrorists,” stated provocatively: “One man’s terrorist is another man’s warrior against oppression.”

Threats to Sovereignty

Ever since the attacks of Sept. 11, the Bush government has been determined to find Islamic terrorists in every corner of Ibero-America, in order to justify its geopolitical plans. Brazil has suffered repeated threats of a U.S. intervention in the name of “fighting terrorism.” For example, the Utopian group which boasts the Hudson Institute’s Constantine Menges, lost no time in fingering the so-called Triple Border region of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay as a sanctuary of Islamic terrorists; and despite the total lack of evidence, the group’s spokesmen have even described that zone as the Brazilian “front” of the war.

But they are not the only ones who believe that if you repeat a lie often enough, it will become the truth. Most alarming were the claims of U.S. Southern Command Commander Gen. James T. Hill, cited by the March 9 *Miami Herald*, to the effect that nearly \$500,000 a year is collected in Ibero-America for Islamic groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and al-Gamaat.

The Brazilian government has attempted to avoid these

provocations of the Bush government’s imperial policy, by coordinating diplomatic actions with the European trio of France, Germany, and Russia, the which is conducting unprecedented diplomacy to halt the mad Anglo-American war drive against Iraq, which would unleash an unending Clash of Civilizations upon the world.

Supporting initiatives clearly coming out of the nationalist group which took up important posts in Itamaraty with Lula’s January 2003 inauguration and which argues for Brazil to take a more active role in world affairs, President Lula backed France’s recent proposal for a heads-of-state summit at the UN Security Council, to put the brakes on the conflict with Iraq. While the world was just learning officially of the French proposal, Lula spoke by phone with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, during which the Brazilian President endorsed the French initiative. One day earlier, on March 5, Lula also spoke with German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, and guaranteed him Brazil’s support for the French-German memorandum on Iraq.

In continuation of this coordination, it was announced that French Foreign Secretary Renaud Muselier would be visiting Brazil on March 11, to meet with the Brazilian President. In an interview published that day in *Folha de São Paulo*, Muselier responded to a nervous question about Lula’s coordination with French President Jacques Chirac: “The support given by President Lula is, in our opinion, an essential element. Brazil can play a major role explaining the importance of continuing with the inspections [in Iraq], particularly for other Latin American countries.” It was further revealed that President Lula would soon be making a state visit to France.

Andean Diplomacy

Ibero-America is clearly the natural place for Brazil to exercise a role as regional leader. Thus Itamaraty’s efforts to organize a meeting of continental heads of state—or, at least, of South American heads of state—to analyze the implications of a war with Iraq, in order to forge a single regional position on such an international issue, which would be a first in decades. Apparently, this initiative was thwarted, among other reasons, because of widespread fear of reprisals the Bush government might take against participating nations, already weakened both economically and politically. After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, the Bush government has put enormous pressure on the continent, to make hemispheric security conditional upon acceptance of Bush’s imperial interventionism.

Symptomatic of that fear of Washington’s madness was Colombian President Uribe’s unwillingness to join Brazil’s initiative to sign a statement against Bush’s unilateral war drive against Iraq, because taking such a position could lead to a freeze in U.S. aid against drug trafficking.

Faced with the efforts of the Bush Administration to impose its new empire on the continent, Brazil has moved to try to create conditions of regional stability, by opposing its

program for the physical integration of South America to the currently volatile financial and dangerous security situation on the continent. Thus, the Lula government has moved to create a so-called Group of Friends of Venezuela, in an effort to try to control the Jacobin nut, President Hugo Chávez, and to avoid institutional chaos in that nation. In January, Brazil Foreign Minister Celso Amorim made this clear, when he created the Group of Friends: “We are taking a proactive action because Venezuela is a country that is close to us; it is an important country which has a symbolic role for South America as a whole. Further, the Venezuelan crisis affects our integration project for South America.”

In this context, Colombian President Uribe’s March 7 visit to Brazil, to coordinate actions against the FARC narco-terrorists, is of special relevance. Uribe has been seeking closer ties with Brazil and other nations of the region, following the FARC attack on U.S. military advisors in Colombia Feb. 13—an attack which virtually served as an invitation to a U.S. invasion.

Before Uribe’s visit, there was a moment of great tensions, because it was feared that Brazil would refuse to identify the FARC as a terrorist force—a rumor which was spread by President Lula’s foreign policy advisor Marcio Aurelio Garcia. Garcia even went so far as to say that Brazil could not take sides in the Colombian conflict by branding the FARC terrorists, as that would prejudice any future role Brazil might undertake as a mediator in that conflict! Garcia’s words were intended to disguise his sympathy for the FARC, allies in the São Paulo Forum whose meetings Garcia has frequently attended as a representative of Brazil’s Workers Party (PT).

The tension increased, because it is clear that Brazil will not accept a foreign intervention in the region in any guise. Brazil views the U.S.-drafted Plan Colombia as such, and sees it as a threat, since Brazil shares with Colombia large interests in the Amazon region. During his visit to Brazil, the Colombian President was explicit on this question: “Terrorism destroys democracy, life, and the ecology. It has already destroyed a part of the Colombian Amazon, and if it is not fought, it could destroy the Brazilian Amazon.”

During Uribe’s visit, Lula supported Colombia’s battle with terrorism. “We discussed themes of interest to Brazil and Colombia. First, Brazil’s commitment to help Colombia and our total solidarity in the fight against terrorism and the drug trade.” Lula said. Finally, Brazilian diplomacy made a proposal which could offer the Colombian government a new direction in its fight against narco-terrorism. The two countries are calling on the UN Security Council to issue a resolution condemning all the illegal armed movements in Colombia, which includes the FARC, the ELN, and paramilitary groups such as the AUC. The joint communiqué which concluded President Uribe’s visit also stated that the two governments would examine, on a priority basis, the modalities of utilization by the Colombian government of Brazil’s System of Vigilance of the Amazon (SIVAM), a modern network of

radars, planes and computers which monitors the Amazon region. The final communiqué also emphasizes, at various points, the importance of economic integration and of the physical infrastructure of both countries, in the context of South American integration.

The Brazilian diplomatic initiative, while failing to condemn the FARC as terrorists—which is clearly a mistake—nonetheless silenced speculation that Brazil gave legitimacy to the FARC as a belligerent force, a stance encouraged by radical groups within the ruling PT. Within those groups are members of the Presidential Cabinet, such as Urban Affairs Minister Olivio Dutra, who as governor of Rio Grande do Sul, had received FARC representatives in the governor’s palace. Although Presidential advisor Marco Aurelio Garcia does not nominally belong to these radical elements, his statements with regard to both Venezuela and the FARC, are a clear reflection of the ongoing battle inside the PT ranks.

The FARC in Rio

The problem for Brazil, is that the FARC not only threatens the security of the Brazilian Amazon region, whose shared border with Colombia is more than 2,000 kilometers long, and therefore offers easy penetration for the narco-terrorists, but also extends to the cities and the interior of Brazil. On March 1, the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* published a report based on military intelligence from Colombian counterinsurgency units, which stated that the FARC maintains at least three sanctuaries for elite groups of that narco-terrorist army inside Brazil. One is in the south of Paraná, another is in Mato Grosso do Sul, and a third is in Roraima. The first two have long been identified by the United States as hide-outs of Hamas and Hezbollah, but never as FARC refuges. Suffice it to say that one of the most dangerous drug lords who controls much of organized crime in Rio de Janeiro’s slums, Fernandinho Beira Mar, was protected by the FARC inside Colombia. Beira Mar was captured in April 2001 on Colombian territory controlled by the FARC, and he was subsequently handed over the Brazilian authorities. He is currently in jail in São Paulo, but everything indicates that he continues to maintain relations with the FARC through both drugs and arms trafficking.

Also very dangerous is the relationship between the FARC and Brazil’s Landless Movement (MST), which recently relaunched aggressive land seizures and invasions of public buildings across the country. And herein lies the Gordian knot facing the Lula government, because Brazil will be unable to maintain any credibility abroad in its policy toward Colombia and Venezuela—a policy which will soon have state forces, including the Armed Forces, behind it—as long as Lula maintains Miguel Rossetto, one of the founders and leaders of the MST and a known FARC sympathizer, as his Agrarian Development Minister, and as long as he continues to keep the Agrarian Reform Institute (INCRA) in the hands of the MST.