

L. Trapassi, *La terra del futuro. Il Brasile dalla crisi alla crescita economica*, LUISS University Press, Rome, 2020, pp. 127.

Few countries have gone through such radical and transformative changes over the last thirty years and attracted so much interest from the academic world as Brazil did. Yet, the recent trajectory of the South American giant has received relatively little attention within the Italian academia and the broader public. In the light of that, Lorenzo Trapassi's work is a valuable contribution.

La terra del futuro is a one-of-a-kind book. Trapassi is an experienced Italian diplomat who has served in Brazil for over four years. Therefore, the analysis of Brazil's foreign policy he has proposed is extremely well-informed and based on first-hand experience. At the same time, avoiding technicalities and formalities, Trapassi has managed to compile an analysis that crosses the academic boundaries and speaks to the broader public.

The book's overarching goal is to show how the South American

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

country has managed to move from the periphery of the international system to the forefront stage of world politics, overcoming domestic turbulences and turning into a key player in the international fora. Trapassi's focus is on the two pivotal figures that have led Brazil's exit from its long-standing marginal status: Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010). In particular, his analysis aims at pointing out the continuities and convergences in the foreign policies pursued by the two Brazilian presidents despite their political and personal differences and their contributions to the country's internal and international successes.

The book starts by sketching out the features that had historically characterised Brazil's posture in the international system. Above all, Trapassi has emphasised the reasons – its colonial past, its linguistic isolation within the South American continent – that had condemned Brazil to the periphery of international politics for over three centuries. According to the author, this historical marginality helps explain why – even in more recent times – foreign policy had never been at the centre of Brazilian governments' (either civilian or military) actions and strategies. And this is also why the Cardoso and Lula presidencies – which conceived foreign policy as an integral part of the country's development – have had a truly revolutionary impact on Brazil's international standing.

Before analysing Cardoso's presidency, Trapassi focuses on the conditions in which he took office (Chapter 2). Political instability and economic turmoil very much defined Brazil's entrance into the post-Cold War era. Cardoso had to face those challenges firstly as a member of the cabinet chaired by Itamar Franco, who became president after Fernando Collor de Mello resigned in 1992. Cardoso acted for a few months as Minister of Foreign Affairs (October 1992 to May 1993) and then assumed the post of Minister of Finance until 1994. As pointed out by Trapassi, two of the core goals he pursued in this first governmental experience – integrating Brazil within the globalisation process and stabilising the economy by fighting hyperinflation – remained at the very centre of his agenda once he became president in 1994.

In the overview of Cardoso's foreign policy (Chapter 3), Trapassi emphasises five main axes. Firstly, the Brazilian president sought to end the country's historical isolation by establishing its position within the international fora and actively participating in the reform of global governance. The clearest sign of this attempt was the candidacy to a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, launched during the 52nd session of the UN General Assembly in 1997. Secondly, Cardoso's presidency was characterised by a strong emphasis on the integration project born in 1991 with the Treaty of Asunción, by which Argentina,

Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay had laid the foundations of MERCOSUR (*Mercado Común del Sur*). During Cardoso's years, the scheme was complemented with a political dimension through the signature of the Ushuaia Protocol, which established the so-called "democratic clause" – a formal commitment by member countries to preserve the democratic rule. Equally relevant has been the attempt to diversify the country's partnerships – which passed, particularly in his second mandate (1998–2002), through the dialogue with the European Union, China and the "Asian tigers", and African countries such as Angola and South Africa – and the campaign for guaranteeing less asymmetrical conditions to the developing, export-oriented countries within the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Finally, Trapassi points out another feature introduced by Cardoso and destined to remain central during Lula's mandates – namely, the personalisation of foreign policy. According to Trapassi, the shift from the periphery to the status of regional power integrated within the globalisation process was very much facilitated by the respect and appeal widely recognised to Cardoso's figure well beyond the Brazilian borders. This feature was particularly relevant in the interaction with the United States. Indeed, the Brazilian president managed to preserve an autonomous and even critical position – for instance, on FTAA (*Free Trade Area of the Americas*) project promoted by Washington – but without bringing the relationship with neither Clinton nor Bush on a confrontational path.

Considering this record, when Lula became president in 2002, he found a profoundly transformed country: economically stable and much more integrated within the international community. Cardoso's legacy set the conditions for the big jump ahead – both in terms of economic growth and international activism – that the country made during Lula's two mandates (2003–2011). The other factor mentioned by Trapassi that played in favour of the former trade unionist and leader of the PT (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*) was the so-called "commodity boom", the impressive expansion in demand and prices of the commodities on the international markets. Building upon this favourable conjuncture, Lula managed to conduct an ambitious foreign policy, reinforcing the country's economic upturn and contributing to its leadership in the region and beyond. Indeed, Lula gave the highest priority to the reform of global governance, following the path opened by Cardoso. In doing so, the Brazilian president sought to build new partnerships with other actors from the developing world – the so-called "South-South cooperation" – equally dissatisfied with the asymmetries of the international order. Lula's activism within such fora as BRICS or the G20 is indicative. Within Lula's strategy, a similar relevance has been assigned to the South American region and the in-

tegration process, which were intended to further advance Brazil's leadership. The attempt to expand Mercosur to other members – such as Venezuela and Bolivia – or the launch of the UNASUL (*União de Nações Sul-Americanas*) project testify to the significance attached to this dimension.

The evaluation offered by Trapassi (Chapter 4) on Lula's foreign policy is thought-provoking. According to the Italian diplomat, the Brazilian president has been able to change the narrative on the status and future of the South American giant, stepping up as one of the strongest supporters of the reform of the architecture of the international order but without compromising the dialogue with the Western partners. Lula's pragmatism emerges particularly from his handling of the relationship with Washington. Indeed, although the Brazilian president has been among the main actors behind the failure of the FTAA project, the partnership with the United States remained stable and friendly, as Lula's capacity to act as a regional leader and a bulwark against Chávez was highly appreciated in Washington. This is the same pragmatism that Lula had demonstrated on the economic front, where his ambitious and revolutionary social programs – such as the *Bolsa Família* – were complemented by an overall attention to the country's macroeconomic stability.

At the same time, Trapassi has pointed out some of the most controversial moves made by the Brazilian leader – such as the involvement in the 2010 Iranian crisis, which risked to jeopardise his image among Western partners – as well as the fragile foundations upon which he had created such political projects as UNASUL. Likewise, although he has praised the transformative impact of Lula's economic and social initiatives, Trapassi has highlighted how they have been only partially able to secure long-term results and address the issues at the core of Brazil's development gap. These considerations do not lead to an overall negative judgment but help separate the widespread, often overly triumphalist narrative on Lula's foreign policy from its concrete achievements.

Overall, Trapassi's analysis brings the reader to the point indicated at the very beginning of the book. Indeed, the author has shown the complementarity between the international courses followed by Cardoso and Lula and how both presidents have decisively contributed to raising Brazil from its peripheral status. Yet, Trapassi does not ignore the weight that the increasingly favourable international conditions – the system's turn towards multipolarity and the aforementioned commodity boom – have played in the evolution of Brasilia's foreign policy, especially during Lula's mandates. This consideration invites us to have a critical look on the last years. Since the end of Lula's

second government (and more precisely since Dilma Rousseff's second mandate), the South American giant has entered a spiral of economic slowdown, political instability, and social unrest. To these evolutions – confirming Trapassi's perspective – contributed both the collapse in the revenues coming from the commodity sector and the operation of individual leaders. At least partially, the recent path followed by Brasilia lessens the optimism shown by the author, as the centrality gained during Cardoso and Lula years has progressively waned. Brazil has not returned to its previous peripheral status, but its image and leadership have received severe blows (particularly during Bolsonaro's mandate). Instead, what has remained unchanged is Trapassi's concluding remark: Brazil can and should play a central role in international politics, as it has the prestige and ability to act as a bridge between the Global North and the Global South.

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