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International Politics **Reorientation of Multilateralism**

This policy paper reflects discussions of the CEBRI-KAS Project on the future directions of multilateralism.



Introduction

The objective of CEBRI's Multilateralism Program is to promote debates and the exchange of experiences that generate reflections on multilateral organizations and recommendations that can guide Brazilian insertion strategies in the international order. The ideas and arguments developed in this publication contribute directly to this purpose - and do so with much intellectual density.

As revealed by the different and valuable contributions of Anna Jaguaribe, Maria Regina Soares de Lima and Marianna Albuquerque, Lia Baker Valls Pereira, Caetano Penna and, finally, Izabella Teixeira and Francisco Gaetani, 2020 added the uncertainties exposed and enhanced by the Covid-19 pandemic to the tensions between national interests and multilateral regulation, to the need to harmonize power and norm in international relations and to the political imperative to build or reform and update international institutions that regulate individual behaviors and coordinate collective action.

The virus did not distinguish between individuals, groups, social classes and nations, but socioeconomic inequalities, cultural and behavioral differences, as well as pre-existing state capacities caused the virus to generate different effects. The global contrast in how public policies and societies responded to the challenges of the health crisis has revealed that it is not enough to be a financial power, a military giant or an industrialized economy to obtain good results when coping with the effects of the SarsCov-2 virus: the case of the USA illustrates this observation emblematically. Also the fact that there are democratic regimes or authoritarian governments does not allow us to build solid hypotheses as to why the numbers of infections and deaths are what they are: in East Asia, democratic countries and authoritarian regimes have both obtained good results in terms of infection control and its effects. Much remains to be empirically researched in order to understand the interfaces between the social and natural conditions for the spread of the pandemic, but it seems clear that:

No borders, no military power, no economic capacity has been able to hold back its worldwide dissemination. The complexity of the pandemic links local and global scales, natural and social conditions, which means that one must grasp where such scales and conditions intersect in order to be able to analyze Covid-19's spatial, political and sociological consequences (Milani, 2020, p. 143).

This means that the virus did not spread to virgin and homogeneous territories: in 2020, Covid-19 only emphasized pre-existing contradictions and vulnerabilities in national social systems and in the international scenario already hit by economic, financial and environmental uncertainties and energy, social, political and military risks:

The new coronavirus has not only reached global diffusion; as a matter of fact, such as SARS, MERS, H1N1 and Ebola, this most recent transnational health threat is also invisible, it comes from everywhere, reaching all individuals irrespective of class, status, nationality, race and gender. It is true, however, that some individuals, groups and nations are more vulnerable than others. Not all people are equally at risk from Covid-19: because people have different levels of exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity, some are more at risk from the new coronavirus than others. For instance, in several countries, the elderly and those suffering from heart diseases or diabetes may be victims of social Darwinism. Inequalities, hierarchies and asymmetries matter and that is not new in the world of international relations. Covid-19 has only made them straightforwardly crystal-clear in the way they increase the effects of the disease and the access to its treatment (Milani, 2020, p. 143).

Schematically, I summarize the uncertainties present in the international scenario in four macro phenomena that, associated with each other, reflect the main central realignments currently underway in the global order and that challenge the multilateral organisms' capacity for adaptation and innovation:

- (i) The hegemonic disputes between the USA and China and the resulting transition scenarios on the international chessboard;
- (ii) The continuous process of autonomization of global finances in the design of what appears to be the new capitalism of the 21st century, generating systemic crises since the 1990s, including in central countries, and strong commercial and technological repercussions;
- (iii) The crisis of Western democracies and democratic models in some countries of the South and on the periphery of the international system;
- (iv) The anthropocene crisis, including climate change and health crises, as a phenomenon outside the politically constituted international system, but with a significant impact on the reorganization of multilateralism.

In this closing chapter, I will summarize, around these four macro phenomena, the key ideas that guided the different texts in this publication. In addition, I will seek to develop the following argument: the political reconstruction of global multilateralism, including for the purpose of preparing international organizations, States and societies to provide effective responses to future crises (environmental, climate, health, financial, etc.), presupposes to firstly confront the current crisis of democracy in the domestic political sphere of many countries in the West and South; secondly, it implies dealing with the necessary redefinition of the relationships between nature, society, the State and the market in the implementation of public policies for sustainable development at the national and international levels. In the final remarks, I will try to systematize some of the implications of the development of these four macro phenomena for Brazil's international insertion.



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The US-China hegemonic disputes

The world is witnessing the rearrangement of the tectonic plates of international power due to the emergence of China (or the reemergence, as some prefer)¹.

The transition that China has been experiencing since the mid-1990s on the economic front, in terms of security and energy, its role in the reorganization of global production chains, Beijing's participation in economic and humanitarian cooperation efforts, the improvement of indicators at the national level, the increase in Chinese prestige in promoting an alternative to Western development models, among other aspects, points to a clear confrontation with the USA on the institutional and normative design of multilateralism in the 21st century. Graham Allison, in his book "Destined for War" (2017), reported on historical experiences of cases of power transition in international relations, drawing attention to the scenarios of conflict between China and the USA, but also to the possibilities of diplomatic negotiation, cooperation and peaceful accommodation between the two superpowers. The bet on multilateralism and the redefinition of norms and the roles of the main powers of the North and South in international organizations is part of the list of peaceful solutions proposed by the professor from the Harvard University School of Government.

The China-US dispute is a key element of the structural movement for change in the international system with strong repercussions in multilateral spaces, whether global or regional. If, at the regional level, China has progressively succeeded in promoting progress towards building new institutions (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, New BRICS Development Bank, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Regional Economic Comprehensive Partnership/RECP) and new cooperation platforms (One Belt One Road, China-Africa Cooperation Forum, China-Latin America Cooperation Forum), the scenario is more complex globally.

With regard to the UN and the WTO, China can consider itself gratified, since it has a permanent seat with the power of veto while its economy benefits from the recognition as a developing country in trade relations with central countries. There are ambiguities in the Chinese position regarding the reform of the Security Council, since India and Japan are two of the countries that demand access to this condition. In this sense, Beijing's tendency would be to block any reform projects in order to avoid the risk of having two major regional competitors with recognized permanent member status and the power of veto. In this respect, Chinese action within the UN would be more conservative and directed at maintaining the security *status quo*.

In the field of development and North-South relations, however, there are attempts by Beijing to get the UN and its agencies to give more visibility to the Chinese model of state-market relations, to China's proposals for cooperation, as well as to its growing investment in varied sectors, such as technical, economic, agricultural, educational and infrastructure cooperation. The strong Chinese support for the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) reflects this trend. In this second aspect, Beijing is pro-reform, seeking to legitimize its development trajectory at the multilateral level, with significant support from G-77 countries (in particular African countries), but also proposing institutional changes (as in the case of recent reforms of the World Bank and the IMF) that reflect this movement of the magma of global power to which I referred earlier.

Beijing's double game (between maintaining the status quo and demanding for reforms) has worked quite successfully in recent years, especially during the Donald Trump administration. As of

1. Christopher A. McNally (2012). Sino-Capitalism: China's Reemergence and the International Political Economy. *World Politics*, 64(4), 741-776. Joseph S. Nye (2008). China's Reemergence and the Future of the Asia-Pacific. *Survival, Global Politics and Strategy*, 39(4), 65-79.

2021, the scenario is likely to change: in fact, the US of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris will tend to adopt, at least in part, quite different positions from the Trump administration, especially in terms of human rights and climate change. The scenarios that will be built under Biden-Harris for the security, trade and technological development agendas are not yet clear, although in structural terms it is plausible to think more in terms of continuity than ruptures in these agendas. In the field of trade, it is not yet clear, either, whether Washington's eventual new commitment to plurilateral partnerships (on the transpacific and transatlantic axes) will come to be in time to compete with the RECP.

Illustrating this hegemonic dispute in the commercial sector, as Lia Valls points out in this publication, two issues stand out in the WTO negotiations: first, China's rise in trade and the global economy, with its accession into the WTO in 2001, and it becoming the world's main exporter in 2009; second, the position of the USA, during the Obama administration, that, in order to contain the Chinese advance, sought to negotiate regulatory standards for trade between the main Asian countries by proposing the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Furthermore, in proposing the Transatlantic Partnership between the United States and the European Union, Obama also signaled that regulatory frameworks would be shaped outside the multilateral system. Trump abandoned these efforts to contain the Chinese power, increasing direct conflict on issues associated with technological options (especially the case of 5G) and the use of digital economy applications, and this, also outside the multilateral field of trade - despite his decisions and the agreements signed with several countries (Australia, Japan, United Kingdom, for example), directly impact the distribution of global trade and services flows.

The disputes between the USA and China directly affect the construction of future scenarios for multilateralism. It is not clear how the power transition will take place, whether peacefully or through direct or indirect military conflicts. Therefore, the US-China dispute will probably continue to block deeper reforms from global multilateral organizations, both the representativeness reforms and those referring to diversity, to use the categorization of Maria Regina Soares de Lima and Marianna

Albuquerque. Representative reforms are of less concern to the USA and China, since both are part of the UNSC as permanent members; and those regarding diversity would imply that the West redefine itself no longer as the only political and cultural center in the world (civilization, sources of legitimacy, original norms of rights and moral values) and, therefore, abandon the traditional use of humiliation strategies in the international system, as stated by the hypothesis developed by Bertrand Badie (2014).

The relationship between China and the USA is paradoxical, since it involves elements and dimensions of hegemonic competition, but it was also built on bases of high economic interdependence. For Brazil, the uncertainties and challenges posed by what I would call "competition in interdependence" are dramatic. With the USA, Brazil has maintained close and deep relations in several sectors. Commercially, Brazilian exports to the USA have greater added value but, at the same time, Brazil competes with the USA in some sectors and presents a deficit in this bilateral trade relationship. China was elevated to the status of Brazil's main trading partner and an important source of direct investment. Under the Bolsonaro government, Brazilian trade diplomacy made several concessions without seeking Washington's reciprocity. Furthermore, Brasilia has made culturalist attacks against Beijing, spreading, mainly on social media, visions based on misinformation about the historical trajectory, but also about Chinese scientific and technological capabilities in the development of vaccines and 5G technology. Current Brazilian diplomacy, hardly worthy of the Rio Branco tradition, has neglected the central aspect of China's new technological strategy: as Caetano Penna points out in this publication, the Digital Silk Road is based on foreign investments in the digital infrastructure sectors, in the development of artificial intelligence, in e-commerce and in digital governance diplomacy (with an emphasis on cyber sovereignty).

Trade, technology and finance in the international political economy

As Anna Jaguaribe points out, starting in the 1990s, commercial multilateralism began to suffer from structural fragility and to lose functionality, making it difficult to conclude global negotiations within the scope of the WTO. Lia Valls recalls that the Bretton Woods multilateral system was a construction of coexistence between the interests and values of the USA and those of Western European economies. And this system has managed to adapt over the years, always based on this game of interests. In the 1980s, with the second great wave of globalization driven by new information technologies and the reduction in transportation costs, one of the responses of the multilateral system was the Uruguay Round launched in 1986, expanding the scope of areas negotiated and, thus, incorporating topics such as investments, services and intellectual property.

In the 1990s, negotiations advanced on regulatory issues and the World Trade Organization (WTO) was created, hailed as a sign of the strengthening of multilateralism in trade. The real world of international trade was already different and some nations in the South, in particular the emerging countries, started to have diplomatic and negotiating capacity in the legal and political pillars of the WTO (Oliveira and Milani, 2012). It was within the scope of the WTO that Brazil was able to win the arduous dispute over cotton against the USA, yielding financial and diplomatic dividends to Brazil, given that part of the funds obtained were directed to the Brazilian Cotton Institute and to technical cooperation projects in cotton farming in African countries (Bueno, 2018). Commercial multilateralism, with the establishment of conflict resolution procedures and the growing socialization between regional powers in the geopolitical South, became very beneficial to developing countries with high diplomatic capacity, such as Brazil and India. This aspect may have aroused conflicting interests in some western capitals.

In addition, the Bretton Woods system, which was partially abandoned in the 1970s with the rupture of the dollar-gold standard, presented limitations in dealing with new trends in world trade. In the Uruguay Round, the proposal for the liberalization

of trade in services based on the most favored nation clause (MFNC) proved to be unfeasible. The United States abandoned its tradition of privileging multilateral agreements and began to pursue its interests through bilateral or regional agreements. In 2001, when the Doha Round was launched and was identified as the “Trade and Development” round, developing countries wished to include agriculture on the agenda, but difficulties in closing a negotiation paralyzed the Round in 2003 (Amorim, 2015).

Two other important dimensions of the multilateral system’s poor functionality concern technology and the role of finance in international relations. As Anna Jaguaribe points out, as of 2008, the West has been engaged in dealing with the economic scenario of costs and losses of hyper globalization. This led to the search for new tools for economic growth, making the innovation economy a center of attention for decision makers. National plans such as *Germany’s industry 4.0* and *China’s 2025* are examples of strategic planning tools for this new understanding of the political economy. The global economy of the 21st century is much more diverse and multicentric than it was in the late 1970s and 1980s, thanks to the growth of Asia and, above all, China. Thus, the technological dimension changed the reality of global production value chains and supply

and service networks, bringing more elements to the hegemonic conflict and generating cracks in international trade and investment negotiations.

Caetano Penna underlines the centrality of the technological dimension when he recalls that no capitalist country develops without manufacturing industries and technological innovation. The fact that Brazil has a network of high-level research institutions in health (federal public universities, Fiocruz, Butantã Institute, excellence research centers and official pharmaceutical laboratories, among others) highlights this centrality. Without this network, it is not unjustified to speculate that the country would be in an even more delicate position to deal with the challenges of the international scenario, among them, those presented by the Covid-19 pandemic.

As Caetano Penna rightly points out in this book, the development of a thriving scientific system is not sufficient for a given country to benefit from the opportunities created by digital innovations. There needs to be a vector that directs investments and technological development to areas of high added value. According to Penna, both in Brazil and other developing countries lack, is an industrial strategy and an innovation policy with a long-term vision that puts government procurement and incentive programs at its core. In other words, what this technological dimension of the international political economy reveals is that the issue is no longer just a matter of choosing between liberalizing markets or adopting industrial and technological innovation policies, but it is a matter of knowing how to combine these strategies in favor of development, particularly in a context in which the economy has been gaining a truly strategic dimension.

The third dimension of the international political economy and that is not directly addressed throughout this book, concerns the impacts that the absence of regulatory frameworks in the field of global finance has on development models and the effectiveness of public policies, including in the fields of climate change and socio-environmental sustainability. As Jan Aarte Scholte (2002) states, in economics, finance links savings to investments through a variety of instruments denominated in monetary values, serving as an intermediation activity that provides savings for investments and, at the same time, generates revenue from these investments for savers. The transnational (global and regional) scale of contemporary finance is unprecedented, with transaction levels greatly exceeding the so-called “real economy” of primary production, manufacturing, transportation, communications, among other sectors. Almost all States allow external banks, securities brokers and insurance companies to operate within their borders, sometimes on an equal footing with national companies, generating the phenomenon of global financial liberalization, thanks to supranational communication and organization tools. How to give global finances a true global conscience beyond earnings and financial logic? How to make savers, investors, borrowers and brokers think and act in a world where challenges such as climate change, pandemics and new sources of renewable energy are a reality? These are some of the questions raised by the processes of disintermediation and liberalization in the financial sector on a transnational scale, to which only States can produce comprehensive answers through multilateral regional and global arrangements.

The crisis of democracies at the center and on the periphery of the international system

When dealing with these aspects of the international political economy and its impacts on the definition of future scenarios for multilateralism, even if in a very schematic way, it is inevitable to resume traditional debates about the relations between States and markets in international relations. After all, as Susan Strange (1988) said, structures of security, finance, production and knowledge are intertwined in the creation and reproduction of power structures in the world economy. Therefore, the decisions made within the States are fundamental to think about how policies resulting from the relations between such power structures are designed and implemented at the external level. In this context, democracy and the rule of law are central to the definition of regulatory frameworks that consider the most diverse forms of “negative externalities”, the responsibilities of different agents and the role of parliaments and citizens in decision-making processes.

Robust democracies tend to make qualitatively stricter commitments to multilateral, regional and global organizations. Of course, the strategic interests of even the most robust democracies are a key variable in understanding their respective behaviors in multilateral spaces. Authoritarian governments share the characteristic of making less stringent commitments to multilateral organizations, especially when it comes to human rights, public policies of transparency (for example, in health crises), respect for diversity and pluralism, political participation of minorities, among other agendas. As Maria Regina Soares de Lima and Marianna Albuquerque underline, in addition to the number of members, multilateralism is characterized by elements such as interaction, the institutionalization of deliberative spaces, the reduction of transaction costs, transparency, the plurality of opinions and identities and the legitimacy to establish essential norms and values for international society. In other words, multilateralism mirrors at the international level some of the characteristics and imperfections of democratic processes seen in the domestic sphere.

2016 was a year of spectacular change in international relations, with the UK's vote in favor of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as US president. For different reasons, both phenomena called into question the continued support of great powers for multilateralism, both regionally and globally. In the case of non-central countries, there were cases of Viktor Orbán (Hungarian Prime Minister since 2010), Nicolas Maduro (President of Venezuela since 2013), Narendra Modi (Indian Prime Minister since 2014) and Rodrigo Duterte (President of the Philippines since 2016), all leaders unlikely to make strong commitments in multilateral spaces. And they are joined by Jair Bolsonaro (president of Brazil since 2019), whose attacks on the “globalism” and “cultural Marxism” of the United Nations have already become notorious in the speeches of his chancellor Ernesto Araújo. This authoritarian turn, which is expected to undergo major turmoil in the midst of the recent US elections that culminated in the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, has had a strong impact on multilateral negotiations and international institutions.

Democracy is going through yet another transformation process, which some scholars have called one of its deepest crises (Przeworski, 2019; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Merkel and Kneip, 2018). Themes such as participation, representation and effective power to govern reveal unresolved democratic challenges, such as an increasing level of exclusion from the lower third of the demos of participation, the consequent diminished representation of society's interests, crisis of confidence in the elites, distance between rulers and those ruled, as well as a loss of democratic sovereignty in political action. Within this framework, exclusion and increasing patterns of inequality, both in central countries and on the periphery of the international system, have increased the capacity to seduce authoritarian and ultra-conservative leaders who promise easy and simplistic recipes for complex problems, often challenging political norms and institutions both in the national and international spheres.

There are variations in the political and institutional behavior of these different authoritarian governments, but many of them also adopt practices of rupture or relaxation of institutional rules, defending negationist positions in relation to history and the relations between science and public policies in the most diverse sectors (health, the environment, climate, technology, etc.). Many of the leaders mentioned above make frequent use of social networks as a tool for political dialogue with their bases, deviating from the roles and responsibilities traditionally attributed to the powers and political institutions of democracy. Some analysts even treat social networks as one of the most challenging infrastructures for the political development of democracies in our era (Sustein, 2017).

The authoritarianisms of the 21st century, in the North and South of international politics, are a real threat to democracy and multilateralism. Even in European countries with political institutions strongly defending democratic principles, like Germany and France, the spectrum of parties, movements and networks of ultra-conservative, anti-Semitic and neo-fascist activism advances. Among other aspects, the economic and social results of ultraliberal development policies and models, associated with the gradual abandonment of social welfare policies, generate fertile grounds for the diffusion of these values and anti-democratic policies (Piketty, 2014).



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How does the domestic crisis impact multilateralism? In most cases, existing or gestating authoritarian governments (such as Hungary, Poland, Israel, Brazil or the United States under Trump) can surprisingly be more hostile to multilateralism than authoritarian regimes like China or Russia. In the Cold War era, democracy and social development were central values in the West, albeit with national variations. The ideological dispute between the USA and the USSR resulted in the configuration of a power structure favorable to the development of the welfare state. Today, the dispute between the USA and China is a competition between two capitalist states with different political regimes, but both using market tools to defend their interests and expand their global presence. If democracy fails in the West, which countries will have the capacity to defend and finance multilateral organizations and to promote their values? How will multilateral organizations respond satisfactorily to collective demands and keep the flame of their legitimacy in the global order burning? In view of the uncertainties that threaten democracy in the West and the diversity of regimes in the East, the risk of increasing the crisis of legitimacy of multilateralism is real, and may translate into the loss of confidence and credibility of its institutions, as analyzed by Maria Regina Soares Lima and Marianna Albuquerque.

The Anthropocene, the climate emergency and the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed how individuals from different geographic and social contexts experience the risk of contagion and the fear of death in a very short period of time. Differences and inequalities also exist in the experience of the pandemic, but the important thing to remember, very schematically in this closing chapter, is the fact that the pandemic has expanded as a threat to global human security with a truly existential scope.

Unlike climate change, where access to information, understanding and interpretation of data, the cognitive and emotional internalization of the threat of climate change in everyday practices, among other aspects, play a central role in the construction of anthropogenic climate change as a political problem, Covid-19 has been a subjective experience that occurs without much mediation between the spread of the virus and the perception of the threat of contagion, illness or even death.

Climate change paradoxically appeals to the need for long-term transformations and the sense of emergency of actions to be taken in the short term. Building bridges between these two temporalities is not a simple task when it comes to designing and implementing concrete public policies, both at the national level and through intergovernmental and multilateral arrangements. As Dale Jamieson states, climate change is an abstraction from a more concrete phenomenon: time (Dale, 2011). And the weather changes daily, one day of rain can follow another day of sun; cold can reduce and heat increase. The public debate on climate change, therefore, takes place in cognitive, psychological, cultural and political territories that are very fertile for a diversity of interpretations and perspectives. Hence the opportunistic strategies of opportunistic negationists or irrational catastrophists, both of which really act in ways that are contrary to the collective interest, of humans and nature, of building sustainable development policies.

As Izabella Teixeira and Francisco Gaetani point out, climate change has become a political imperative and has redefined priorities at all levels of action. The sense of urgency can vary, but there is no doubt that the emergency is here to stay. As the concepts of “Anthropocene” and “Capitalocene” (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000; Chernilo, 2017; Moore, 2016) indicate, the challenges posed by climate change cross generations, classes, groups and nations, economic and political interests, whose mediations can only be conceived and implemented in democratic and pluralist spaces that promote the necessary convergences, both internally and externally.

This means that socio-environmental sustainability should no longer be considered ownership of the environmental political community, which includes government officials, activists, scientists, and community leaders, among others. Sustainability should be a priority in the most diverse sectors of public policies, from economics to energy, from conservation policies to education, from digital transformation to social inclusion policies. It is in the political practice, with all its difficulties and complexities, that the struggles to be fought and the possibilities of convergence will be defined so that this normative agenda is established as an effective practice of national and international public policies.

Final remarks: Brazil in the multilateralism of the future

In the difficult task of summarizing the intellectual contributions that make up this publication, the uncertainties presented here schematically bring up the debates about globalization, the development models, the relations between nature and society, between State and market. More than that, they imply a conceptual and political rethinking of the capacity of States and civil society, nationally and through multilateral collective actions, to create institutions that respond to the challenges outlined here. Without any claim of exhaustiveness, given that the different chapters also discussed the implications for Brazilian foreign policy, I list here only three challenges faced by Brazil to think about its insertion in the institutional spaces of multilateralism.

Table 1: Diplomatic capabilities of selected countries

Index Components	Number of Posts	Embassies	Consulates	Permanent Missions	World Ranking 2019
China	276	169	96	8	1
USA	273	168	88	9	2
France	267	161	89	15	3
Japan	247	151	65	10	4
Russia	242	144	85	11	5
Turkey	235	140	81	12	6
Germany	224	150	61	11	7
Brazil	222	138	70	12	8
United Kingdom	208	152	44	9	11
India	186	123	54	5	12
México	157	80	67	7	15
África do Sul	124	106	14	2	25

Source: <https://globaldiplomacyindex.lowyinstitute.org>

Firstly, since Brazil is an intermediate, non-nuclear power, with a strong potential to influence regional issues and having built an important diplomatic capacity, it is fundamental for Brazil to invest in multilateralism in order to be able to defend itself against conflicts between great powers and games of interests that emerge

from the dispute between the USA and China. In comparison with superpowers, great powers and other regional powers in the South, Brazil has considerable diplomatic capabilities (see Table 1). In this sense, it could support the efforts of the “Friends of the Multilateral System” group at the WTO, as recommended by Lia Valls in her chapter.

Secondly, from the point of view of the international political economy, Brazil should rethink its engagement with the WTO and defend, alongside other developing countries, the central role of this body in the construction of trade multilateralism. Without a strong WTO and fragmented regulatory framework systems, as Lia Valls points out, China would lead the Asian bloc and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) proposal would reflect this trend. How would Brazil take on the task of organizing regional chains with the weakening of its leadership in MERCOSUR in particular and in South America in general? One of the challenges for Brazil, in this regard, would be the complex task of overcoming the gap in the region in which it operates when compared to other regions of the world that are advancing their geoeconomic and geopolitical projects. If the WTO were to lose steam definitively in favor of fragmented multilateral systems, interregional relations would tend to gain strategic weight. How could Brazil prepare and help prepare its strategic regional environment for this process?



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Thirdly and lastly, isolation and detachment from the rest of the world are not positive tactics for a country like Brazil. In the context of the pandemic, showing attitudes that are not well established in national science and international expertise, has not helped the country dialogue with other governments or with the World Health Organization, and even less to learn from the experiences of other societies. By refusing to dialogue multilaterally, the current government produces not only effects for Brazilian society; in fact, it also has obvious consequences for the regional environment and the country's image before its neighbors.

Therefore, it is necessary to consider the challenges for Brazil beyond the current government. It is also important to recompose Brazilian positions, especially in human rights and multilateral climate negotiations. On several issues, it will be necessary to recover the prestige and the traditional role of bridge builder in international organizations, even if such repositioning is more difficult for the country, since it has no surplus of material power. With regard to the US-China competition, the greatest risk is that Brazil will import this confrontation, in line with Washington's strategy of restraining China, and without negotiating compensations. Brazil only loses diplomatic density by supporting US initiatives, particularly its value system, and with this strategy it is condemned to isolation or simply to play an irrelevant role in its region and at the global multilateral level.

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