
Anti-Americanism Is Hurting Brazil, Says Former Brazilian Ambassador to the US

Contributed by Francesco Neves
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The man who represented Brazil in Washington for the last three years is very critical of the way that country is conducting its foreign policy. In an interview to *Veja* magazine, published this past weekend, former ambassador Roberto Abdenur, 64, says that a short-sighted group filled with anti-Americanism is controlling foreign policy in Brazil.

He also charges them with using ideological indoctrination in a way that not even the military dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s has done.

Abdenur was forced to leave his post in Washington despite his decades-long friendship with Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim. Upon his return to Brazil he opted to go into retirement as a way of protest.

According to reports in the Brazilian press, the ex-ambassador has been snubbed since openly criticizing Brazil's decision to recognize China as a market economy. Amorim gave him a chance to recant but Abdenur preferred to maintain his principles. The old friendship is gone now.

"There is a very strong ideological element present in Brazil's foreign policy," Abdenur told *Veja*. "The South-South idea as the dominant axis shows a backward anti-Americanism. This has been showing inside the Itamaraty (the Foreign Ministry) in several ways. There has been an indoctrination.

"Veteran diplomats, not only the young ones, have been forced to read some texts when they arrive or leave Brasília. Books with this ideological posture's bias. This is something irksome. You don't need a dean of discipline at the Itamaraty."

According to the retired ambassador his ex colleagues in the Foreign Ministry feel that Brazilian diplomats nowadays only get promoted when they are attuned with certain political and ideological line and not due to their capacity or skills. He also charges that there is no respect for plurality of opinions.

He recalled that the military during their reign, adopted a simplistic foreign policy based in a blind anti-communism, which was imposed by force. In contrast to what is happening now, however, diplomats during the dictatorship were never indoctrinated and were not forced to adhere to that ideology. Since president General Geisel, he says, until the end of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration the ideological pressure had disappeared.

Abdenur, however, praised Brazil for starting a partnership with India, Japan and Germany eyeing a permanent seat at the UN's Security Council. He also applauded the country's leadership role in the G20 and the Doha Round negotiations

as well as the Brazilian effort to open new trade fronts with Africa, Southeast Asia and the Arab countries.

For the ex-ambassador, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez is a threat to democracy in Venezuela. "There is a basic difference between Evo Morales and Hugo Chávez," he comments. "Morales comes from a humble background, he is a peasant leader who became President. Hardly comparing, a similar trajectory of president Lula. Chávez, on the other hand, parachuted into office, tried a coup and then got to power by the democratic way. Unfortunately, he is destroying democracy in Venezuela."

As for the Brasília-Washington relations, Abdenur reserves praise for President Lula: "It can seem paradoxical, but the relationship between Brazil and the United States prospered significantly in the last few years. Thanks to a person who has a lot of authority in the Brazilian government, a person with extreme pragmatism and lucidity, who is the president Lula.

"He doesn't hide his displeasure with some things that the Bush administration has been doing, particularly in Iraq. But Lula knows that a better relation with the United States is of interest to Brazil. When I took over the embassy, he told me: "Roberto, I want to leave as a legacy for the future even sounder and wider foundations in the relation between both countries."

Abdenur would like to see Brazil getting closer to the US: "Brazil is, at best, failing to get all the money it could get. The American market is approaching the 2-trillion-dollars mark. It would be vital for Brazil to have preferential advantages of partnership with the United States. I'm not saying we should have signed the FTAA at any rate, but we should have kept on negotiating.

"We have been stalled for 10 years with 1.4% of the American market. Twenty years ago, our participation was 2.2%. I regret that the only facet of the Brazil-United States relation in which there was no progress was trade. The resources allocated for trade promotion in the United States by the Brazilian government were negligible."

As for China, he would like Brazil to see that country more as a competitor than as a partner: "We cannot have a romantic vision of that China of the past, poor, backward, full of peasants, isolated from the world. China gave an extraordinary jump and today is a power. It has a 1.8-trillion-dollars foreign trade, eight times that of Brazil.

"We have to update the vision of China... When we create myths and want to give the impression that China is our allied, that we lead the country, this is pure nonsense. China today seeks capitalism, globalization, the market."