

Celso Amorim Autonomous diplomacy

Brazil will not fall into the trap of polarization between the United States and China, says former foreign minister Celso Amorim

By [Sergio Lirio](#)

CartaCapital, 28.09.2023



Update. Foreign policy has incorporated new themes, says Amorim – Image: House of America

Special advisor to the Presidency, the former Foreign Minister "[Celso Amorim](#)" exchanged, in this third term, [the Itamaraty](#) for a room in the Planalto Palace, but maintained the role of the foreign policy of the [Lula](#) government. Despite the noise caused by certain statements of the president in these nine months, Amorim celebrates the reintegration of Brazil on the international stage, rebuts criticism of the supposed thopage of the external agenda and reaffirms the commitment of the country with multipolarity. "We want to be partners in the United States and China," he said in the interview. Other topics of conversation? G-20, BRICS, the Mercosur-European Union agreement and the sustainable transition of the Brazilian economy.

According to critics, Brazilian diplomacy repeats the same strategy 20 years ago, from the first term of President Lula, despite the world today being another. How do you respond to these analyses?

Celso Amorim: Who says this is totally mistaken. It's not the same agenda. A new theme has

been placed at the centre of foreign policy, the climate urgency. President Lula elected the matter even before the inauguration. In November last year, a few weeks after being elected, he attended [COP27](#), the United Nations climate conference held in Egypt. There, Lula carried the message: Brazil returned to international debate. Last August, we held in Belém do Pará the summit of the Amazon countries. For the first time the meeting had the central and firm purpose of joining efforts for the preservation of the forest. There have been other summits in the past, of course, but the climate situation was one of the many issues, never the main one this time. I hadn't seen anything in that sense. Not just. The meeting convened by French President [Emmanuel Macron](#) to discuss the reform of the financial system, of which Lula was one of the guests, dealt with a subject that was not so in vogue two decades ago. And there is this new initiative that unites Brazil and the United States, Lula and President [Joe Biden](#), in the fight against the precariousness of the work. It is something very important, with the same dimension, I would say, with the fight against hunger for the first term, which enabled an alliance with the then French President Jacques Chirac.

CC: What to expect from the concrete alliance between Lula and Biden in defense of the work?

CA: In principle, it serves as a political motivation for the International Labour Organization itself. From now on, I imagine the formation of several groups with experts from both countries to discuss, for example, the impact of Artificial Intelligence or gender and race discrimination. We wanted, both the US and Brazil, to take advantage of the UN General Assembly to give greater repercussions to the initiative.

CC: You stressed the weight of the climate debate in the foreign policy of the third term, but at the opening of the UN General Assembly, President Lula preferred to talk about inequality. Why? Why??

CA: The president, very clearly, said that inequality is transversal, as Minister Marina Silva likes to say, to other problems. And it needs to be present in every conversation, from finance to security, from climate change to the world of work.

CC: Paraguayan President Santiago said that if the Mercosur does not conclude negotiations with the European Union until December, when he assumes the rotating presidency of the bloc in place of Lula, the free trade agreement will not leave the paper. Is there, in fact, that deadline? Can we resolve issues in the case of European environmental requirements and government procurement?

CA: I don't know if by December negotiations will be concluded. What President Lula has said is that the agreement can no longer be dealt with in the bureaucratic sphere, it is up to the political leaders of the two blocs to decide whether they want it or not. To quote the critics mentioned by you in the first question, the world has changed. The pandemic has shown us to be absolutely fundamental for a country to have a developed pharmaceutical industry. For this, the government procurement mechanism must be maintained. There are no other forms, the tariffs are very low and will be lower with the dynamics of the agreements. We have ahead of us the commitment to the sustainable transition of the economy and this is a unique opportunity for Brazil to reindustrialize. The European Union itself implements support programmes for local industries as well as the United States. The developed countries, in addition to targeted policies, have always relied on military spending, which are not subject to limitations, to make industrial policy. Brazil does not have the same capacity in proportion to the GDP of investments in this area. We cannot want to be the saints of free trade when others do not.

CC: If the agreement with the European Union is not concluded, does Mercosur survive? What is the future of the block?

CA: Brazil wants the agreement with the European Union. For many reasons, starting with the fact that it is good for [Mercosur](#). In addition, the treaty would exert a burden on the overall balance. We don't want the world of the Cold War, it's either the United States or it's China, or even a Cold War in the economic field. We wish for a multipolar world and the agreement would be good to achieve that goal. In any case, Mercosur remains fundamental to talk to the US, with China, with whoever wants. It is also fundamental for Brazil. I regret that in some cases there is no clear perception of this importance.

CC: Does the problem of Mercosur boil down to the will of the members to resume the dynamics of the bloc or are there deeper structural issues to be solved?

CA: The leadership of Brazil, by the presence and size of the market, is fundamental. When a Brazilian president is disinterested, tries to destroy everything, is terrible for Mercosur and ends up being reflected in the attitude of the other members. Back there, Uruguay was very complaining, as it was again, because it said it had no benefits with the bloc. Uruguay had a trade deficit with Brazil. Between 2007 and 2009, we did a broad support program and they increased exports to us and started to have surpluses. We understood that in Mercosur, it was necessary to implement a kind of affirmative action for the smaller economies. They are not automatic mechanisms, you need to look at it on a case-by-case basis. Before President Lula returned, we lived two moments. In the Temer period, there was indifference. In the [Bolsonaro government](#), there was an open opposition to the bloc. We want to consolidate Mercosur and one of the issues of great interest of the government, but that depends on the Congress, is the inclusion of Bolivia, a strategic country, at the same time Andean, Amazon and the platino, with large reserves of lithium and willing to expand the exploitation of natural gas.

CC: The media reported in recent months a dissatisfaction of Washington, which was fundamental in the recognition of the result of the Brazilian elections, with the rapprochement with China. How would you define the current relations between Brazil and the United States?

CA: They are at a great point. We live in a new phase in the world, the development of the green industry, sustainable. This opens up many investment opportunities, joint projects. The Minister of Finance, [Fernando Haddad](#), participated in New York, in the days of [the UN General Assembly](#), of several meetings with investors to present the general lines of the country's ecological transition program. Lula praised on social networks Biden's initiative to participate in a workers' demonstration. We have never had a US president so close to the working ideas. We recognize the importance of U.S. support for the outcome of the elections in Brazil. We don't want to be one partner. We are partners in the United States and are partners in China. And the European Union and others. One is not opposed to another. President Lula was, at the invitation, at the G-7 meeting and at the [BRICS](#) meeting. We have been very much sought after by international interlocutors for being seen as partners in the search for a peaceful, sustainable and less unequal world.

On relations with the US: "They are on an excellent point"

CC: Does this expansion of the BRICS interest Brazil or does the group risk becoming an appendage of Chinese foreign policy?

CA: Enlargement is important over several aspects. It allows for greater regional balance, see the invitation to Argentina. In addition, some new members, such as Saudi Arabia and the

United Arab Emirates, have high financial availability and are fundamental, among other reasons, for the idea of a common currency. To have a common currency you must be backed by. And all in a peaceful environment, because we have side by side Saudi Arabia and Iran, which until recently were diplomatically broken. BRICS is fundamental to the world balance. In the end, in recent years, there has been an attempt to return to geopolitics prior to the formation of the BRICS and the G-20, to reconfigure the decisions in the G-7, which invited the countries à la carte. The expansion also causes positive effects on the internal balance of the group, because the sum of the new members acts as a counterweight.

CC: Do you see any short-term solutions to the war in Ukraine?

CA: While one side and the other believe in victory and the possibility of achieving all of your goals, we will have no peace. Unfortunately, it is necessary to arrive at a fatigue and, apparently, signs of this fatigue begin to appear. Any proposal made today would be bombed by Russia and Ukraine, driven by the illusion that they can win. Although it is Russian aggression, and Brazil condemns aggression, this is not just a matter between Russia and Ukraine. It is a clash between Moscow and NATO, a crucial aspect in this context, as it is necessary to take into account the security concerns of all those involved.

CC: What are the priorities of the rotating presidency of Brazil in the G-20?

CA: There are many points, I do not know if it is possible to draw up a goal plan. In principle, I would say that the G-20 needs to be the dominant forum in the economic debate, with repercussions, of course, on the political side. It is the proper space to conduct global issues, not the G-7 or the BRICS. President Lula has stressed the aspect of global governance. And that includes updating the World Trade Organization and the reform of the United Nations Security Council. There is a growing recognition of the need for change, the problem is that often the proposals are palliative.

CC: Is the world more complex, even more hostile, than it was in Lula's first two terms?

CA: More complex, certainly. In relation to Brazil, I see no hostility. We've been more in demand than in the past. Before, Lula was seen positively, but there was an effort to fit us into what existed. That's changed. The president summed up, in a way, about the climate, but the phrase applies to other dimensions. In the past, the world was talking about the Amazon. Today, the Amazon speaks. "Ill with you to the "a "Cerm...or "Cerm...or""", "Cerm...or", "Cerm...or",

Published in the 1279th edition of *CartaCapital*, on October 4, 2023.

This text appears in the printed edition of *CartaCapital* under the title 'Autonomous Diplomacy'