

LOOKING AT THE BALD EAGLE: PUBLIC OPINION ON THE UNITED STATES*

Edison Benedito da Silva Filho**
Rodrigo Fracalossi de Moraes**

RESUMO

O artigo analisa a percepção da opinião pública em vários países acerca dos Estados Unidos e de sua atual influência no mundo. São abordadas as mudanças de percepção advindas a partir da eleição de Barack Obama, em novembro de 2008, e de como o chamado “efeito Obama” pode indicar desconfiança na percepção sobre os Estados Unidos em alguns países do Oriente Médio. Analisa-se, especificamente, o Brasil e como a percepção da população do país sobre os Estados Unidos melhorou após a eleição de Barack Obama. Ainda em relação ao Brasil, são analisados dados da pesquisa Sistema de Indicadores de Percepção Social (SIPS) – Defesa Nacional, demonstrando-se que as faixas etárias mais jovens da população percebem os Estados Unidos mais como possível ameaça do que como possível aliado do Brasil para os próximos vinte anos.

Palavras-chave: Estados Unidos; antiamericanismo; opinião pública; *soft power*; diplomacia pública; Brasil.

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the public opinion views in some countries about the United States and its current influence in the world. It examines the changes in perceptions resulting from the election of Barack Obama in November 2008, and how the “Obama effect” may indicate distrust of the United States in some Middle Eastern countries. It analyzes, specifically, how the perception of the Brazilian population over the United States improved after the election of Barack Obama. Also in relation to Brazil, we analyze some data from the Social Perception Indicators System – National Defense, demonstrating that younger age groups of the Brazilian population perceive the United States more as a possible threat than as a possible ally of Brazil for the next twenty years.

Keywords: United States; anti-americanism; public opinion; *soft power*; public diplomacy; Brazil.

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** Planning and Research Officer of the Directorate of International Economics and Political Studies (Dinte) of Ipea.

1 INTRODUCTION

The United States, currently the greatest economic, technological and military power, has interests spread throughout the globe. The reach of its government, armed forces, companies, non-governmental organizations, culture, as well as other aspects/institutions of this country is unparalleled: the American economy is the largest in the world; its companies operate all over the planet; the largest part of international transactions are made through the American dollar; military expenditures of the country are the greatest in the globe; the products of its cultural industry are widespread; the country is the largest donor of official development assistance (in absolute terms); and its network of diplomatic missions holds no equivalents in terms of global reach.

Due to such presence/influence, public opinion regarding the United States tends not to be neutral in most countries. It is difficult to be neutral in relation to a country with such power: opinions are generally either positive or negative. In part for the same reason it is attributed to the United States the responsibility – or at least the co-responsibility – for diverse economic, political, military and/or environmental failures and successes throughout the world, be them local, national, regional or global. And with the progress of mass communication technologies and the consequent improved access to information in the international media, more and more one's vision of the United States is not restricted to its influence exerted on each nation/region separately, but it incorporates perceptions of the manner how that country acts on a global scale.

From the American foreign policy point of view, positive views abroad are an important asset of soft power, used to reach its objectives in foreign countries with less need for coercive measures, which are not always efficient and almost never popular with the populations of the target country.

But what is the percentage of the population around the world that views negatively the American influence? And what is, particularly, the perception of Brazilians on the United States? The election of Barack Obama, an African-American democrat, resulted in an impact on the views of citizens of other countries on the United States?

The objective of this article is to point out possible answers to these questions, discussing the perception of the population of selected countries (focusing on Brazil) on the United States. In addition to this introduction and the final considerations, this work has four sections. The second section explores the importance of public opinion in determining the format of foreign policy of States, relating it to the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy. The third section analyzes the various “anti-Americanisms”, based on the works of Katzenstein and Keohane (2006, 2007). The fourth section analyses the profiles of the positions regarding the United States in different regions of the globe, based on surveys taken in several countries. And the fifth section analyses the perception of Brazilians on the United States based on data obtained through the System of Indicators of Social Perception (*Sistema de Indicadores de Percepção Social* – SIPS), carried out in August 2011 by Ipea, and on international surveys.

2 PUBLIC OPINION, SOFT POWER AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

One of the topics present in debates among scholars of the Realist and Liberal schools, in the field of International Relations, is on the role of public opinion in determining the format of States' foreign policy.

For realists/neorealists such a role should have little or no importance, due to the volatility of public opinion and the little contact of most people – in the greater part of the countries – with foreign policy issues.

In some cases, it is admitted that public opinion could in fact become an obstacle, but the State should ignore it or mold it into a manner that would adapt it to the national interest, whose definition and interpretation should be always the State's responsibility. Following this perception, the State should be the *leader* of the public opinion, as stated by Lippman (1978, p. 16-27), Morgenthau (2003, p. 1018-1019) and Kennan (1984, p. 61, 93, 158).

For liberals/neoliberals public opinion has a relevant role in international relations, especially on democratic regimes (Holsti, 2004; Nye Jr., 2004, p. 105; Knecht and Weatherford, 2006; Wilson III, 2008, p. 113). From a domestic point of view, it would impose a limit on the actions governments, which could not ignore the citizens' opinion when formulating public policies, given the domestic political cost this would ensue. From an external point of view, a favorable public opinion in a foreign country (that is, public opinion of an "A" country in a "B" country) would be an important asset of soft power, facilitating the activities of its institutions in that country and enhancing the possibilities of establishing or maintaining cooperative relations. In this perception, the State would be a *follower* (and not a leader) of public opinion (Guraziu, 2008).

Aside the more realist or more liberal foreign policy orientation of each nation, governments seek to have and maintain a positive image of itself in the public opinion of other countries. And the costs and benefits associated to this image tend to become more relevant in an environment with a more disseminated access to information and with the strengthening of public participation in governmental politics.

In the case of the United States, the country disputed with the Soviet Union, during the Cold War, not only over military, economic, technological and political supremacy, but also on the field of ideas. The American government promoted the systematic "demonization" of the "Soviet model", highlighting its authoritarianism, lack of free initiative, and inefficiency, while the Soviet government highlighted the inequality, the greed, and the racism present in the "American model". To promote a positive image of itself (as well as a negative image of the other) the United States government used several public diplomacy instruments, coordinated by the United States Information Agency (Usia), created in 1953.¹ With this tool, images of grandeur, richness, liberty, professional opportunities and good public services were disseminated, all associated with the "capitalist model", while it was shown that the "other model" did not offer the same benefits, that it was going "backwards in history" and that its values were incompatible with the national traditions.

However, based on the perspective that the public diplomacy was a vestige of the Cold War, its apparatus was shrunken in the United States throughout the 1990s, culminating in the deactivation of Usia in 1999 (Nakamura and Weed, 2009, p. 2, 20-21). Furthermore, since in that decade the views of the United States were mainly positive in almost all the world (except for the Middle East) (Katzenstein and Keohane, 2007, p. 10), it was considered that there was no need to maintain the structure of public diplomacy with the dimension that it had then.

After September 11, however, in the context of the War on Terror, the image of the United States rapidly deteriorated, rekindling the interest in the American public diplomacy as a foreign policy tool (Nakamura and Weed, 2009, p. 6).² The Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication (DSB) stated

1. Until 1973, the U.S. Department of State under the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) also coordinated public diplomacy, the year which it was absorbed into the Usia.

2. Other factors also contributed to the negative views on the United States during the period, such as: i) the status of the country as the only superpower in the world; ii) the reaction against globalization, many times interpreted as beneficial only to the United States; iii) the rejection by the United States to integrate important international regimes, such as the Ottawa Convention, the Kyoto Protocol, and the International Criminal Court; and iv) the apparent incompetence of the country in response to certain events, such as the Hurricane Katrina (CSIS, 2007, p. 20).

that the American public diplomacy was in crisis and highlighted the image problems the United States was facing, particularly in Muslim countries (Department of Defense, 2004), a similar conclusion to the works of other institutions, like: Rand Corporation (Wolf Jr. and Rosen, 2004); Heritage Foundation (Johnson & Dale, 2003; Johnson, Dale and Cronin, 2005); Brookings Institution (Amr, 2004); Council on Foreign Relations (2003); Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, created by the Department of State (Advisory Group..., 2003); and Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS, 2007) (Nakamura and Weed, 2009, p. 2-3; Kelley, 2005, p. 1).

Regarding Brazil, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) had already pointed out some “misunderstandings” in the perception of the American foreign policy, creating obstacles for the improvement of the relationship between the two countries. In a memo of 2000, aimed at guide the efforts of the Presidency of the United States for strengthening relations with Brazil, the institution listed five critical subjects to overcome through dialogue with Brazilian society:

(...) the legacy and ambiguity of past U.S. policy toward Brazil; the fear in Brazil (and for some within the United States) that free trade in the hemisphere will harm them; the perception in Brazil that the United States seeks to diminish Brazilian sovereignty in the Amazon region; wariness both domestically and among Brazil's neighbors of too close a relationship between Brazil and the United States; and the elements of competition as well as cooperation that exist between the United States and Brazil (Council of Foreign Relations, 2000).

However, in spite of the influential voices in the United States on this subject, the public diplomacy initiatives during the George W. Bush Administration (2003-2009) were not capable of containing the deterioration of the United States' image and reverting the unilateral and militaristic image of the country's foreign policy (Nye Jr., 2004, 2005).

Only with the election of Barack Obama, in November 2008, a positive rupture in the image of the United States was made possible. With a personal history that was profoundly different from the one of his predecessor (democrat, African-American, Arabic last name, son of an African student, did not serve the Armed Forces etc.) and with a conciliatory speech to the international community, Obama represented the antithesis of the figure and the government of George W. Bush. In his inaugural speech, he stated that his government would seek a new path for the relations with the Muslim world, besides committing to remove the American troops from Iraq and seeking peace in Afghanistan. On the day after his inauguration, he pledged to close the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp and secret detention centers of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In March 2009, seeking reconciliation with Russia, he declared that the project of the anti-ballistic missile shield in Eastern Europe would be suspended. He also rejected some terms, such as “global war on terror” and “Islamic extremism”. Still in 2009 Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize.³

Due to these and other initiatives/events, the foreign image of the United States improved substantially in his government, a phenomenon denominated “Obama effect”, as analyzed in the section 4 of this article. However, this did not occur in most of the Middle East, where the views of the country continued negative. To comprehend this point, it is necessary to highlight the complexity of the public opinion on the United States throughout the world, varying according to the country/region and the subject in question. This topic will be handled in the next section.

3. For a critical analysis of this issue, highlighting the changes in public diplomacy in the Obama Administration, and, at the same time, with suggestions for its improvement, see Krause and Evera (2009).

3 DIFFERENT “ANTI-AMERICANISMS”: BETWEEN THE OPINION AND THE BIAS

Foreign policy actions of the United States are related to diverse processes that have brought problems and solutions for several subjects and in different parts of the globe. On the one hand, the country supported – or continues to support – political regimes and groups of authoritarian character and/or associated to human rights violations. Such actions contributed to the downfall of democratic governments and/or to the remaining in power of non-democratic governments, as occurred: in Iran in 1953; in Latin-American countries from the 1950s to the 1980s; in most of the Francisco Franco regime in Spain (1938-1973); in Egypt during the Hosni Mubarak regime (1981-2011); or how it still occurs in its support for the Saudi Arabian royal family. On the other hand, the economic recovery of Japan, South Korea, and the Western European countries in the post-Second World War (after 1950 in the case of South Korea), as well as the building of democratic institutions in most of these countries, occurred, in large part, due to the American economic and military support, making the United States a key part in the defense, stabilization and democratization of these regions.

However, it is often attributed to the United States the responsibility for failures with little or no relation to the American government, policies, population, or culture. When it acts in other countries, it is common for the United States to face intense opposition, which frequently denounces the supposed connections between the American actions and shady interests motivating them. Such complaints also can be observed when the country does not act. Both commission and omission can equally be attributed to shady interests:

Around the world, not just in the Middle East, when bad things happen there is a widespread tendency to blame America for its sins, either of commission or omission. When its Belgrade embassy is bombed, Chinese people believe it was a deliberate act of the United States government; terror plots by native British subjects are viewed as reflecting British support for American policy; when AIDS devastates much of Africa, the United States is faulted for not doing enough to stop it (Katzenstein and Keohane, 2006).

However, the complexity of this phenomenon should be pointed out. Certain groups in some countries may present a negative view of the economic influence of the United States and, at the same time, admire its technological capacities and the products of its cultural industry. Differently, other groups may express resistance or unconditional admiration of the United States, refusing or absorbing its ideas, information, and products simply because they come from that country or are associated to it. This fact stems from the complexity of the American society as well as from the various “lenses” through which different groups observe the United States and its actions (Katzenstein and Keohane, 2006).

With the objective to clarify the point, Katzenstein and Keohane (2006) differentiate two basic types of positions contrary to the United States, the *opinion* and the *bias*:

Some expressions of unfavorable attitudes merely reflect opinion: unfavorable judgments about the United States or its policies. Others, however, reflect bias: a predisposition to believe negative reports about the United States and to discount positive ones. Bias implies a distortion of information processing, while adverse opinion is consistent with maintaining openness to new information that will change one’s views (Katzenstein and Keohane, 2006).⁴

4. The quoted excerpt is from an article published by the authors in 2006, which served as a base for a book’s chapter published by Katzenstein and Keohane in 2007. In the 2007 work, the authors included *distrust* as a third position.

Based in part on concrete elements (opinion), in part on “apriorism” (bias), contrary positions to the United States are present in different segments of the civil societies and governments in several countries.⁵ Proposals/actions of the American government, as well as the actions of its companies and the diffusion of its cultural products, rend strong discussions among parliamentarians, government officials, scholars, media, religious groups, and civil society on their convergence to the national interests. According to the authors, however, opinion and bias should not be understood as absolute positions, but as ideal types: between the two extremes there is a *continuum*, with *distrust* being in an intermediate position (Katzenstein and Keohane, 2007).

In spite of these reservations, it is possible to identify different patterns of perception of the United States according to the regions of the world. Through changes in opinions observed before and after the War on Terror, one can observe the differences in contrary positions to the United States in regional terms. According to the classification proposed by Katzenstein and Keohane (2006, 2007), one can verify that these positions tend to be of *distrust* in most of the Middle East and *opinitives* in most part of Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

4 VIEWS OF THE UNITED STATES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

In perception surveys taken in several countries, one may observe that the public opinion of the United States is mainly positive in most nations, though with important regional variations. Besides, in most of the world, the negative views are due more to *opinion* than to *distrust* or *bias*, according to the distinction of Katzenstein and Keohane (2006, 2007): that is, they change in response to modifications in the United States foreign policy. The trend to a position of distrust or bias is concentrated in the Middle East and in Pakistan, where the negative views of the United States are permanently high, independent from the actions and the profile of the American government (Katzenstein and Keohane, 2006). The anti-American positions are, therefore, more structural than volatile in these countries (Chioza, 2007, p. 95).

In table 1 there is data from surveys taken between 2002 and 2011 by the Pew Global Attitudes Project (2012), in which people from 56 countries were asked if their views of the United States were favorable or unfavorable. The data is separated by countries/groups of countries, ordered from the most positive to the least positive: Sub-Saharan Africa; Asia and Pacific; North America and Europe; Latin America; Russia; and Middle East and Pakistan.⁶

Of the 34 listed countries, favorable views had an average above 50% in 21 and above 40% in 28. One can observe in this same table the changes from the election of Barack Obama on. Comparing the 2006-2007 and 2010-2011 periods, out of the 22 countries with available data for these years, the percentages of favorable views were higher in seventeen of them, with twelve countries presenting an increase equal to or greater than 10 percentage points (p.p.).

The countries of Sub-Saharan Africa were the ones which presented, on average, the most favorable views, particularly Kenya and Ghana. There are some changes through time, but the trend is that they maintain positive views, standing out, nevertheless, the better American image in the last two bienniums.

5. Other than the division between *opinion*, *distrust* and *bias*, the authors establish a typology with four types of motivations for the anti-Americanism: i) sovereign-nationalist; ii) liberal; iii) social; and iv) radical. They still include two additional categories: i) elitist; and ii) legacy (Katzenstein & Keohane, 2007). Such typologies are not covered by this work because of scope and space limitations. For a synthetic explanation of each one of these types of anti-Americanism, see Princeton Task Force... (2010, p. 1-2). And for a critical view of this same topic, see Zogby International (2010).

6. In each of these groups, there were not considered countries of less relevance in comparison to countries of the same group (Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Bolivia, for example).

TABLE 1
Favorable views of the United States
(In %)

		2002-2003	2004-2005	2006-2007	2008-2009	2010-2011	Total Average
Sub-Saharan Africa	Kenya	80	–	87	90	89	87
	Ghana	83	–	80	–	–	82
	Nigeria	69	–	66	72	81	70
	Senegal	–	–	69	–	–	69
	South Africa	65	–	–	60	–	63
	Tanzania	53	–	46	65	–	55
Asia and Pacific	Philippines	90	–	–	–	–	90
	Japan	72	–	62	55	76	65
	South Korea	49	–	58	74	79	64
	Australia	59	–	–	46	–	53
	China	–	42	41	44	51	45
	Indonesia	38	38	30	50	57	43
	India	–	–	–	–	41	41
North America and Europe	United States	–	83	78	86	82	82
	Poland	79	62	61	68	72	69
	Canada	68	59	55	68	–	63
	Great Britain	73	57	54	61	63	61
	Italy	65	–	53	–	–	61
	France	52	40	39	59	74	53
	Germany	53	40	34	48	63	47
	Spain	38	41	29	46	63	44
Latin America	Venezuela	82	–	56	–	–	69
	Peru	67	–	61	–	–	64
	Brazil	–	–	–	–	62	62
	Mexico	64	–	56	58	54	57
	Argentina	34	–	16	30	42	30
	Russia	49	49	42	45	57	48
Middle East and Pakistan	Israel	78	–	78	71	72	75
	Lebanon	32	42	47	53	51	45
	Egypt	–	–	26	25	19	23
	Jordan	13	13	18	22	17	17
	Pakistan	12	22	21	18	15	17
	Turkey	23	27	11	13	14	17
	Palestinian Territories	0	–	13	15	18	12

Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project (2012, p. 58-60).

Obs.: 1. The question was made as follows: "Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of the United States".

2. The answer "favorable" includes the options "very favorable" and "somewhat favorable".

In a slightly lower level are the views of the countries in Asia/Pacific and in North America/Europe. In Asia/Pacific stands out, by a large difference, the favorable view of the Filipinos, the highest among the surveyed countries, superior even than the one of Americans about their own country (with the observation that the Philippines data is not recent), followed by the favorable views of the Japanese and the South Koreans. In the case of South Korea, it can be observed the significant evolution in the percentages between the first and the last bienniums (from 49% to 79%).

Among the countries of North America/Europe (besides the United States), stand out the favorable perceptions from Poland, Canada, Great Britain and Italy. France, Germany and Spain presented significant changes during the examined period: in these three countries, it is worth noting the most favorable views in

the periods of 2008-2009 and 2010-2011 in comparison to the previous periods, indicating in large part the so-called “Obama effect”.⁷

In Latin America, with the exception of Argentina, views were positive.⁸ It draws attention the positive perception of the Venezuelans, diverging from the position of the government regarding the United States. In the case of Brazil, one can observe the high percentage of favorable views, in levels close to or superior to those of important allies of the United States, such as South Korea, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom.

In Russia the view is moderately positive, while in the Middle East it is negative. The perception is positive in Israel and moderately positive in Lebanon, while in the other countries it is almost always below 25%. In Turkey, the percentages were low during the whole period, reaching 11% in 2006-2007, even being a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and an important ally of the United States. Therefore, one can observe the distance of the population regarding the foreign policy of the Turkish State in this matter.⁹ Also stands out the case of Pakistan, whose government has an alliance with the government of the United States that equally does not reflect the perception of the population.¹⁰ The Middle East is in fact different in comparison to other regions. Though some aspects of the United States are seen in a positive way in the region, these are not capable of yielding a positive perception of the United States as a whole. In the case of Pakistan, for example, even with the \$600 million aid provided by the United States after the floods in the country in 2010, the perception did not improve (Wike, 2012). Besides, the public opinion in the region is the most negative regarding different aspects of the United States, such as: American democracy; the people; ideas and customs; music, film and television; trust in the United States President; among others.¹¹

Another way of capturing views on the United States is to ask about the American influence in the world. In table 2, there is data from surveys taken by the BBC World Service Poll. Aiming to observe the “Obama effect”, the table compares averages for the 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 periods.

Though the text of the question and the results present some divergence in comparison to the previous survey, the trends are the same. The perception of the United States significantly improved since 2008 due to the so-called “Obama effect”. Among the 21 listed countries with data for both bienniums, it improved in seventeen of them, while the percentage of negative views diminished in twenty countries.

The countries of Sub-Saharan Africa presented again the most positive views, equally with a special note to Kenya and Ghana. Countries from Asia and the Pacific presented views that were from moderately negative to moderately positive, standing out the positive views of the Philippines and South Korea. Though Japan presented a relatively low percentage of positive responses (different than what is shown in table 1), it had at the same time a low percentage of negative answers, superior only to the Philippines, having a wide percentage of neutrals

7. For an analysis of anti-Americanism in Europe, see Gienow Hecht (2006).

8. Both Katzenstein and Keohane (2006) and Chioza (2007, p. 96) consider that Argentina is a country closer to the Middle East than to the rest of Latin America in this point.

9. For an analysis of the anti-Americanism in Turkey in recent periods, highlighting how this has been transformed into a political force in the country, see Grigoriadis (2010).

10. For an analysis of the relations between Pakistan and the United States, with emphasis on the perception of the Pakistani population, see Ajami (2010/2011). For an analysis of the anti-Americanism in the Arab world, see Lynch (2007).

11. Data available in Pew Global Attitudes Project (2012). For an analysis of these data for the year 2002, see Chioza (2007). For different views on anti-Americanism in the world, see Makdisi (2003) and Blaydes and Linzer (2012).

(the largest among the listed countries). In these countries, one can observe the growth of the positive views, indicative of the “Obama effect”, demonstrating at the same time the existence of *opinion* and not *distrust* or *bias*.

Among the countries of North America and Europe, the views went from moderately negative to moderately positive, with emphasis to the fact that in Germany, and in a smaller scale in Canada, the percentage of negative answers were higher than the positive ones. France, especially, presented in the last biennium the most positive view among the listed countries. Even though there is a tradition in France – and in other parts of Western Europe – of belittling the United States for their supposed religiosity and small appreciation for the arts, this is mainly an elite phenomenon, being not backed up by the most part of the population (Katzenstein and Keohane, 2006).¹² This reinforces the Katzenstein and Keohane (2006) thesis of the non-existence of distrust or bias in the views of European countries on the United States.

In Latin America stands out the positive views of Brazil and Peru, although in an inferior level than the ones presented in table 1. The percentage of the Brazilian population with positive views was higher or close to the ones observed in important United States’ allies. Out of the 27 countries where the surveys were carried out (not all listed in table 2), Brazil was the sixth in terms of positive views. One can also observe, in this case, the improvement in the perception.

In both the Middle East countries listed and in Pakistan predominate the negative views, standing out, at the same time, the broad parcel of neutral views in Pakistan and the improvement in Egypt. The BBC World Service Poll (2009, 2010) highlighted the improvement in the Egyptian view of the United States after the election of Barack Obama. However, in the survey of the Pew Global Attitudes Project (2012), the improvement was far inferior and both the United States government and other aspects of the American society remained unpopular in the country. The results seem contradictory and, if one analyses the data of other surveys, such as the World Public Opinion (2009), the Zogby International (2010, 2011), as well as scientific works on the subject (Krause and Evera, 2009; Blaydes and Linzer, 2012), one observes the proximity with the results of the Pew Global Attitudes Project.

The following section will analyze in greater detail the perception of Brazilians on the influence exerted by the United States, using as a base the data recently produced by Ipea and some data from the Pew Global Attitudes Project (2012).

12. See also Anti-Americanism... (2003).

TABLE 2

Perception of the United States' influence in the world (2007-2008 and 2009-2010)

(In %)

		Bienniums	Perception			
			Predominantly positive	Neutral	Predominantly negative	
Africa	Ghana	2007-2008	80	7	13	
		2009-2010	78	13	9	
	Kenya	2007-2008	71	13	17	
		2009-2010	77	10	14	
	Nigeria	2007-2008	66	7	28	
2009-2010		70	7	23		
	South Africa	2009-2010	54	32	14	
Asia and Pacific	Philippines	2007-2008	80	11	12	
		2009-2010	86	7	8	
		South Korea	2009-2010	66	6	29
	Indonesia	2007-2008	33	13	49	
		2009-2010	47	21	32	
	Australia	2007-2008	32	10	57	
		2009-2010	41	20	39	
	India	2007-2008	31	58	22	
		2009-2010	41	32	28	
	Japan	2007-2008	25	41	34	
2009-2010		35	51	15		
China	2007-2008	36	16	52		
	2009-2010	31	21	49		
North America and Europe	United States	2007-2008	58	9	34	
		2009-2010	48	20	33	
	Italy	2007-2008	47	16	37	
		2009-2010	59	18	23	
	United Kingdom	2007-2008	38	13	49	
		2009-2010	47	14	39	
	France	2007-2008	34	14	52	
		2009-2010	46	15	40	
	Canada	2007-2008	33	9	59	
		2009-2010	42	16	43	
Spain	2007-2008	30	16	55		
	2009-2010	41	24	36		
Germany	2007-2008	19	13	69		
	2009-2010	38	17	46		
Latin America	Brazil	2007-2008	39	21	40	
		2009-2010	59	14	28	
		Peru	2009-2010	53	24	23
	Mexico	2007-2008	11	34	55	
2009-2010		18	39	44		
Middle East and Pakistan	Russia	2007-2008	19	25	56	
		2009-2010	32	28	41	
	Turkey	2007-2008	21	12	68	
		2009-2010	13	28	59	
Egypt	2007-2008	14	21	66		
	2009-2010	37	24	40		
	Pakistan	2009-2010	13	39	49	

Source: BBC World Service Poll.

5 THE BRAZILIANS PERCEPTION ON THE UNITED STATES: DATA FROM THE SIPS SURVEY – NATIONAL DEFENSE

The position of the United States in the international political scene and the ubiquity of its economic and cultural influence may have contributed to the consolidation of an image among the Brazilian population that seems, at first sight, contradictory: on the one hand, one observes the perception of the United States as a possible future threat and, on the other, as an important ally.

The survey with the Brazilian population on national defense issues, carried out under the SIPS Project, produced results that give evidence to this “threat-opportunity” duality in the view on the relations between Brazil and the United States.¹³

In the survey, the interviewees were asked about the possibility of some country (from a pre-selected list) being a military threat to Brazil over the next twenty years. Table 3 presents the perceptions on this matter.

TABLE 3

Perception of foreign military threat (over the next twenty years, by regions of Brazil)

(In %)

	Central-West	Northeast	North	Southeast	South	Brazil
United States	43.7	36.9	40.9	41.1	20.6	37.1
Argentina	13.3	14.4	22.2	14.6	18.6	15.6
Bolivia	11.9	7.7	24.8	10.6	18.6	15.6
Colombia	8.5	9.2	20.5	10.0	9.9	10.5
China	9.3	8.1	14.4	10.5	7.9	9.7
European Countries	8.9	7.6	12.8	9.4	5.7	8.6
Russia	10.4	9.2	18.1	8.5	4.4	9.0
Paraguay	7.8	6.2	8.1	5.0	3.7	5.6
Venezuela	7.4	7.0	9.4	5.4	2.9	5.9
India	1.1	3.3	3.7	1.9	0.7	2.2
Others	0.4	1.0	2.0	1.5	0.4	1.2
None	28.5	19.2	14.1	25.3	23.2	22.6
Did not know/ did not respond	1.8	9.6	2.0	3.9	7.5	5.7

Source: SIPS Survey/Ipea, 2011.

Obs.: Question: “(...) Brazil currently lives at peace with all the other countries of the world. But what about the future? Do you think that some of the countries listed, over the next twenty years, could be a military threat to Brazil?”.

The United States was the most mentioned by the interviewees (37.1%) as a possible threat to Brazil over the next two decades. In comparison, the second most mentioned (Argentina) reached less than half (15.6%) of the American percentage. The table also shows the differences in regional terms: the perception of the United States as a possible threat reached percentages close to 40% in all the regions, except for the South, where only 20.6% of the interviewees considered it a relevant threat over the next twenty years.

13. Information on the SIPS Project is available (in Portuguese) at: <http://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6186&Itemid=33>.

However, possibly the most relevant information for this subject emerges when one compares the perception of military threat to that of opportunities in terms of partnerships or alliances over the next two decades. As shown in table 4, the results indicate that, far from existing a clear division between countries that are “friends” and “enemies”, the countries pointed out as the main threats also figure as the most relevant potential partners of Brazil.

TABLE 4

Perception of the possibility of alliances or partnerships with other countries (over the next twenty years, by regions of Brazil)

(In %)

	Central-West	Northeast	North	Southeast	South	Brazil
United States	37.0	32.8	54.7	32.0	18.6	32.4
Argentina	30.7	24.7	34.6	34.0	35.2	31.4
China	21.9	13.8	14.8	19.8	12.0	16.7
Bolivia	21.9	7.7	18.8	17.4	17.5	15.1
Paraguay	22.6	11.3	16.1	17.1	12.0	15.0
European Countries	18.5	12.2	27.9	15.7	6.8	14.6
Colombia	11.5	5.7	13.1	11.4	8.9	9.6
Venezuela	10.4	6.3	11.7	9.8	4.6	8.3
India	7.0	6.1	10.1	6.2	6.6	6.6
Russia	6.3	4.8	7.4	6.1	3.7	5.5
Others	2.2	1.6	3.0	1.8	1.6	1.8
None	12.6	12.5	7.4	17.2	14.8	14.4
Did not know / did not respond	2.2	11.5	1.0	6.1	11.7	7.7

Source: SIPS Survey/lpea, 2011.

Obs.: Question: “Do you think that some of the countries listed below will be, over the next twenty years, important allies of Brazil? That is, they will be important friends or partners of Brazil?”.

The United States had again the greater number of answers: 32.4% of the interviewees pointed this country out as a probable ally or an important partner, a percentage close to the one reached by Argentina (31.4%). Following were China (16.7%), Bolivia (15.1%), Paraguay (15%), and European countries (14.6%). In the North and Central-West regions there was a preponderance of an optimistic view on the possibilities of strategic cooperation between Brazil and the United States over the next twenty years: respectively 54.7% and 37% of the interviewees of these regions pointed that country out as a probable partner. The South region presented the more skeptical perception on this subject, with only 18.6%.

But in what segments of the Brazilian population the perception of threat and of a possible alliance with the United States is concentrated?

Table 5 demonstrates that the younger tend to present a bigger perception of threat than the older. Although such a fact also occurs in relation to other countries, such as Argentina, the difference by age group is more pronounced in the case of the United States. Regarding China, no significant variations in terms of age group were observed.

TABLE 5

Perception of foreign military threat: United States, Argentina and China (over the next twenty years, by age and educational attainment)
(In %)

	United States	Argentina	China
Age group			
18 to 24 years	43.0	17.6	10.6
25 to 34 years	42.4	17.3	9.6
35 to 44 years	39.2	14.9	11.5
45 to 54 years	35.3	13.4	8.6
55 to 64 years	29.6	12.6	8.6
Over 64 years	28.3	17.8	8.3
Educational attainment			
No schooling and primary education (incomplete/complete)	34.1	16.9	9.2
High School (incomplete/complete)	39.5	16.3	9.3
College (incomplete/complete)/post-grad	40.3	8.0	13.0

Source: SIPS Survey/Ipea from 2011.

When analyzing educational attainment, one can observe that the differences are less accentuated than in the age groups. It may be observed, however, a slight tendency of people in the high school or college levels to present a greater perception of threat, which also happens in relation to China. For Argentina, one may observe the opposite.

In table 6, there is data on the perception of the possibilities of alliances or partnerships with the same three countries listed in table 5. One may observe that the variations between age groups are also manifested, but the differences are smaller than the ones in the perception of threats. That is, the youngest tend to perceive the United States more as a threat than as a possible ally. Regarding Argentina, differences by age group are not significant, and in the case of China there is a slight tendency of the younger ones seeing that country as a possible ally or strategic partner.

Regarding educational attainment, there are no significant differences in relation to the perception of possible alliances with the United States. In the case of Argentina, the interviewees of college grade level manifested a slightly higher tendency of viewing the country as a possible ally or partner. In relation to China, one may observe that the difference in positive perception among the interviewees of college grade level and the rest is greater than for the United States and Argentina.

One has to consider also that the views of the Brazilians are more favorable for some aspects of the United States than for the others. In the bilateral relations, both governments may consider that the strengthening of cooperation in areas related to subjects with more positive perceptions would face, possibly, a weaker domestic opposition. In decreasing order, according to data from the Pew Global Attitudes Project (2012), the positive views of some aspects of the United States were as follows: for scientific and technological advances, 80% of Brazilians admire them; for anti-terrorist actions led by the United States, 66% said they approve them; for the music, film and television, 60% said they like them; for ideas and customs, 49% declared that they are good; for American democracy 48% declared they like it; and for the American way of doing business, 45% declared they like it.

TABLE 6

Perception of the possibility of alliances or partnerships: United States, Argentina and China (over the next twenty years, by age and educational attainment)

(In %)

	United States	Argentina	China
Age group			
18 to 24 years	33.6	30.9	16.7
25 to 34 years	35.1	30.9	17.1
35 to 44 years	34.0	29.6	17.6
45 to 54 years	31.4	32.8	17.7
55 to 64 years	27.4	30.8	15.6
Over 64 years	30.8	29.3	13.8
Educational attainment			
No schooling and primary education (incomplete/complete)	30.4	32.0	15.0
High School (incomplete/complete)	34.8	28.7	16.9
College (incomplete/complete)/post-grad	31.7	34.4	22.7

Source: SIPS Survey/Ipea from 2011.

Since the views of Brazilians are particularly favorable (positive views equal or above two thirds of the interviewees) for the scientific and technological advances and the anti-terrorists actions, these topics imply, possibly, a weaker domestic opposition in Brazil to the broadening of cooperation (depending, of course, of the manner in which cooperation will actually occur, especially in anti-terrorist actions). In fact, there are recent projects of cooperation in these fields, such as: the Science Without Borders program; the United States-Brazil Defense Cooperation Agreement (signed on April 2010); and the United States-Brazil Defense Cooperation Dialogue (DCD).

6 FINAL REMARKS

Since the beginning of the War on Terror, the United States has sought to improve its image in other countries, in the aftermath of the deleterious effects of wars in the George W. Bush Administration. These efforts gained impetus with the election of Barack Obama, based on a government platform that pledged the pacification of the armed conflicts abroad involving the country and the rapprochement with developing countries in the search for common interests. Despite the fact that the degree of success and effectiveness of these initiatives is questionable, in most of the world they produced a positive effect for the image of the United States.

Once the influence on foreign public opinions constitutes one of the essential basis for the accumulation of soft power and, not by chance, the declared objective of the American diplomacy, it can be expected an ever greater preoccupation of this country in broadening its direct communication ties with the population of emergent countries, favored by the wide dissemination of new communication technologies.

In the case of Brazil, recent surveys present a favorable perception of the United States. This positive view contrasts, at first glance, with the results of the SIPS, which highlighted the United States as the main military threat for Brazil. However, these results are coherent when the methodological conditions of these surveys and their different objectives are considered. The fact that the majority of Brazilians perceive the United States as an important partner does not mean that the United States are not to be feared due to its military power.

Favorable views of foreign countries, whether they are about culture, economy or political role in the international scene, implicate a smaller domestic resistance to the broadening of bilateral relations. From the Brazilian government point of view, the broadening of the cooperation with the United States implicates a weaker domestic political cost as the image of that country improves among the Brazilian population. In this sense, the change towards a more favorable perception of the United States by Brazilians since the beginning of the Obama Administration represents an opportunity for deepening the economic and political relations between the two countries, even if its reach is limited by other factors.

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