Brazilian Diplomacy and the Washington–Rio de Janeiro “Axis” during the World War II Era

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The era of the Second World War had a profound impact on Brazilian foreign policy. Relations with Germany, Brazil’s leading European trade partner, reached their twentieth-century nadir. Britain’s financial and commercial role in Brazilian affairs weakened still further, continuing the decline initiated by the Depression. Among the great power rivals for influence in Brazil, the beneficiary of wartime circumstances was the United States. Indeed, the unprecedented intensification of relations with that country was one of the most significant chapters in modern Brazilian diplomacy and an historical phenomenon pregnant with implications for not only wartime but postwar hemispheric relations. This article seeks to contribute to an understanding of the Rio–Washington “axis” by re-assessing two of its key aspects: the nature of Brazilian diplomacy and the character and objectives of American policy toward Brazil.

The major statement on wartime Brazilian–American relations is Frank D. McCann’s The Brazilian–American Alliance, 1937–1945. According to McCann, Brazil was a somewhat passive victim of stronger, domineering powers. Berlin’s goal in Brazil was “conquest and domination to fulfill the Fuehrer’s dream of world dictatorship,” and Roosevelt’s United States was surprisingly not essentially different from Hitler’s Reich in this regard. The New Deal trade program, for example, insofar as it concerned Brazil, was aimed at establishing American “economic and political hegemony” over that country. During the war, moreover, Washington would play “a two-faced game” with Rio de Janeiro, continuing to seek “domination” of Brazil at the same time that it formulated plans for a program of postwar military assistance to Latin America in which the importance of Brazil to the United States “was reduced, if not eliminated.” The Getúlio Vargas

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government, insufficiently realistic or tough-minded in its bargaining with Washington, had placed Brazil by mid-1944 "in the position of a woman who has given in to her lover and can only trust that his intentions are honorable." American intentions, however, were not honorable. The crowning blow in what McCann regards as Washington's deceitful treatment of Brazil came in the matter of representation on the Security Council of the new United Nations: "American failure to obtain a security council seat for its faithful ally and Washington's general depreciation of Brazilian prestige paralleled American economic and military efforts to keep Brazil subservient."  

If this passivity-domination thesis is correct, the historian would expect to find the record of Brazilian–American relations to be one of concession and sacrifice by Rio de Janeiro in return for little from Washington that satisfied perceived national interests. One logically would encounter, furthermore, ample signs that key Brazilian policymakers expressed grave anxieties, at least privately, about the dangerous intimacy of relations with the United States and the domineering thrust of American policy. If that policy in fact had as its conscious goal the political and economic domination of Brazil, the historian should also discover substantial evidence of explicit discussion of that goal in American policymaking circles. Yet neither Brazilian nor American archives, nor those of Great Britain and Germany, yield any such evidence. On the contrary, these sources amply document the Machiavellian opportunism of Brazilian leaders who skillfully probed the vanity, anxieties, and prejudices of counterparts in other countries and were remarkably successful in bartering geographic accident for valuable economic, military, and political concessions from Washington. The record also shows that the Roosevelt administration eschewed domineering, deceitful diplomacy toward Brazil and never devised any program for establishing economic, political, or military control over that country—a fact explicitly appreciated not only in Brazilian circles, but by European rivals as well.

Any evaluation of the foreign policy behavior of the Vargas government must underscore the latter's capacity for, and skill at, the diplomacy of opportunism and deception. The Machiavellian character of Brazil's response to one of its major prewar challenges—the intensive trade rivalry between Nazi Germany and the United States—has been documented.  


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traded with Germany on a bilateral basis that contravened a liberal agreement signed with the United States in 1935, the Vargas government proclaimed its solidarity with American policy, systematically exploiting Washington's good-neighborliness and frequently distorting the truth in order to disguise or justify Brazil's commercial alliance with Germany, a fact that various prominent Brazilian authorities privately decried.³

Vargas, heavily influenced by his finance minister, the military high command, and his own desire to diversify exports and markets, displayed a high degree of opportunistic independence from Washington in the trade dispute, which is not an isolated example. Indeed, the reaction of his government to other major international problems, such as the Italo–Ethiopian embroilment, reflected a similarly pragmatic, independent spirit. The Italo–Ethiopian conflict was the first great challenge to the Versailles system in the 1930s. Roosevelt and the State Department clearly sympathized with Ethiopia and they endeavored in vain, on the eve of the outbreak of hostilities in 1935, to dissuade an adamantly isolationist congress from depriving the President of the power to discriminate between aggressor and aggressee in applying a mandatory arms embargo in the case of war. The administration's subsequent famous appeal for a "moral embargo" was an effort to restrict the flow of other important materials to Italy.

Vargas and his counselors, on the other hand, from the very beginning of the tension in Italo–Ethiopian relations had scented commercial opportunity. In mid-1935, Vargas himself corresponded with the governor of Rio Grande do Sul about special consignments of mules and frozen beef for the Italian army, pointing with enthusiasm to the possibility of supplying various products to Italian troops on their way to East Africa. Foreign Minister José Carlos de Macedo Soares (1934–1937), a devout Catholic, staunch anti-Communist from São Paulo—a region of heavy Italian immigration—and unabashed admirer of Mussolini, shared Vargas' desire to maximize profits. Italian

³ Ambassador Oswaldo Aranha, for one, protested his government's "lack of integrity" and its "policy of subterfuge and inveiglement" toward Washington in the German–American trade struggle. Aranha (Washington) to Rubens rosa, Feb. 18, 1935; Aranha to Getúlio Vargas, June 4, 1937, Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea (hereafter cited as CPDHC), Fundação Getúlio Vargas (Rio), Oswaldo Aranha Papers (hereafter cited as OA). Cf. Valentim Bouças to Aranha, June 18, 1936, OA; Ambassador Mario Pimentel Brandão (Washington) to Vargas, Sept. 14, 1938, CPDHC, Getúlio Vargas Papers (hereafter cited as GV).
mobilization, he reminded the finance minister late in August, presented Brazil with an “exceptional” commercial opportunity. Early in October, after hostilities began, Macedo Soares argued in a memorandum to Vargas that Ethiopia meant nothing to Brazil, whereas Italy had provided immigrants and was a ready market for foodstuffs and “raw materials indispensable in war, such as cotton, rubber, etc.” The following month Itamaratí rejected in somewhat abrupt terms an appeal from the League of Nations for sanctions against Italy, making no mention of Brazil’s traditional opposition to wars of conquest.4

Ambassador Oswaldo Aranha in Washington decried his government’s attitude, warning both Vargas and Macedo Soares of the unfavorable impact that it had on American opinion. The response from Rio de Janeiro was to give verbal assurances of solidarity with U.S. policy, but simultaneously to intensify the successful pursuit of new supply contracts with Italian authorities.5 In March 1936, as Ethiopian resistance distegrated, Macedo Soares publicly lauded Mussolini declaring that Brazil was pursuing friendship with Italy “with devotion and enthusiasm, in the certainty that we are working for a common ideal of greatness.” Later that year, after conclusion of a secret commercial modus vivendi with Berlin and after assuring the American embassy that Brazil would not negotiate any trade understanding with Rome that would violate the liberal principles of the Brazilian–American treaty, the Vargas government signed a confidential clearing agreement with the fascist regime.6

The pronounced sympathy of the Vargas administration for fascist Italy and Franco’s Nationalist forces in Spain (Vargas in 1936 even authorized secret donations of sugar and coffee to Nationalist troops7)


7. Francisco Franco to Vargas, Oct. 29, 1936, GV.
was a disquieting signal to observers in the United States, where export circles and government spokesmen were understandably disturbed about Brazil’s flaunting of the commitments it had assumed in the 1935 trade treaty. And when Vargas, with the backing of the army, jettisoned congress and proclaimed the Estado Novo in November 1937, a new ingredient was added to American concern over the drift of Brazilian policy.8

One of the immediate objectives of the Vargas regime in 1938 was therefore to reassure the United States, a key diplomatic ally, that Brazil had not joined the Axis—a task made even more urgent by the fact that Rio de Janeiro was at that time in the final stages of negotiations with the German embassy and Krupp representatives for a major armaments contract, one that would mean continued expansion of bilateral trade with the Reich.9 Vargas’ adroit use of the 1938 crisis in German–Brazilian relations to allay American anxieties and divert attention from his commercial alliance with Berlin was further evidence of his devotion to, and success at, realpolitik.

The precipitate deterioration in relations with Berlin originated in Brazil’s nationalistic response to the activities of Nazi agents in southern Brazil, a region of German immigration.10 Extended analysis of the subject is impossible here, but one episode, German–Brazilian conversations in February–March 1938, is worthy of examination because it lucidly illustrates Vargas’ diplomatic techniques. In his view, having Washington believe that his government was reacting vigorously to Nazi political bullying would be an excellent way to still speculation in the United States about his allegedly pro-Axis leanings and camouflage the projected strengthening of military and economic ties with Berlin. A visit by German ambassador Karl Ritter on February 25 to discuss the anti-Nazi agitation in southern Brazil, where state authorities were closing Nazi party offices and harassing party spokesmen, provided the shrewd Brazilian leader with his first opportunity and he characteristically sought to turn it to double advantage. According to Ritter, Vargas was “measuredly cordial” (freundlichgemessen) throughout their fifty-five-minute conversation and repeatedly assured him of

9. German firms, with official support, were selling armaments to Brazil for compensation (blocked) marks that Brazil earned from extra-quota sales of primary products to Germany. The first armaments contract had been signed with Krupp in February 1937. Hilton, “Military Influence,” p. 83.
his friendly intentions toward German interests. Ritter welcomed Vargas' statements as a basis for an understanding and later reported: "The President, at the end of the conversation, expressed himself—as he previously had done repeatedly in public—in very friendly fashion toward the German community in Brazil."11 Having reassured the Germans and protected the armaments negotiations, Vargas, well aware of American sensitivity to Nazi intrigue, moved quickly to improve his image in the United States. He called in his friend Aranha, who had recently resigned his post in Washington, and had him transmit to Ambassador Jefferson Caffery a doctored account of the meeting, now depicted as an angry clash, with the telling request that Caffery relay the news to Roosevelt himself.12

The appointment of Aranha to the post of foreign minister the following month was another calculated move by Vargas to assuage American concern, and Aranha immediately set out on the course charted by his chief. He sent personal messages of solidarity to State

12. Jefferson Caffery to State Dept., Feb. 27, 1938, Dept. of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1938, 5 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1955–1956), V, 409 (hereafter cited as FRUS). The assumption underlying McCann's analysis, which is based on the adulterated version of the meeting (Alliance, p. 83, n. 16), is that Berlin had politico-territorial designs on South America. He consequently views Ritter as a truculent defender of Nazism from the outset. This general argument overlooks the internal divisions and conflicts over goals and means within the Nazi foreign policy apparatus, as well as studies based on German records that show that South America did not figure prominently in Nazi long-range planning and that Berlin's aims in the region were commercial, not political. See Paul Seabury, The Wilhelmstrasse: A Study of German Diplomats under the Nazi Regime (Berkeley, 1954); Leonidas E. Hill, "The Wilhelmstrasse in the Nazi Era," Political Science Quarterly, 82 (Dec. 1967), 546–570; Hilton, "Brazil and Great Power Trade Rivalry;" Harms-Baltzer, Nationalisierung. Reliably documented Nazi discussions of possible acquisitions of non-European territories focused solely on Africa. Gerhard L. Weinberg, "German Colonial Plans and Policies, 1938–1942" in Waldemar Besson and Friedrich Hiller v. Gaertringen, eds., Geschichte und Gegenwartsbewusstsein (Göttingen, 1963), pp. 462–491. Those who suspect Berlin of territorial goals in South America recognize the extremely tenuous nature of the documentary support for this view. See, for example, Alton Frye, Nazi Germany and the American Hemisphere, 1933–1941 (New Haven, 1967), pp. 168–194. A sound recent review of the subject is Hans-Jurgen Schröder, "Hauptprobleme der deutschen Lateinamerikapolitik 1933–1941," Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas, 12 (1975), 408–433. It is relevant to note that in June 1940, at the height of Nazi power, Karl Ritter himself, then a special economic adviser to the Wilhelmstrasse, in outlining the Reich's future colonial empire and "Greater Economic Sphere," specifically excluded Brazil from those areas, predicted a postwar contraction of
Department officials and even made a special broadcast to the American people.13 But Aranha’s unquestioned sympathy for the United States did not mean that he opposed cordial relations with the Reich, and his opposition to bilateralism stopped short of losing an opportunity to acquire badly needed armaments.14 He consequently had been maintaining informal contacts with Ritter, and the latter had recently advised Berlin that Aranha’s cooperative attitude made him hopeful of a satisfactory settlement of the party question. The first official encounter between the two men took place on March 16, when Ritter raised the issue of party activities in the South. Separate records of the meeting by both diplomats indicate that it was a cordial encounter. Ritter, in fact, was so encouraged by Aranha’s “well-intentioned” remarks that he recommended that Berlin prevent attacks on Brazil by the Nazi press.15 Two days after that meeting, however, Aranha, following Vargas’ lead, cast it in a different light for American benefit, telling Caffery that his strong stand in the face of Nazi pressure had led Berlin to instruct Ritter to do what he could to subvert Aranha’s political position.16

trade with that country and even suggested that, in order to provide a labor force for the “colonial empire,” German settlers in South America be encouraged to move from that region. Ritter, memo, June 1, 1940, Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D (1937–1945) [hereafter cited as DGFP], 13 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1957–1964), IX, 496–500.

13. McCann, Alliance, pp. 74–75; Aranha to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Mar. 17, 1938, OA.

14. On Aranha’s interest in armaments and reluctant defense of compensation trade on the grounds that it was at least a means of obtaining badly needed military hardware, see Aranha to Vargas, June 4, 1937, OA; Herbert Feis, memo, June 29, 1937, National Archives, Records of the Dept. of State (hereafter cited as DS), file 632.6231.


16. Caffery to State Dept., Mar. 18, 1938, DS, 892.00/1178. Cf. McCann, Alliance, p. 87, who argues that the encounter between Aranha and Ritter was marred by near physical violence and accepts Aranha’s statements to Caffery as accurate. McCann’s authority for the near-fisticuffs episode is an item in the newspaper column of Drew Pearson that appeared one year after the alleged incident. It is noteworthy that Pearson in 1938–1939 was trying to obtain from Itamarati a contract for radio publicity and that his article depicting Aranha as a rough-and-ready adversary of German bullying was published just as Aranha was arriving in Washington for special economic and military negotiations. In 1940, Pearson received a commission from Itamarati to conduct radio publicity on behalf of Brazil. Aranha to Pearson, June 14, 1938, OA; Brandão to Vargas, Dec. 6, 1938, GV; Pearson to Aranha, June 10, 1939, Mar. 7, Aug. 28, 1940, OA. It should also be noted that in mid-1938, when the diplomatic quarrel between Berlin and Rio de Janeiro did worsen, the Wilhelmstrasse, far from encouraging Ritter to subvert Aranha’s position, actually rebuked him for undiplomatic conduct
The tactic used by Rio de Janeiro was highly successful. On the one hand, the American press, fed the distorted versions of the German-Brazilian conversations, hailed Vargas’ resistance to Nazi machinations, while Caffery wrote of the “complete change of policy” that allegedly had occurred in Rio de Janeiro since proclamation of the Estado Novo. On the other hand, Berlin was sufficiently mollified by the reassuring attitude of Vargas and his foreign minister that the armaments contract, providing in essence for the exchange of nearly 900 pieces of artillery for raw materials, was concluded without hitches on March 28.

The record of Brazil’s maneuvering during 1939–1941, the period of hemispheric neutrality, also shows that the Vargas government, far from passively allowing itself to be victimized by the great powers, made shrewd use of the rivalry between the two blocs. Indeed, its policy during that period continued to be studiously ambiguous. While systematically proclaiming his devotion to Pan American ideals, Vargas courted Axis goodwill in a number of ways. In November 1939, he wired congratulations to Hitler for having escaped unhurt from an assassination attempt, and months later he agreed to assume protection of Italian interests in Allied countries when Mussolini joined Hitler in the war. His famous speech of June 10, 1940, reflected his commitment to opportunism and even deception. Praised by the Axis press and saluted by il Duce in a private telegram, Vargas, to counter the alarm produced in the United States by his apparent declaration of solidarity with the Axis, privately assured the State Department of his loyalty to the hemispheric cause and then days later met secretly with the new German ambassador to insist anew on his sympathy for the Axis.

Until the Battle of Britain, Vargas negotiated simultaneously with

19. MRE to Brazilian ambassador (Berlin), Nov. 10, 1939, AHI; MRE, O Brasil e a Segunda Guerra Mundial, 2 vols. (Rio, 1943), I, 95–96.
20. Italian ambassador to Vargas, n.d. [June 13–14, 1940], GV; Berliner Börsen-Zeitung, June 12, 1940; Der Angriff (Berlin), June 14, 1940; unsigned memo, June 17, 1940, OA; Caffery to State Dept., June 12, 1940, FRUS, 1940, 5 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1959–1961), V, 618; Hull, memo, June 13, 1940, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Cordell Hull Papers, folder 192, container 57; Ambassador Kurt Prüfer (Rio) to German Foreign Ministry, June 21, 1940, DGFP, IX, 659.
both Berlin and Washington for assistance in establishing a major steel complex and, as Brazilian records demonstrate, he and his counselors were well aware that German interest in the project was their major trump card and they judiciously displayed it to pressure the Americans.\textsuperscript{21} While holding politico-commercial talks himself with the German embassy, Vargas pushed similar negotiations with Washington, making certain that American authorities were reminded of German offers.\textsuperscript{22} During the period of neutrality, furthermore, Rio de Janeiro refused to cooperate, or did so only in piecemeal fashion, in Washington's hemispheric defense program "because of American inability to supply Brazil with arms"\textsuperscript{23}—in other words, without a quo there was no quid as far as the calculating Brazilian bargainers were concerned. Vargas also demonstrated his independence by resisting American pressure to eliminate Axis influence from air transportation in Brazil, taking effective steps to do so only after the hemisphere was at war.\textsuperscript{24} He systematically refused, moreover, to make a state visit to Washington despite repeated American entreaties.\textsuperscript{25}

The head of the Brazilian army's secret service noted aptly in September 1939 that the Germans could have little reason to oppose Vargas since Brazil's "foreign policy corresponds to their desires." This fact was amply appreciated in Axis circles, and their firm conviction during 1940–1941 that Vargas was in their camp should be considered when judging the character of Brazilian diplomacy. "We have every reason to support his regime," the new German ambassador concluded early in 1940, and Berlin's Italian allies agreed. "The Axis regards Brazil as a future ally and [major] base of support in all South America . . . ," wrote a Brazilian official in Rome later that year. In October, on the tenth anniversary of the Revolution of 1930, the only heads of state who sent congratulations to Vargas were Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Emperor Hirohito of Japan, and the leaders of two Axis-controlled Eastern European countries. By mid-1941, Wilhelmstrasse analysts were labeling the Vargas regime "the bulwark against the inclusion of South Amer-

\textsuperscript{21} Vargas to Ambassador Carlos Martins Pereira de Souza (Washington), Dec. 1, 1940; Martins to Vargas, Mar. 1, July 2, 1940, GV.
\textsuperscript{22} Priifer to German Foreign Ministry, June 21, 1940, DGFP, IX, 659; Aranha to Martins, Aug. 5, 1940, AHF, 408/3/16.
\textsuperscript{23} McCann, \textit{Alliance}, p. 208.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., pp. 216–221.
\textsuperscript{25} Roosevelt to Vargas, Jan. 4, 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (Hyde Park), Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers (hereafter cited as FDR), President's Personal File 4473 (hereafter cited as PPF); Alzira Vargas do Amaral Peixoto (for Vargas) to (Sra.) Martins, Jan. 29, 1941; (Sra.) Martins to Vargas, Feb. 17, 1941, GV.
ica in Roosevelt's anti-German policy." Vargas carefully encouraged this belief, having confidential emissaries such as his brother periodically reassure the German embassy as the schism between Berlin and Washington widened in the latter months of 1941.26

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Vargas, despite pleas from some cabinet members,27 declined to break immediately with the Axis and wavered until the Rio Conference in January 1942. During the intervening critical weeks, he sent his private secretary, Luis Vergara, repeatedly to the German embassy with protestations of good intentions and distorted accounts of diplomatic pressure from Washington.28 At the conference, Vargas still resisted American pleas, agreeing finally to sever relations with the Axis only after securing firm guarantees of greater American military assistance.29 Even after the break with Berlin, however, Nazi authorities continued to believe that Vargas was sympathetic to their cause and would resist American policy as long as possible.30

Vargas, in fact, despite obvious constraints, continued to maintain a relatively independent attitude vis-à-vis Washington. In mid-1942, for example, he abruptly suspended shipping to the United States at a time when it “needed every vessel it could get” because he thought American naval protection of Brazilian ships was inadequate.31 His government also persisted in its extremely cautious approach to hemisphere defense. “It becomes increasingly apparent,” Chief of Staff George Marshall complained in May 1942, “that the Brazilians are not seriously cooperating with us to secure that vital [Northeastern] area, sea and air, against Axis aggression.” Even after Brazil’s entry into the war in August 1942, Brazilian cooperation remained somewhat halfhearted. The State Department in April 1943 lamented that Brazil’s record in meeting its shipping commitments had been “very disappointing,” while the American commander of the South Atlantic Force, in a candid note to

26. [Major Henrique Holl], Boletim de Informações, no. 11, n.d. [Sept.-Oct. 1939], PR, 33.470; Prüfer to German Foreign Ministry, Jan. 3, 1940, RGFM, 1302:2281/480376; Luis Sparano to Vargas, Rome, Sept. 26, 1940, GV; MRE to Brazilian embassy (Berlin), Nov. 16, 1940; German Foreign Ministry memo, June 10, 1941, DGFP, XII, 994; Prüfer to German Foreign Ministry, Nov. 29, 1941, DGFP, XIII, 895.
27. Acting Minister of Justice Vasco Leitão da Cunha to Vargas, Dec. 8, 1941, GV.
31. McCann, Alliance, p. 266.
Vargas, underscored the “apparent slackening” in Brazil’s military effort.32

A key reason for Brazil’s reluctant participation in the defense program defined by Washington was a basic conflict of strategic interests. Even before the outbreak of the war in Europe, American–Brazilian discussions had revealed that whereas Washington was concerned with defense of the Northeastern hump, Rio de Janeiro was preoccupied more with the Argentine threat than the Axis challenge.33 During 1940 and 1941, the priority that Brazilian leaders assigned to southern defenses lay at the heart of the difficulties that American negotiators encountered in joint defense talks.34 As Caffery cautioned Washington, the Vargas government had “very little interest in Hemisphere defense as such,”35 and the problem of divergent priorities remained a serious one even when Brazil’s break with the Axis become definitive. One of the major tasks of General Estevão Leitão de Carvalho as head of Brazil’s delegation to the Joint Brazil–United States Defense Commission was therefore to remind his American counterparts that Brazil’s strategic concerns included the South as well as the Northeast and to persuade them to help bolster Brazil’s military position on the Argentine border.36

An important question to ask in assessing the costs and benefits of the wartime Brazilian–American alliance is whether or not Brazil itself profited from it. With regard to the commercial aspects of that alliance, it should be noted that the collapse of important European markets during 1939–1940 created grave financial problems for Brazil, as government planners, industrial and business groups, and the press repeatedly bemoaned.37 Export expansion, by opening new markets

32. George C. Marshall to Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, May 10, 1942, DS, 832.20/403½; Caffery to Aranha, Apr. 1, 1943, AHI, Embaixada dos EE.UU., Notas Recebidas; Admiral Jonas Ingram to Vargas, Apr. 3, 1943, GV.
33. Minister of War Eurico Dutra to Vargas, June 21, 1939, Ministério da Guerra (Rio), Arquivo do Estado Maior do Exército (hereafter cited as EME); Lourival Coutinho, O General Góes Depõe (Rio, 1950), pp. 360–361.
34. General Pedro Góes Monteiro to Dutra, Aug. 6, 1941, EME.
37. Roberto Simonsen et al. to Vargas, Apr. 26, 1940, PR, 9.374; “Mercados Interditos,” Correio da Manhã (Rio), May 9, 1940; Souza Costa, statements, Diário de Notícias (Rio), May 22, 1940; Assis Chateaubriand, “Uma Calamidade Nacional, O Jornal (Rio), June 7, 1940; Artur Torres Filho, memo, July 26, 1940, Conselho Federal de Comércio Exterior, Anais (typewritten), Julho-Agosto 1940.
or developing new products, became therefore an urgent national goal. In fact, shortly after the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, the Federal Foreign Trade Council, foreseeing the "inevitable ills" that the conflict would bring, had recommended, and Vargas had approved, a program for stimulating the production of items for which the war would create a ready demand.\textsuperscript{38} American mobilization was a godsend and Brazilian analysts hailed for financial reasons the opportunity to develop or increase exports of strategic materials to the United States.\textsuperscript{39} On the other hand, as Brazilian authorities subsequently competed with other allies to benefit from American industrial conversion, they fully exploited the advantages that geographical accident gave them, frequently utilizing "military necessity" as a pretext to claim equipment and industrial raw materials that were not, in fact, destined for the defense program—a fact that rankled harried American officials.\textsuperscript{40}

After obtaining satisfactory guarantees of national sovereignty, Brazilian leaders regarded as a definite boon the bases that the United States built in the Northeast at its expense. American activities in that region should prove to be of "incalculable" value to Brazil, Aranha exulted in a message to Vargas in 1942. The airfields themselves, he predicted, would play a "decisive role" in Brazil's future development.\textsuperscript{41} The dispatch of the famous Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB) was, of course, a calculated move to enhance Brazil's prestige and bargaining position in postwar councils, and Brazilian policymakers also saw it as a means of preying further shipments of war matériel out of American arsenals.\textsuperscript{42} Indeed, Brazilian records reveal that the major initial impulse for the FEB was the fear that the Allied invasion of North Africa had so reduced the Axis threat to the Northeast that Washing-

Arquivo Nacional, Arquivo do Conselho Federal de Comércio Exterior (hereafter cited as CFCE), lata 152.


40. Standing Liaison Committee, minutes, Aug. 6, 1943, National Archives, Record Group 355; Lawrence Duggan to Edward Stettinius, Jr., Dec. 15, 1943, DS, Office of American Republics Affairs, Memoranda on Brazil (hereafter cited as OARA: Brazil), vol. 7, box 27.

41. Aranha to Vargas, Nov. 9, 1942, Arquivo Nacional, Pedro Salgado Filho Papers. Salgado Filho was the Air Minister.

ton would lose interest in arming Brazil if that latter could not offer the United States a greater dividend on its investment.43

Approaching the question from the American side of the diplomatic equation, it is important to note first that the consistency and unity of goals implicit in the domination thesis did not exist within the American policymaking apparatus. That thesis overlooks, in other words, the well-known confusion and conflicts of interest, perceptions, goals, and authority that prevailed in the United States during the period, producing cleavages among and within the organizations, agencies, and departments that vied for scarce resources and for influence on foreign policy.44 The Treasury and State Departments, to mention a well-known contest, fought a running battle for policy initiative during the Roosevelt years.45 There were also recurrent disagreements between civilian and military planners—and, indeed, among the latter themselves—over questions of national policy. With specific regard to policy toward Brazil during the grim years 1940–1943, the conflicts between the Army and Navy on the one hand, and the Army and State Department on the other, have been carefully documented.46 Within the State Department itself there were deep schisms and crosscurrents, such as that between Secretary of State Cordell Hull and Under Secretary Sumner Welles, that stemmed not only from personality but from policy divergences as well.47 Foreign observers were struck by this competitive confusion prevailing in American policymaking circles. João Alberto Lins de Barros, Vargas’ wartime Coordinator of Economic

43. Carvalho to Vargas, Nov. 27, 1942; Carvalho to Aranha, Dec. 23, 1942; Vargas to Carvalho, Mar. 29, 1943; Carvalho, Relatório dos Trabalhos da Delegação do Brasil à Comissão Mista, June 1943; Carvalho to Dutra, Jan. 8, 1944, ELC.


45. According to Hull, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. “often acted as if he were clothed with authority to project himself into the field of foreign affairs and inaugurate efforts to shape the course of foreign policy . . . .” Hull, Memoirs, 2 vols. (London, 1948), I, 207. Morgenthau was particularly anxious about Axis influence in South America and placed great importance on improving relations with Brazil, frequently conducting negotiations with Brazilian agents. John M. Blum, From the Morgenthau Diaries, 3 vols. (Boston, 1959–1967), I, 523–526, II, 50–58; Hilton, Great Powers, pp. 155, 164, 193–198, 201–204, 206.


Mobilization, visited the United States in 1942 and reported almost in despair that the “multiplicity of organs” involved in foreign affairs were like “hermetic compartments, each one struggling to assert its supremacy” in policy formulation.48

The specifics of American behavior toward Brazil would also seem to weaken the thesis that the United States was seeking to dominate Brazil during the Roosevelt–Vargas era. With regard to the argument that the trade policy of the Roosevelt administration in the 1930s was aimed at driving Germany out of the Brazilian market and establishing “economic and political hegemony” over Brazil, certain salient aspects of German–American rivalry should be emphasized. The United States ran an average annual deficit of approximately $55 million in trade with Brazil during the 1931–1938 period, yet American exporters were forced to wait indeterminate periods for payment of goods they sold to Brazil, an anomaly that Brazilian observers recognized.49 At the same time, Brazil was expanding trade with the Third Reich on a basis that violated Rio de Janeiro’s treaty with Washington, a fact also privately admitted by Brazilian officials. The question to ask, then, is how was it possible for the Vargas government to maneuver with such striking success vis-à-vis the United States if the latter, a great power, was determined to dominate Brazil, a very weak power. The answer is that Washington did not aspire to the economic conquest or political control of South America, and Brazilian policymakers were well aware of that fact.

Indeed, Brazilian officials in the mid-1930s were deeply impressed by the cordiality and spirit of fraternity that American authorities, from Roosevelt on down, displayed in financial and commercial discussions.50 In appraising American commercial diplomacy, moreover, Bra-


49. See, for example, Diário Carioca, Apr. 15, 1933; Diário de Noticias, May 20, 1933. During trade discussions with Washington in 1934, Brazilian negotiators admitted among themselves that American interests were right in regarding as “absurd” Brazil’s treatment of American exporters. The United States could well impose a bilateral payments agreement, confessed the foreign minister at one point, since it would mean “only that we are going to pay what we should pay.” Conselho Federal do Comércio Exterior, memo, Aug. 10, 1934, CFCE, processo 979, lata 70; Macedo Soares to Aranha, Nov. 23, 1934, OA.

50. See, for example, Ambassador J. F. de Assis Brasil, memo, June 9, 1933,
zilian analysts made special note of Washington’s curious refusal to seek special privilege in trade with their country.\textsuperscript{51} Roosevelt, in fact, in 1933 instructed the State Department not to interfere on behalf of private interests with financial grievances against the Brazilian government. And in 1934, when Brazilian authorities themselves officially proposed a clearing agreement that would have enabled American exporters to “offer prices and conditions more advantageous than their competitors” could in the Brazilian market.\textsuperscript{52} Washington, despite heavy pressure from irate creditors and exporters, rejected the proposal as unfair to Brazil and contrary to commercial liberalism.\textsuperscript{53} In ensuing years a policy of moral suasion and appeals to reason, as defined by the State Department, rather than the aggressive use of American economic strength to secure commercial advantage, became firmly entrenched as the approach of the Roosevelt administration to trade relations with Brazil. This fact bewildered British competitors\textsuperscript{54} and led policymakers in Rio de Janeiro to the correct conclusion that Cordell Hull and his associates could be satisfied with the rhetoric of good-neighborliness and would not employ sanctions against Brazil for the latter’s de facto commercial alignment with Berlin.\textsuperscript{55} Ambassador Caffery, appraising Brazilian conduct and intentions more realistically than the State Department, argued in May 1938 that if Washington were to adopt “retaliatory measures, envisaging definite economic pressure, Brazil would change her policy overnight,” but he sparked no response in Washington.\textsuperscript{56} Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr.,

AHI, maço 7.100; Minister Gilberto Amado (Montevideo) to Vargas, Dec. 27, 1933, AHI, maço 9.399; Bouças to Vargas, Mar. 7, 1934, Aranha to Vargas, Nov. 2, 1934, OA.

51. Consul Sebastião Sampaio (New York) to MRE, Apr. 15, 1933; J. E. do Nascimento e Silva, memo, Apr. 25, 1933; AHI, maço 7.100.


53. “By forcing Brazil to divert some exchange [to pay debts to Americans] it would mean forcing that Government to disturb its plans for rationing its exchange in such a way as to best serve the interests of the country,” Feis explained to other officials. Feis, memo, Sept. 14, 1934, DS, 832.5151/430.


55. Hull systematically declined to protest Brazil’s compensation trade with Germany in 1935 and went out of his way in 1936 to reassure the Vargas government after erroneous reports that Washington was contemplating reprisals. Aranha’s declaration in mid-1937 that Brazil would be “very pleased if all countries treated Brazil on the same friendly terms the United States has . . . for many years, and now more than ever” was thus not merely a public relations gesture. \textit{O Jornal}, July 21, 1937. For a detailed discussion of Washington’s “soft line” toward Brazil with regard to the German trade issue, see Hilton, \textit{Great Powers}, passim.

56. Caffery to State Dept., May 6, 1938, FRUS, 1938, V, 346–347. “I do not see the slightest chance of expecting any pressure,” one of Caffery’s aides wrote.
thinking primarily of Brazil, recommended in June that the United States utilize its financial resources to help Latin American governments resist Axis overtures. But even this proposal was turned down because the White House and State Department, in Roosevelt’s words, feared that “it would be greatly misunderstood down there and be regarded as a resumption of dollar diplomacy.”

As authorities in Washington contemplated what seemed to be an increasingly aggressive Axis challenge in South America in ensuing months, they debated various policy alternatives, but the use of force was not one of them. While the United States logically would not regard with “equanimity” any effort by European countries to “colonize” South America, Secretary of Commerce Daniel Roper privately wrote, the era of the marines had passed and Washington had to treat “the South American nations as free and equal and . . . associate with them on that basis.” Following Munich, Morgenthau again pressed Roosevelt to allow him to devise a program of economic assistance to Latin America. “Our neighbors to the South are sorely in need of capital and commerce to enable them to develop their resources free from foreign intervention,” he admonished the President. “Unless we assist them they will become a helpless field for political and economic exploitation by the aggressor nations.”

Roosevelt now authorized him to open talks with Brazilian authorities, but the only concrete aid extended prior to August 1940 was a $20 million loan, scorned by Morgenthau as “mere pin money,” to permit Brazil to clear up commercial arrears.

Resisting strong criticism and pressure from angry bondholders and exporters, the Roosevelt administration thus steadfastly refused throughout the 1930s to attempt to coerce Brazil into adopting a particular line of commercial action. The record also reveals no irregular efforts by American authorities to interfere with Brazilian politics during that period. When leftist and ultraliberal groups in the United States endeavored to mobilize opinion against the Vargas government for the wave of repression that followed the abortive Red uprising of November 1935, Roosevelt assured Aranha that he regarded the matter as Brazil’s affair and would pay no heed to the clamor for official

pessimistically from Washington. Robert Scotten to Caffery, June 9, 1938, University of Southwestern Louisiana (Lafayette), Southwestern Archive and Manuscripts Collection, Jefferson Caffery Papers.


58. Daniel Roper to Hull, Nov. 12, 1938, Hull Papers, folder 95, container 40.

intervention. The launching of the Estado Novo late in 1937 was widely attacked by the responsible American press and certainly the administration was dismayed by what seemed to be a blow to democratic government; but the immediate official response, articulated by Under Secretary Welles, was to label the episode "purely a domestic and internal matter." On December 6, Welles went so far as to publicly criticize the American press for not having reacted with "tolerance and with friendly sympathy" to the political crisis in Brazil, a stand that Aranha privately hailed as an act "of great courage, given the atmosphere that exists here [against Brazil]." As Aranha indicated, Welles had spoken for the administration, "which decided, against its normal procedure, to challenge [public] opinion and the press in our case." Even with regard to an issue of great significance to Washington—that of Nazi activities in Brazil—the State Department declined an opportunity to influence Brazilian policy. Asked by Aranha in 1938 for counsel regarding ways to curb such activities, Caffery demurred and the State Department approved his caution. "This would seem to be a question to be determined solely by the Brazilian authorities," Welles wrote.

In the military sphere American policy toward Brazil in the 1930s was similarly unaggressive. One of the major goals of Brazilian policy was immediate military preparedness, which meant primarily the acquisition of armaments and ships abroad. A unique opportunity was thus created for a potential supplier to extend greatly its influence in Brazil. What was Washington's response to that opportunity? Throughout the decade, the firm policy of the American government was to discourage the sale of arms to foreign countries, particularly Latin American states, since they faced severe economic problems and typically had difficulty meeting their financial obligations. The State Department specifically argued that point in 1933–1934 in discouraging American shipbuilders from participating in Brazil's naval program at a time when European diplomatic agencies were "cooperating openly" with firms from their countries who were seeking Brazilian contracts. The White House later was inclined to give Brazil some naval

60. Aranha to Vargas, Apr. 1936, OA.
62. Caffery to State Dept., Mar. 18, 1938; Welles to Caffery, Mar. 21, 1938, DS, 832.00/1178.
63. State Dept. memo, Dec. 6, 1933, DS, 832.34/236; State Dept. memo, Mar. 12, 1934, DS, 832.34/239; U.S. Embassy (Rio) to State Dept., June 11, 1934, DS, 832.34/246; State Dept. memo, Aug. 15, 1934, DS, 832.34/249.
assistance, and first thought of selling decommissioned cruisers, but the Navy blocked the transaction in 1936. Roosevelt and the State Department then promoted a plan to lease overaged destroyers to Brazil, but abandoned it the following year in the face of strong objections from Argentina. As a result, Brazil turned to European suppliers placing orders with Italy for submarines and with Great Britain for destroyers. Nazi Germany was especially successful in expanding its influence in Brazil by supplying armaments through compensation trade. It was the desire to protect these commercial–military relations that led Rio de Janeiro and Berlin to settle amicably their political clash of 1938, and during 1939–1940 the Brazilian high command exerted strong pressure on civilian leaders to guarantee the supply of arms under the Krupp contracts.

The State Department watched with dismay the increase in the “political and commercial prestige of our European rivals” as a result of arms sales, but argued curiously that providing arms to Brazil and other Latin American countries “would probably in the end weaken rather than strengthen our prestige throughout the hemisphere.” The Army in May 1938 drew a more logical conclusion and suggested that the government promote private sales of arms to Latin America, but the State Department successfully opposed the idea. It was not until 1939 that the administration requested Congress to authorize the sale of surplus military equipment to Latin America, and Congress would not pass the necessary resolution until the Wehrmacht had conquered France.

The general pattern of official relations between the two countries during the war period was one in which Washington, eager to secure Brazil’s cooperation in hemispheric defense, cultivated the latter’s goodwill with a variety of services, demonstrating all the while a scrupulous regard for Brazilian sovereignty. In the economic sphere, Roosevelt’s cabinet agreed in mid-1940 that, in order to strengthen hemisphere defense, economic assistance should be extended to South America to cushion the region against the financial dislocation of war and to de-

64. Welles to Aranha, May 27, 1936, GV. On the destroyers’ episode, see Bryce Wood, “External Restraints on the Good Neighbor Policy,” Inter-American Economic Affairs, 16 (Fall 1962), 3–24. Rejecting a subsequent appeal for arms by Brazil, a State Department official informed the Brazilian ambassador that “the officers of this Government abroad had standing instructions not to engage in the promotion of the sale of military equipment.” State Dept. memo, Sept. 16, 1938, OARA: Brazil.


velop “new industries and production.” Brazil became a major target of this new policy. When State Department adviser Herbert Feis wrote that it was unnecessary to “say how firm we consider our friendship with Brazil and how steady is our desire to cooperate with it,” he was not only using the diplomatic tone that characterized American overtures to Brazil, but was also reflecting American objectives. It was because of official American intervention that the Vargas government was able to begin work on a national steel industry that year, a fact that led a genuinely grateful Aranha to assure Sumner Welles, after signature of the first Volta Redonda loan contract in September 1940, “I will not forget how much we owe you and the State Department for that happy result.” Washington subsequently made new loans, facilitated the transfer of technology, and responded favorably to Brazilian requests by giving the steel project a top-priority classification in 1941 for the purpose of obtaining export licenses for equipment. Two years later Washington granted Volta Redonda the same priority as new American steel plants.

Brazilian officials found that American authorities displayed “the best of good will” in handling Brazilian requests for industrial raw materials and equipment, and what difficulties they did encounter were caused, they realized, by wartime circumstances beyond Washington’s control. Aside from the steel complex, Brazilian negotiators discovered that other projects considered important for Brazil’s military–industrial development, such as a national engine factory, also met with a receptive atmosphere in Washington. Exulting over the fact that the factory had received a priority classification equal to that of government-owned plants in the United States, a Brazilian officer labeled Washington’s gesture “an excellent demonstration of efficient friendly cooperation in Brazil’s industrial development” and proudly reported to Rio de Janeiro that as a result Brazil found itself “in a priv-

68. Feis to Souza Costa, July 13, 1940, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Herbert Feis Papers, container 26; Aranha to Welles, Oct. 15, 1940, OA.
69. Aranha (MRE) to Martins, Jan. 9, 1941, AHI; Martins to Amaral Peixoto (for Vargas), Jan. 16, 1941, Martins to Vargas, June 14, 1941, GV; Caffery to Aranha, Feb. 8, 1943, AHI, Embaixada dos EE.UU., Notas.
70. Col. Edmundo Macedo Soares e Silva to Vargas, May 26, 1941, GV. Cf. Martins to Vargas, Dec. 16, 1941, GV.
71. Martins to Simonsen, June 30, 1941, Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro (Rio), José Carlos de Macedo Soares Papers; Commercial Attaché Walder Sarmanho (Washington) to Vargas, Sept. 6, 1941, PR, 31.956; Martins to MRE, Oct. 10, 1941, AHI; Conselho Federal de Comércio Exterior, minutes, May 11, 1942, PR, 15.723.
ilegèd position and one very prestigious for us” vis-à-vis other countries in the competition for American assistance. “We have only reasons to believe that the Vargas program for industrialization of the country will continue to be executed with increasing American aid,” Aranha noted privately in 1943.72

Authoritative Brazilian perception of Washington’s response to the crucial coffee question was overwhelmingly positive. To help prevent severe financial dislocation in Brazil and other Latin American coffee-producing countries from the closing of European markets, American experts made in 1940 what the Brazilian financial attaché called “a complete, exhaustive and perfectly impartial” study of the matter and and worked out a special convention that guaranteed to those countries a share of the American market at reasonable prices. The director of Brazil’s National Coffee Department later remarked to Finance Minister Artur Souza Costa that with the convention Washington had erected “a rare monument of great political wisdom.” When a coffee-exporting firm inquired early in 1942 about the possibility of securing higher prices for shipments to the United States, the director’s response was incredulous. “It seems to us, from all standpoints, impossible to seek a greater price for coffee,” he informed Souza Costa, “since the one that we obtained is a result exclusively of the magnanimity of the Government of the United States . . .”73

In the area of American military policy toward Brazil after 1939, it is significant that, although the Army and Navy agreed months before the outbreak of war in Europe that the establishment of military bases in Northeast Brazil was vital to American national security, “nearly three years of delicate and involved political and military negotiations” would be necessary to persuade Rio de Janeiro to allow the stationing of American troops in that region.74 The diplomatic and military records of both countries show that those negotiations were sensitive and protracted in large part because Washington was anxious to avoid offending Brazilian national sensibilities and, consequently, it moved only as fast as the Vargas government permitted. “Since we are obviously not in a position to use force, in pursuit of our policy in the south Americas,” General Dwight Eisenhower once aptly remarked, “we must depend upon wheedling.” Reflecting on the staff discus-

72. Col. Antonio G. Muniz (New York) to Aranha, Sept. 19, 1941, PR, 27.583; Aranha to Dutra, Aug. 11, 1943, OA.
73. Eurico Penteado to Aranha, Nov. 29, 1940, OA; Director, Departamento Nacional do Café to Souza Costa, Sept. 8, 1942, PR, 20.792, June 23, 1942, PR, 5.845.
sions of 1940–1941, ardent nationalist Pedro Góes Monteiro, then chief of staff, recalled that “happily, the American officers were very understanding and sensible, strictly accepting the viewpoints of the [Brazilian] General Staff.”

It should also be noted that the major bone of contention in those negotiations was not American encroachments on Brazilian sovereignty, but Washington’s inability to supply the arms that Brazil wanted. American policymakers agonized over the question, recognizing that, as the Chief of Naval Operations put it, Brazil’s importance to the United States was “perfectly enormous,” but they could do little during 1940–1941 except express goodwill and frankly explain to Rio de Janeiro the immense difficulties that Washington faced. Following Pearl Harbor, however, American military aid to Brazil would be considerable and, in comparison with assistance given to other hemisphere countries, it would be both massive and preferential.

The course of negotiations about specific items of military assistance was marked on the American side by an obvious desire to bolster the Vargas regime politically and diplomatically, a fact that, according to Brazilian observers, elicited numerous complaints from Spanish American governments. Over strenuous objections from the Navy, Roosevelt, for example, ordered naval units turned over to Brazil in 1942 because, he said, “this is a matter of international relations which has to be gone through with regardless of the purely military desirabilities.” In the critical military-economic matter of petroleum supplies, Washington in mid-1942 included Brazil in the same category as Great Britain, and following Brazil’s entry into the war in August it agreed to meet all the petroleum requirements of the Brazilian armed forces. This represented “absolutely exceptional treatment” of Brazil, an ebullient Brazilian general exclaimed. In ensuing months Brazilian authorities repeatedly commented among themselves about

76. Standing Liaison Committee, minutes, Jan. 23, 1941, RG, 353. A typically frank, apologetic communication is Marshall to Aranha, Jan. 6, 1941, OA.
77. The value of total Lend–Lease supplies to Brazil reached $366 million, which was approximately three-fourths of the total given to Spanish American countries. Con and Fairchild, Hemisphere Defense, p. 339.
American goodwill and receptivity regarding plans and programs for bolstering Brazil's military and international position.  

Roosevelt's stopover in Natal in January 1943 to see Vargas following the Casablanca meeting with Churchill was largely a calculated gesture to enhance Brazilian prestige. In conference with Vargas, Roosevelt surveyed the general politico-military situation, discussed further joint military and economic collaboration between Brazil and the United States, and broached postwar problems. “President Vargas was in high good humor on the trip back from Natal...,” Caffery later wrote to Roosevelt. “He told Aranha that he was highly pleased with the trip, delighted with his conversation with you, and had come back with his feeling of confidence in you even stronger than it was before.”  

A striking example of the American attitude was Washington’s support for the FEB. Not only did the United States government equip and transport the FEB, but it overrode strong British objections to Brazil’s participation in the ground fighting in Europe. London had never shared Washington’s enthusiasm for Brazil, and relations between Great Britain and Brazil in the early stages of the war had been far from cordial. When the British seized a Brazilian ship carrying a consignment of Krupp armaments in 1940, a major crisis in those relations was averted only by energetic intervention by the State Department and Chief of Staff Marshall, who persuaded the British to release the ship. Washington also pressed London in 1941 to allow Brazil to send military observers to the Middle East; a reluctant Foreign Office then asked the War Office to cooperate, emphasizing that it made the request only because Washington had "repeatedly made it clear that they attach great importance for both political and economic reasons to Brazil and to the improvement of Anglo-Brazilian relations. . ." Later in the war London strongly disapproved of the idea

80. See, for example, the letters to Vargas from Dutra, Sept. 2, 1943; Martins, Jan. 18, 1944; Naval Attaché João P. Machado (Washington), Nov. 17, 1944, GV.
82. The Board of Trade candidly acknowledged early in the war that Brazil was “near the bottom of the list” of countries of political significance to Great Britain. Board of Trade to Foreign Office, Dec. 18, 1939, FO, A8930/539/6.
84. Foreign Office to War Office, Oct. 4, 1941, FO, A7922/190/6.
of Brazil’s involvement in the European theater of war, and even after bowing to American pressure, Churchill endeavored to minimize Brazil’s future role. The State Department, however, believed that “important political stakes” were involved, “such as the strengthening of the Brazilian voice in the postwar settlements,” and it also feared that rejection of the FEB “might seriously weaken President Vargas’ position.” Under Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, Jr., cautioned by Hull that “the delay in carrying out the plan is embarrassing President Vargas and threatens his prestige,” proceeded to admonish British leaders about “the political importance [of the FEB] both within Brazil and from the standpoint of her prestige as an ally,” and only then did they abandon their resistance to the undertaking.86

American planning for postwar military assistance to Brazil was designed to transform that country into an effective military–diplomatic partner and to assist it “in becoming self-sufficient in a military sense, rather than having continuing help.”87 Joint discussions of the matter with Brazilian staff officers began in 1944 and were entirely consistent with the simultaneous support that Washington was giving to the FEB. Brazilian planners, moreover, went along wholeheartedly with the idea of the closest possible military collaboration between the two countries after the war.88

The capstone of the domination thesis, as noted earlier, is allegedly depreciatory treatment of Brazil by Washington in the matter of a seat for that country on the United Nations Security Council.89 According to Professor McCann, the United States not only refused to support Brazil’s bid, but even deceived Brazilian leaders about American intentions. Citing Hull’s memoirs, McCann states that the Secretary of State “claimed” that Washington had supported the idea of a permanent seat for Brazil during the Dumbarton Oaks talks in 1944, but

86. Hull to Stettinius, Apr. 15, 1944, DS, 7400.0011, Stettinius Mission/34D; Stettinius to Hull, May 22, 1944, FRUS, 1944, III, 14.
88. Admiral A. R. de Vasconcellos to Vargas, Nov. 1, 1943; Admiral Henrique Guilhem to Vargas, Mar. 22, 1944; Vargas to Góes Monteiro, Apr. 12, 1944; Vargas to Roosevelt, Apr. 13, 1944, CV; Dutra, memo, Apr. 17, 1944, EME.
89. One additional item in McCann’s argument—the suggestion that Washington was monitoring Brazil’s diplomatic correspondence, thus placing that country at a disadvantage in negotiations with the Americans—should be clarified. The evidence he adduces is a copy of a telegram sent by Vargas to Souza Costa on Feb. 14, 1942, while the latter was in Washington conducting military and
that the British and Russians had opposed it. “If that was indeed the case,” argues McCann, “the United States owed Brazil an honest explanation, but it was never given.” With the disappearance of Aranha, Welles, Hull, and Roosevelt from the diplomatic scene by 1945, Brazil’s cause in Washington was fatally weakened. To be sure, “the drive for American domination” of Brazil intensified with the advent of Truman. “Washington allowed the Brazilian government to continue in the expectation that its efforts [to gain a seat] would be rewarded . . . ,” McCann concludes. “Instead of greatness, however, its reward was subservience.”

The record of the American response to Brazil’s desire for representation on the Security Council does not support that interpretation. Washington in fact raised the question of a permanent seat for Brazil with the Russians and British apparently even before Rio de Janeiro seriously put forth its candidacy. At the very beginning of the Dumbarton Oaks meetings in August 1944, Hull advised Stettinius, who headed the American negotiating team, that “he supported the idea of a permanent seat for Brazil.”

Roosevelt also favored the idea, but economic negotiations, a copy that came into the hands of Sumner Welles and which he forwarded in translation to Roosevelt. “There is no indication that it came from a Brazilian source,” McCann states (Alliance, p. 266). The Vargas Papers show, however, that Souza Costa himself gave the message to the Americans in order to bolster Brazil’s bargaining hand. Vargas wanted military equipment urgently and to prod Washington, he sent Souza Costa on Feb. 9 an ominous report on alleged Argentine military activity on Brazil’s southern border, authorizing him “to use this information in a strictly secret manner in order to expedite delivery [of] our materiel.” He renewed the message on Feb. 14 and two days later received a wire from Souza Costa assuring him that “my whole effort is directed precisely toward obtaining actual delivery of the materiel that we need. I will have another meeting with Sumner Welles today and will take the opportunity to transmit the information that you sent by telegram so as to reinforce my argument about the urgency of satisfying our requests.” The message that Welles subsequently sent to Roosevelt was a translation of Vargas’ telegram of Feb. 14. Vargas to Souza Costa, Feb. 9, 14, 1942, Souza Costa to Vargas, Feb. 16, 1942, GV; Welles to Roosevelt, Feb. 18, 1942, FDR, PPF: Brazil. It should be noted, moreover, that whereas neither the available American nor Brazilian records indicate that Washington monitored official Brazilian communications, Vargas’ personal files disclose that Brazilian censors monitored at least the telephonic traffic between the State Department and the American embassy in Rio. Vargas apparently received transcripts or résumés of such conversations as a matter of course when they dealt with subjects of political substance. The censors even commented on the “tone” of the conversations. See, for example, Censura Telegráﬁca do Brasil to Vargas, Feb. 28, July 25, 1944, GV.

90. McCann, Alliance, pp. 341, 458.

91. Extract from Stettinius Diary, Aug. 24, 1944, FRUS, 1944, I, 732. “I myself felt strongly on this point, believing that Brazil’s size, population, and resources, along with her prospect of a great future and the outstanding assistance
when Stettinius raised the question, Ambassador Andrei Gromyko and Sir Alexander Cadogan, speaking for the Russian and British governments, expressed on at least three occasions their candid opposition to giving permanent seats to any but the Big Four and possibly France.92

The Brazilian government obviously would have welcomed a permanent seat, and its diplomatic agents argued thereafter in talks with Allied leaders that Brazil deserved such recognition, but this was a bargaining maneuver designed to increase the chances of securing a non-permanent slot on the Council. Brazilian policymakers realized that it would be impossible to overcome the resistance of at least the European great powers to Brazil's candidacy. Itamarati's instructions to Ambassador Carlos Martins in Washington early in November 1944 reflected Rio de Janeiro's realism: endeavor to obtain a permanent seat, said Itamarati, but if that should prove impossible, try "to ensure the election of our country . . . to a position of temporary member."93

The State Department quickly sought to discourage insistence on a permanent seat. A high-ranking official was frank with Martins, pointing out to him that countries receiving permanent seats would logically be those possessing the military capacity to assume worldwide obligations. The following month Stettinius, in a telegram to the American embassy in Brazil intended for transmission to Itamarati and in conversation with Martins, gave the Brazilian government what can only be described as an honest exposition of Washington's position. "The United States is prepared to give strong support to Brazil's claim to a non-permanent seat on the Security Council," Stettinius stated. "It is not prepared to insist upon the allocation to Brazil of a permanent seat." The "determined opposition" from the other major powers, especially the Soviet Union, made a permanent seat for Brazil impossible. Permanent membership, he repeated, would have to be reserved for countries that could contribute to peace-keeping on a global scale. At a meeting late in January 1945, Martins and other Latin American diplomats in Washington received from the State Department an equally candid restatement of the realities of international politics.94

Stettinius, in his explanation to Brazilian authorities, stressed the significance of Russian objections, and Martins agreed that generally

she had rendered her sister United Nations, warrant her receiving permanent membership." Hull, Memoirs, II, 1678.

92. FRUS, 1944, I, 731, 737, 744.
93. MRE to Martins, Nov. 4, 1944, AHI.
94. State Dept. memo, Nov. 13, 1944, OARA: Brazil; Stettinius to U.S. chargé (Río), Dec. 18, 1944, FRUS, 1944, I, 952; Martins to MRE, Dec. 19, 1944, AHI; State Dept. memo, Jan. 31, 1945, FRUS, 1945, I, 41.
deteriorating relations among the great powers hindered Brazil's candidacy.95 Moscow, furthermore, would hardly be disposed to accept as a partner a country that had not maintained relations with it since 1918. It was precisely in the hope of improving Brazil's chances of obtaining postwar representation that the State Department now took the initiative of urging Vargas to restore ties with the Soviet Union, a fact heretofore ignored.

Hull in March 1944 had already informed Martins that Roosevelt was willing to serve as an intermediary should Brazil desire. State Department analysts at the end of the year, recognizing that “Brazil's ambitions to play an influential role in the postwar security and peace organizations make it highly important for her to have Russian support—or at the very least for her not to have Soviet opposition to her participation,” urged friendly intervention. Accordingly, Stettinius, with his eye on the approaching conference in San Francisco to draw up the United Nations charter, passed through Brazil in February 1945 and took the occasion of a meeting with Vargas in Petrópolis to admonish him that “no time should be lost by Brazil in recognizing Russia.”96 Two weeks later he pressed Foreign Minister Pedro Leão Velloso to act before the conference opened, and Vargas decided to heed the advice. On March 2, he instructed Velloso to establish contacts with the Russians “in accordance with the talk we had with Stettinius in Petrópolis.” Velloso, then in Mexico City as head of Brazil's delegation to the Chapultepec Conference, subsequently proceeded to Washington where, through the good offices of the State Department, Ambassadors Martins and Gromyko exchanged notes on April 2 reestablishing diplomatic relations.97

Roosevelt's death that month did not adversely affect Brazil's status in Washington or diminish American interest in shoring up Brazil as a diplomatic ally. Truman “on several occasions” prior to that time had indicated to Martins his conviction that a “strengthening of the good neighbor policy, especially with Brazil,” was needed, and after assuming the presidency he had Martins informed that he “fully insisted” on giving Brazil “maximum assistance.”98 At San Francisco in

95. Martins to MRE, Dec. 19, 1944, AHI.
97. Pedro Leão Velloso (Mexico City) to Vargas, Feb. 28, 1945; Vargas to Velloso, Mar. 2, 1945, GV; State Dept. memoranda, Mar. 10, 13, 16, 1945, FRUS, 1945, IX, 223–226; Martins to MRE, Apr. 2, 1945, AHI.
98. Martins to Vargas, Apr. 14, June 15, 1945, GV.
May, American delegates told Velloso that Truman intended to propose Rio de Janeiro as the site of the first postwar inter-American conference and, because it would be “politically advantageous” for Brazil and would avoid a cessation of Lend-Lease supplies, they urged Rio de Janeiro to declare war on Japan.99 Truman subsequently remarked to the new American ambassador to Brazil, Adolf Berle, that “he was more anxious to have good relations with Brazil than any other country in Latin America,” a statement that became the subject of a State Department circular to the diplomatic missions in Latin America.100

Velloso at San Francisco quickly realized the futility of trying to overcome Russian and British objections to a permanent seat for Brazil—Anthony Eden told him “with all candor” that he opposed such a move—and he also immediately discovered that Brazil's case was seriously weakened by the lack of unanimous Spanish American endorsement. Stettinius, however, assured the Brazilian envoy of Washington's determination to lobby on behalf of Brazil's election to a “nonpermanent seat for two years,” the maximum temporary position, whenever such elections were held at the as yet unscheduled first meeting of the future world body.101 Late that year, as plans were being formulated for the inaugural session of the United Nations, Rio de Janeiro launched in earnest a diplomatic campaign for a temporary seat. Fearing that the pretensions of Britain and Russia for their favorites might prejudice Brazil's chances, Itamarati appealed to the State Department, receiving in reply repeated assurances and proof of American support.102

At the turn of the year, an anxious Itamarati instructed Martins to remind the State Department that its endorsement of Brazil's claim would be interpreted as “an expressive proof” of American recognition of Brazil's contribution to the war effort. On January 12, 1946, Brazil was elected to a two-year seat by the first General Assembly, receiving the largest number of votes cast for a nonpermanent member.103 An exultant Velloso in Rio de Janeiro expressed both “official appreciation” and “personal gratification” for American support, saying that he

99. Velloso to Vargas, May 23, 1945, GV; State Dept. to U.S. chargé (Río), June 6, 1945, FRUS, 1945, IX, 627.
100. State Dept. memo, June 13, 1945, DS, 711.32/6-1345; State Dept. to Missions in Latin America, June 27, 1945, DS, 711.32/6-2745.
101. Vargas to Velloso, May 8, 1945; Velloso to Vargas, May 10, 20, 23, 1945, GV.
102. MRE to Martins, Nov. 27, 1945; Martins to MRE, Nov. 29, Dec. 3, 1945, AHI.
realized that “it was this help which had put Brazil in top place of voting,” while Martins in Washington told the State Department that he was “very pleased and particularly grateful for the unqualified support given by the American Government to Brazil’s desires.”

Did Washington, then, engage in a “general depreciation of Brazilian prestige” during the World War II era? Did the United States seek to “dominate” Brazil? The historical record dictates a negative answer, showing clearly that the Roosevelt administration at no time devised a program for establishing politicoeconomic control over that country, nor did it desire to do so. It is noteworthy in this regard that attentive, informed analysts representing prewar competitor and wartime ally Great Britain, who were ever sensitive to American maneuvers in Latin America, saw no impulse to domination in Washington’s policies. Ambassador William Seeds in the mid-1930s had suggested that it was the American business community and not the government that pursued exclusivist aims in Brazil, and London’s endorsement of the Good Neighbor Policy throughout the decade as a means of protecting the British position in Brazil indicates that London was reasonably satisfied that American policy was equitable. During the war British authorities in general seemed to credit the Roosevelt administration with an enlightened approach to Latin America. A Foreign Office spokesman in February 1943, for example, argued that the State Department was “a restraining influence upon American imperialism,” and a knowledgeable consultant agreed. Some groups in the United States would like to exclude other powers from Latin America, but “this is certainly not the official policy of the present administration,” he wrote. The embassy in Washington also discounted the idea that the Roosevelt government wanted to dominate South America, and concluded that American economic policy in that region, that is, the promotion of industrialization, would actually benefit Great Britain itself. As for Brazil, a British analyst noted the obvious early in 1943: “Brazil is being ‘groomed’ for the leadership of South America . . . ,” he said in reference to American treatment of that country. Indeed, reported the Washington embassy months later, “the settled

policy of the United States [has been] to increase by every possible means the power and importance" of Brazil.  

Even more important is the conclusion reached by key Brazilian officials actively engaged in negotiations with Washington that there was no imperialist thrust in American policy. Late in 1938, Ambassador Mario Pimental Brandão in Washington posed the very question: did Brazil have anything to fear from American activity in South America? “The maximum that one could admit, in the most pessimistic of hypotheses, as being the extreme pretensions of the United States with regard to Latin America, and especially Brazil,” he declared, “is to establish with us relations as perfect as those of Canada with England and with the United States itself.” His successor, Carlos Martins, argued the next year that a third term for Roosevelt would be “the best thing that can happen to us,” and late in 1942 he exuberantly hailed the benefits that the partnership with the United States had brought to Brazil. A recurrent theme of Aranha’s official and private correspondence during the 1930s was Washington’s isolationist mood and its insistence on establishing cooperative relations with all of Latin America to the detriment of the special relationship with Brazil that he wanted to forge. As foreign minister (1938–1944) Aranha was not concerned that relations between the two countries would become too close; on the contrary, his fear was that they would not become close enough. Writing in 1943, Aranha insisted that Brazil’s best means of meeting the challenges of an “openly and boldly imperialistic” age was to ally itself “materially, morally and militarily” with the United States, which, by implication then, was not a country that threatened Brazilian sovereignty.

Valentim Bouças, one of Vargas’ closest financial advisers and head of the wartime Amazon rubber program, emphasized the contrast between Washington and some American business sectors, advising Var-

109. Pimentel Brandão to Aranha, Nov. 8, 1938, OA; Martins to Vargas, June 28, 1939, Sept. 4, 1942, GV.
110. See, for example, his dispatch to MRE, Jan. 14, 1935, AHI, 408/1/5; letters to Vargas, Mar. 6, 1935, May 12, 1936, Nov. 24, 1937, GV; letter to Macedo Soares, May 14, 1935, OA; dispatch to MRE, Jan. 15, 1936, AHI, 408/1/9.
111. Pondering Aranha’s imminent arrival for economic and military talks in 1939, Welles aptly remarked that “the inclination of the Brazilian Government is always to go considerably further than we are ready to agree to go as to the form of cooperation,” Standing Liaison Committee, minutes, Jan. 21, 1939, RG, 353.
112. Aranha to Dutra, Aug. 11, 1943, OA.
gas in 1942 that "happily for us the government authorities, notably President Roosevelt, the Department of Agriculture and that of State do not adhere to that antiquated policy of domination and subjugation." Although he had been initially skeptical of all great powers, General Góes Monteiro's trips to the United States in 1939 and 1940—the Americans, he had written, demonstrated "maximum goodwill" toward Brazil—left him convinced by mid-1944 that a wholehearted alignment with Washington was Brazil's wisest policy. He reasoned that "the United States, endeavoring to erase forever the vestiges of imperialistic tendencies, will not take a single step that might seem to be intervention in the internal affairs of the nations of this hemisphere."113 Brazilian members of the Joint Defense Commission in Washington also looked forward with satisfaction to an even closer partnership with the United States after the war, and from his vantage point in Lisbon, Ambassador João Neves da Fontoura, a future foreign minister, saw things in a similar light. The United States represented the sole hope for Western civilization, he wrote enthusiastically, since only that country possessed the material resources, creative spirit and "proven altruism" to assist other countries in meeting the problems of the future.114

As for Vargas, his private correspondence yields no expressions of concern about alleged American imperialism. Rather, like Aranha, he had encouraged since the mid-1930s a special relationship with Washington as a means of extracting military and economic assistance from the United States and in the general interests of Brazilian security, and as the war drew to a close his major worry, as myriad documents demonstrate, was that the United States might lose interest in the alliance after the conflict had ended. American policy, after all, had brought unusual benefits to his country at a relatively low cost. Indeed, as a result of his government's wartime collaboration with the United States, Brazil had been assured a position in postwar councils that would make it unique among Latin American countries, and significant strides had been taken toward the realization of a long-standing national goal—the establishment of industrial and military supremacy in South America. If the wartime "axis" did not bring the postwar benefits that Brazilian policymakers anticipated, it was not because the American gov-

113. Bouças to Vargas, Feb. 22, 1942, GV; Góes Monteiro to Dutra, June 10, 1939, EME; Góes Monteiro to Vargas, May 28, 1944, GV.
114. Carvalho to Aranha, Feb. 15, 1944; Carvalho to Gen. Firmo Freire, Apr. 4, 1944, ELC; Col. Alves Secco to Salgado Filho, Apr. 24, 1944; João Neves da Fontoura to Vargas, Oct. 7, 1943, GV.
ernment had played a “two-faced game” with Rio de Janeiro during the war, but rather because unexpected Cold War challenges riveted Washington’s strategic attention on Europe and Asia and drained American resources toward those areas.