




Cite this article as: Nourigholamizadeh, E. (2023). Successes and Setbacks of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Positive Balancing with Brazil. *Journal of World Sociopolitical Studies*, 7(4), pp. 741-783 <https://doi.org/10.22059/wsps.2024.371483.1409>

## Successes and Setbacks of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Positive Balancing with Brazil\*

Elaheh Nourigholamizadeh<sup>1</sup>

1. Assistant Professor of American Studies, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran (elahehnouri@ut.ac.ir)  0000-0001-5145-6356

(Received: May 22, 2023 Revised: Jul. 16, 2023 Accepted: Sep. 15, 2023)

### Abstract

Formal relationship between Iran and Brazil commenced in 1903 with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce. Since then, their bilateral relations have been shaped by political and economic changes in both countries. A pivotal moment after the 1979 Iranian revolution occurred in 2005, when leaders Lula da Silva of Brazil and Ahmadinejad of Iran showed mutual interest in cooperation, driven by Iran's need to balance US threat and Brazil's aspiration to balance US power. However, shifts in the Brazilian foreign policy towards Iran and escalating tensions between Iran and the West impeded further progress. With Lula da Silva's return to power in 2023 and Iranian President Raisi's heightened focus on Latin America, both countries witnessed renewed discussions about the potential for positive balancing between Iran and Brazil. This study delves into the successes and setbacks of Iran-Brazil bilateral approximation through the lenses of positive balancing theory and historical analysis method. During Lula's administrations, Iran's balancing strategy towards Brazil proved beneficial for both nations: Iran sought to counter US threats by fostering a friendly relationship with Brazil, while Brazil aimed to elevate its Global South agenda by mediating in Iran's nuclear program. This engagement also aimed to unite anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist movements under emerging political leaders. Despite these efforts, the US pressure on Iran to halt its nuclear program and on Brazil to limit its influence hindered constructive engagement between the two countries. Nevertheless, slow but steady economic interactions and Iran's inclusion in BRICS provide hope for the restoration of Iran's balancing strategy in Brazil and its reinforcement in Latin America.

**Keywords:** Brazil, Iran, Iran's Foreign Policy, Latin America, Positive Balancing

\* The author has no affiliation with any organization with a direct or indirect financial interest in the subject matter discussed in this manuscript.

Journal of **World Sociopolitical Studies** | Vol. 7 | No. 4 | Autumn 2023 | pp. 741-783

Web Page: <https://wsps.ut.ac.ir/> Email: [wsps@ut.ac.ir](mailto:wsps@ut.ac.ir)

eISSN: 2588-3127

PrintISSN: 2588-3119

This is an open access work published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-SA 4.0), which allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format, so long as attribution is given to the creator. The license allows for commercial use (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)



## 1. Introduction

Iran's relationship with Latin America, specifically Brazil, has experienced constant fluctuations resulting from the internal conditions of both Iran and Latin American countries. In recent decades, Iran's approach to anti-US and leftist countries in the region has sparked intense debate about the past and future of this connection in political and academic circles. Since 2005, with the emergence of Ahmadinejad as a populist president in Iran, US hostility towards the Iranian government has become increasingly prevalent. The escalating consequences of the Iran-US enmity prompted the Iranian government to integrate Latin American countries into its political calculations.

During the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was a phenomenon known as the Pink Tide, which referred to the rise of Left-wing governments in Latin America. This political shift created an environment that facilitated closer relations between Iran and countries in the region. In particular, Brazil, under the leadership of President Lula da Silva, played a significant role in pursuing what was known as the Global South Strategy (GSS) and took significant steps to enhance Brazil's influence on the international stage. At the same time, Iran was also seeking to balance the threat imposed by the United States. Therefore, the concurrence of Iran's desire for balancing the US threat and Brazil's interest in balancing the US power created a favorable context for closer ties between Iran and Brazil. However, it is important to note that from the beginning, the foundation of this relationship was fragile and susceptible to change. The contradictory foreign policies of successive Brazilian presidents and the shifting political priorities of Iran have impacted the continuity of the alliance between the two countries. Therefore, the

present study aims to shed light on Iran's approach of positive balancing towards Brazil in recent decades, with the goal of promoting better mutual understanding and fostering more beneficial cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Brazil in future.

Historically, the first recorded encounter between an Iranian official and Brazil can be traced back to September 1810 (Shahrivar 1189 SH). During this time, Mirza Abolhassan Khan Ilchi, the Iranian ambassador to London, visited Rio de Janeiro, the capital of the Portuguese Viceroyalty, accompanied by Sir Gore Ouseley, a British envoy to Iran, as well as his brother and servants. They spent sixteen days in the city, receiving honors from Dom John VI, the Prince Regent of the Portuguese Monarchy in Brazil. It is worth noting that this visit occurred twelve years prior to Brazil's independence from Portuguese rule and during the reign of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar in Iran. Based on available historical documents, this journey can be considered the first known visit of Iranians to Brazil, South America, and possibly the entire American continent (Santos, 1825, pp. 332-333; Coaracy, 1955, pp. 130-131 & Javadi, 1983, pp. 308-310). Approximately, sixty years later, in 1875 (1254 SH), Mirza Mohammad Ali Mahallati, also known as Hajj Sayyah, became the first Iranian tourist to visit America. Then, around seventy years after that, in 1888 (1267 SH), Haji Hossein-Gholi Khan Noori, known as Haji Washington, was appointed as the first Iranian ambassador to the United States. However, none of these visits resulted in the establishment of any diplomatic collaboration. It was not until 1903 (1282 SH), that Ishaq Khan Mofakham al-Dawlah, the Iranian vice-minister in Washington at the time, embarked on a journey to several Latin American countries, including Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile. During his travels, he signed the Treaty of Friendship

and Commerce with the respective governments of these countries, marking a significant milestone in diplomatic relations between Iran and Latin America.

Although the first official Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between Iran and Brazil was signed on June 16, 1903 (25 Khordad 1282 SH), the establishment of embassies between the two countries was delayed for several decades. In 1935 (1314 SH), the Iranian Ambassador to Argentina was also appointed as the Ambassador to Brazil. However, this arrangement lasted for only two years due to the closure of the Iranian embassy in Argentina for financial reasons. As a result, no ambassador was appointed to Brazil during that time. Finally, in 1943 (1322 SH), the first Iranian Embassy was established in Rio de Janeiro. Following the relocation of Brazil's capital to Brasilia in 1960, the Iranian Embassy in Brazil was also moved to the new capital city (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1402 [2024 A. D.]).

From the establishment of the Iranian Embassy in Brazil until the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, both countries maintained friendly relations, characterized by normal political collaborations, progressive economic and commercial interactions, especially in the petroleum sector, and innovative cultural initiatives. These positive relations were largely influenced by their shared affiliation with the Western Bloc. However, since the triumph of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, and during the period of military dictatorship in Brazil (from 1964 to 1985), until the present time, bilateral relations between the two countries have been significantly impacted by profound political and economic changes at national, regional and international levels. These changes have played a crucial role in shaping the dynamics and trajectory of the relationship between the two countries.

In light of the historical context outlined earlier, a significant turning point in the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Brazil was the reciprocal inclination towards cooperation in 2005. This development occurred during the leadership of Lula da Silva in Brazil and Ahmadinejad in Iran, and it can be viewed as the initial step towards positive balancing in their bilateral relations. While subsequent progress in this direction was later overshadowed by changes in Brazilian foreign policy towards Iran and the escalation of tensions between Iran and the West, the return of Lula da Silva to power in 2023, coupled with Iranian President Raisi's (2021-), growing Latin American agenda has reignited discussions regarding the potential for positive balancing between Iran and Brazil. In regard to these ongoing debates and the fervent discussions surrounding Iran's relations with Brazil, the present investigation aims to meticulously examine the successes and setbacks associated with the bilateral proximity between the two countries. This examination will be conducted through the lens of the positive balancing theory, using a historical analysis method.

## **2. Previous Academic Contributions to Iran's Involvement in Latin America and Brazil**

Research on the propinquity between Iran and not only Brazil, but also the entire Latin America presents an intriguing and captivating academic subject. The various aspects of similarity and difference between these regions, including geography, history, culture, society, politics, and economics, make such investigations both challenging and rewarding. However, despite the fact that more than a century has passed since the initiation of official relations between the two nations, the existing literature on this topic is quite

limited and scarce. Most available sources consist of journal articles, news releases, and official reports, which may have biases or affiliations with specific social, political, or economic interests. Nevertheless, in recent decades, there has been a noticeable increase in academic efforts to review, explain, and analyze the relationship between Iran and Latin America as a whole, as well as individual countries within the region. These endeavors aim to provide a deeper understanding of the multifaceted dynamics and complexities of the relationship between Iran and Latin America, shedding light on both the commonalities and unique aspects of their interactions.

Among the studies that provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between Iran and Latin America, *'Iran's Latin America Strategy: 2005 to Present'* by Penny L. Watson (2017) explores Iran's expanding trade relations with the region since 2005. Watson challenges the notion that Iran's activities in Latin America are solely driven by financial gains or sanctions evasion, suggesting that economic benefits are minimal. Instead, the author highlights two primary objectives pursued by Iran: supporting its nuclear program and developing deterrence against potential military actions by the United States (Watson, 2017). Although Watson's study adopts a political-economic approach and focuses on the period starting from 2005, it analyzes various aspects of Iran's foreign policy that contribute to the country's positive balancing strategy towards Latin America. It is worth mentioning that Watson's (2021) more recent publication, *'Iran's Latin America Strategy and the Challenges to the Balance of Power'*, provides a more detailed and nuanced examination, emphasizing the mutually beneficial aspects of Iran's relations with leftist governments in Latin America, which are critical to the United

States. The author seeks to explain the advantages derived from these close ties for both Iran and the leftist governments in Latin America (Watson, 2021). As a result, the reciprocal nature of these benefits draws attention to the positive character of the inter-regional rapprochement.

In 'The New Role of Latin America in Iran's Foreign Policy', Saideh Lotfian (2010) highlights the 2005 discernible shift in Iran's foreign policy towards Latin American countries, including Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, and more recently, Brazil. Lotfian argues that the rise of an Iranian president with a populist outlook and a pronounced anti-US/Western rhetoric in 2005 facilitated Iran's increased engagement with Latin America. However, she accentuates that Iran's desire to counterbalance the ongoing conflict with the US and the West provides a compelling rationale for developing closer ties with anti-imperialist governments in the region (Lotfian, 2010). This research further reveals the balancing nature of Iran's relations with Latin American anti-imperialist countries, taking into account the vulnerability inherent in this emerging foreign policy agenda. It underscores the complex dynamics at play and acknowledges the potential challenges associated with Iran's engagement in Latin America.

There are also studies specifically dedicated to the relationship between Iran and Brazil. However, in contrast to the academically rigorous explorations of Iran's involvement in Latin America, the literature on Iran-Brazil relations is not as meticulous and exhaustive. Celso Amorim, Chief Advisor of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva since 2010 and former Minister of External Relations of Brazil (1993-1994 & 2003-2010), provides valuable insights in his essay 'Brazilian Foreign Policy Under President Lula (2003-2010): An Overview'. Amorim (2010) elucidates the significance of

Iran's nuclear program for Brazilian foreign policy by presenting a comprehensive narrative of various diplomatic initiatives undertaken by Brazil during Lula's eight-year presidency. Amorim (2010) highlights the successful foreign policy agenda of Brazil under Lula, including initiatives such as the gathering of developing countries at a World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Cancun and the negotiations leading to the Declaration of Tehran. He also addresses the challenges Brazil has faced as its international influence has grown (Amorim, 2010). Similarly, in her article titled '*Brazil's Relations with Middle Eastern Countries: A Diplomacy in Search for Constancy (2003-2014)*', Élodie Brun (2016) highlights the multitude of initiatives undertaken by Lula da Silva in the Middle East. She emphasizes the unprecedented 44 visits made by Foreign Minister Celso Amorim to the region, including visits to Israel and Turkey. Brun also mentions Lula's significant achievements, such as the launch of the South America-Arab Countries Summits (ASPA) in Brasilia in 2005, the Declaration of Tehran signed with Turkey and Iran on the nuclear issue in May 2010, and the recognition of Palestine as a state in late 2010 (Brun, 2016). While this study highlights the inconsistency in Brazil's relations with Iran, both studies primarily focus on Brazil's foreign policy towards the Middle East, with partial attention given to the case of Iran. Likewise, Davood Rezaee Eskandari, in his article titled '*An Overview of the History of Iran-Brazil Bilateral Relations: Co-evolutions and Challenges*', provides a historical account of the official interactions between Iran and Brazil from the beginning up to 2013. He highlights the challenges and complementary aspects of the bilateral relationship (Rezaee Eskandari, 1392 [2013 A.D.]). Furthermore, Shafiee, Afshari, and Shahnori, in their work, '*Change and Continuity in Foreign Policy of Brazil towards the Islamic Republic of Iran*', shed light on



Brazil's intermediary role in Iran's nuclear tensions with the West. They conclude that despite its efforts, Brazil failed to break the Western consensus against Iran and ultimately followed the path set by the US and its allies (Shafiee et al., 1394 [2015 A.D.]). Overall, most of the research conducted on Iran-Brazil relations has a descriptive focus or is grounded in specific case studies, thus not fully revealing the underlying concepts behind the bilateral interactions. Therefore, considering the growing significance of the balancing strategy in Iran's approach towards Latin America, this study aims to examine the Iran-Brazil rapprochement in recent decades, exploring the successes and setbacks of this mutual balancing agenda.

### **3. Appearance of Positive Balancing as a Strategy in the International Relations**

Examination of the relationship between Iran and Brazil in the historical context of international relations insinuates those insights that focus on the efforts of individual countries in the international system to engage with one another while safeguarding their sovereignty and self-determination. The key to establishing effective and enduring cooperation among nations lies in their capacity or willingness to balance their foreign relations within the framework of international amities and enmities. As a result, traditional approaches to international relations emphasize the concept of the balance of power, or balance of powers, in which each state (each power) strives to maintain the status quo, or a state close to equilibrium in its relationship with other states, aiming to prevent the exclusive exercise of power by any single entity. Disrupting this balance in favor of one state could lead to situations of domination or hegemony (Barbé, 1987).

The balance of power has consistently played a significant role in shaping the formulation and implementation of foreign policy in international relations throughout history. This concept has been evident from Thucydides' account of the History of the Peloponnesian War in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC to pivotal agreements such as Treaty of Westphalia, Treaty of Utrecht, Congress of Vienna, the Metternich System, the Bismarck System, and Treaty of Versailles, and has continued to influence actual post-colonialist and anti-imperialist orientations. Various powers across different regions of the world have been deeply engaged in devising their strategies in relation to other powerful entities.

In modern political theory, particularly since the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the balance of power has been regarded as a fundamental concept within the framework of realism, emerging especially in the early years of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union (Mearsheimer, 2020). Political realism, also known as *realpolitik*, posits that the primary aim of each state is to maximize its accumulation of power, resulting in a balance of power if all states act in ways that align with this objective. According to structural realists (Parent & Rosato, 2015; Mearsheimer, 2009), states -including city-states, dynastic states, nation-states, and other political entities operating in anarchy- exhibit a strong tendency to promptly and efficiently balance, with promptness typically defined within a period of 5 years (Fischer, 1992). Faced with unbalanced power, states routinely seek to expand their capabilities (internal balancing) or form alliances with other actors (external balancing) to ensure survival within the anarchic system. Accordingly, internal balancing is a characteristic behavior of great powers, as it minimizes reliance on others. On the other hand, external balancing is a more intricate and perilous

behavior, and therefore, less common, typically occurring under pressure or as an act of desperation. Some proponents of offensive realism take the concept further by asserting that states, always striving to maximize their “share of world power”, are constantly engaged in internal balancing (Mearsheimer, 2001). This perspective underscores the continual pursuit of power maximization as a foundation of states' actions within the international system.

Stephen M. Walt (1987) posited that states tend to balance against threats rather than against power alone. Unlike traditional balance of power theorists, he outlined the reasons for which balancing against rising hegemony has not always been consistent throughout history (Walt, 1987, p. 5). Walt's concept of the “balance of threat” suggests that neorealism predicts the formation of balances of power, but does not specify whether a specific state will opt to balance or bandwagon, or identify the state with which it might choose to balance. This perspective, serving as a significant extension to neorealism, forms the basis for a theory of foreign policy that allows neorealism to elucidate or anticipate which potential threats a state is most likely to balance against. In Walt's view, governments of each state must be willing to carry out a range of international policy actions, from peaceful measures such as diplomatic negotiations, formulating diplomatic conflicts or crises, and establishing, rupturing, or modifying alliances, to more aggressive actions such as threatening or using force, on varying scales, including the potential for war -which might be construed as mere warfare, self-defense in response to aggression, or preemptive war, contingent on the circumstances (Walt, 1987).

Furthermore, the concept of soft balancing, developed by Robert Pape and T. V. Paul, emerged as a recent addition to the balance of

power theory, aiming to articulate non-military forms of balancing that have become increasingly apparent since the end of the Cold War. Pape notably defined soft balancing as “actions that do not directly challenge U.S. military preponderance but use non-military tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral U.S. military policies” (Pape, 2005, p. 18). Soft balancing, in this context, is often delineated as a strategy employed by second-tier states, utilizing indirect tactics to counterbalance the interests of the hegemonic power (Pape, 2005; Paul, 2005; Walt, 2002). It is regarded as holding “much more promise than any other approach in the contemporary globalized world order” (Paul, 2018), signifying its perceived relevance and potential efficacy in contemporary international relations.

In a more recent development, Kai He (2012) introduced a new analytical framework for the soft balancing strategy, termed the negative balancing model. This framework seeks to explain why states have veered away from forming alliances or engaging in arms races to counteract power or threats, as was commonly seen in the past. He described negative balancing as any strategy or diplomatic effort aimed at undermining a rival's power. In contrast, positive balancing refers to actions or policies intended to bolster a state's own power in global politics. According to Dehghani Firoozabadi (1395 [2018 A.D.]), in negative balancing, countries adopt both military and non-military policies to diminish the enemy's power, while in positive balancing, countries strive to enhance their capabilities through internal balancing (strengthening military capabilities) and external balancing (establishing alliances). The latter strategy can be exemplified by the establishment of friendly relations between Iran and Latin American countries, including Brazil, in 2005, when these nations

sought to reinforce alliances with each other. This marked an active pursuit of positive balancing strategies to solidify their influence in the international arena.

Overall, the soft balancing strategy primarily developed during and after the 2003 Iraq War, has been embraced by numerous developing countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, including Iran and Brazil. The decision to adopt positive or negative approaches to balancing hinges on a country's domestic and international circumstances. In a similar vein, the key foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran's outreach to many Latin American countries, particularly Brazil, has been the positive balancing strategy, an exploration of which will be followed in the subsequent sections.

#### **4. Methodology**

The exploration of various facets of Iran's engagement with Brazil will be facilitated through the use of "archival research", which aims to extract evidence from original archival records. Archives are divided into public and private records, and archival research can be defined as "the locating, evaluation, and systematic interpretation and analysis of sources found in archives" (Corti & Thompson, 2004, p. 20). Therefore, this study adopts the archival research methodology to gather rigorous archives related to Iran-Brazil relations, available in both public and private libraries and databases, especially those published by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of both countries. Moreover, "historical analysis" will be employed to discern the successes and setbacks of the Iran-Brazil relationship. Historical analysis is a method that seeks to comprehend the past through the disciplined and systematic

analysis of the "traces" that it leaves behind. The most commonly used historical traces are written documents, originating from public or private sources. Historical analysis is often integrated with other methods to address social research questions (Gardner, 2006). Hence, delving into historical texts, documents, and records pertaining to Iran-Brazil relations offers a promising avenue for tracing Iran's positive balancing strategy towards Brazil.

## **5. Findings**

### **5. 1. Relevance of Latin America in Iranian Foreign Policy**

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, despite sharing certain similarities with other countries, exhibits distinct characteristics stemming from the nation's specific geographical, social, and economic structures, as well as the ideological inclinations inherent in its political establishment and decision-making apparatus within the international system. The ideological tenets of Imam Khomeini's foreign policy approach revolve around "Political Islam", advocating for Islamic unity, opposition to racism, pursuit of genuine peace, reverence for ethical and moral principles, and a global invitation to Islam. Furthermore, the strategic elements of Imam Khomeini's foreign policy approach are closely linked to the "Preservation of the Islamic Republic", emphasized through building alliances with Muslims and oppressed people worldwide, resistance against domination and anti-imperialism, commitment to independence and self-sufficiency, and reinforcement of spiritual and defensive foundations. Furthermore, the diplomatic elements of Imam Khomeini's foreign policy are significantly associated with "National Interests and Pragmatism", serving as the groundwork for public diplomacy and

nationalism, soft diplomacy and exportation of the revolution, non-alignment (neither East, nor West), adherence to treaties, sincerity in negotiation and mutual respect, pacifism, Islamism in global politics, efforts to dismantle the inequitable structure of the international system, and support for liberation movements (Khani & Mohammadisirat, 1395 [2017 A. D.]). The evolution of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy has historically unfolded across four distinct periods: (1) Moderate Iranism (1979-1981); (2) Utopian revolutionism (1981-1990); (3) Economy-based normalization (1990-1998); and (4) Culture-based normalization (1998-2005). Throughout these periods, the main tenets of the Iranian foreign policy have been revolutionary, Islamic, and nationalistic (Gharayagh Zandi, 1387 [2008 A.D.]). In addition, Mahmood Sariolghalam argues that, in line with the theoretical underpinnings of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution and its post-revolutionary years, the following principles can be ascribed to its foreign policy: (1) Prioritizing nations over states in international relations; (2) Prioritizing social and political movements over states in international relations; (3) Combating Israel and defending the Palestinian Islamic Movement; (4) Opposing and confronting the United States; (5) Disregarding power differentials amongst countries; (6) Opposing the UN veto system; (7) Distinguishing foreign economic relations from foreign political relations; (8) Emphasizing and implementing inclusive political autonomy in planning and policymaking; (9) Prioritizing ideological beliefs over economic and commercial interests in bilateral relations; (10) Maintaining a strategic distance from major powers and their interests and policies; (11) Emphasizing political justice in inter-state relations (Sariolghalam, 1388 [2009 A. D.], 27-28). Taking all factors into account, the framework and decision-making process within the foreign policy of the Islamic

Republic of Iran, akin to other international actors, adhere to common and accepted principles in various dimensions of international politics. However, it is evident that the revolutionary, Islamic, and nationalistic underpinnings of the country have engendered specificities distinct from the typical foreign policy paradigms of other nations, thereby establishing its unique distinct analytical model.

The ideological essence of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy emphasizes confronting countries that threaten Iran's national security, resulting in tensions with the dominant international system. Since the 1979 Revolution, the Islamic Republic has aimed to shift global power dynamics away from U.S. dominance, advocating for principles such as countering imperialism and hegemony. The Islamic Republic's anti-hegemonic stance can be seen as a narrative seeking justice, anti-colonialism, and anti-imperialism, positioning itself apart from the existing liberal international order and its structural, normative, and institutional aspects. Furthermore, a key aspect of Iran's foreign policy is the discourse of non-alignment or Third Worldism, closely associated with anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and anti-hegemonism, characterizing the stances of many developing countries in the Global South, including Iran and Latin American countries. This framework opposes the current international political-economic system, endeavoring to reshape it for the benefit of third world nations (both developing and southern). Therefore, Iran's approach to balancing its relations with Latin America is deeply rooted in the core principles of its foreign policy.

The Islamic Republic of Iran faces numerous security threats due to its geo-strategic position. The intervention of major powers like the United States has led to significant instability in its



neighboring countries. Additionally, US sanctions and escalating economic pressure have compelled Iranian policymakers to pursue a strategy of deterrence and balancing against these ongoing threats. Therefore, the concept of balancing threats has played a pivotal role in shaping Iran's engagement with Latin America. Given Brazil's role as a prominent economic and political leader in the region, Iran's approach to the country stands as a fundamental step aligned with the Islamic Republic's policies. The particular security landscape prevailing in the Middle East, marked by constant Western, particularly US, threats against the Islamic Republic, the deployment of missile shields aimed at countering Iran, and coordinated efforts by the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia to contain Iran's influence, has driven the country's policy focus towards a strategy of hard balancing in the Middle East. Conversely, Iran's engagement with leftist and socialist countries in Latin America has represented a soft and positive balancing approach.

## **5. 2. Pre-Islamic Revolution Iran's Approximation towards Brazil**

The official initiation of Iran's relationship with Brazil can be traced back to June 16, 1903 (25<sup>th</sup> Khordad 1282 SH), when Ishaq Khan Mofakham al-Dawlah, who was then the Iranian vice-minister in Washington, signed a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with Brazil. Subsequently, the first Iranian ambassador was appointed to Brazil three decades later in 1935 (1314 SH), and the first Iranian Embassy was established in Rio de Janeiro in 1943 (1322 SH), later relocating to Brasilia in 1960. This laid the foundation for the gradual growth and development of bilateral relations between Iran and Brazil. It is worth noting that while

Brazil's engagement with the Middle East and Iran did not happen immediately, the country's initial involvement with the region occurred in 1956, when the Brazilian army participated in the Suez Canal crisis. Brazilian soldiers were deployed to the United Nations Emergency Force (Suez Canal) to ensure the security of the Suez Canal.

The victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 marked a significant turning point in bilateral relations. During the pre-revolutionary era, both countries maintained amicable relations, characterized by standard political cooperation, substantial economic and commercial interactions -particularly in the petroleum sector- and various cultural initiatives, largely due to their shared affiliation with the Western Bloc. However, the extent of these interactions was not perceived to be extensive.

Culturally, the signing of a cultural agreement between the two countries in 1957, which came into force in 1962, marked the beginning of a cultural exchange. This was followed by the establishment of the Iran-Brazil Cultural Association in Rio de Janeiro in 1967 and the holding of several cultural meetings, including poetry nights. Additionally, an exhibition of Iranian carpets and handicrafts took place in Rio in 1970. Notably, a street in Tehran was named after Brazil in 1972, and it still retains the same name. These initiatives were among the innovative cultural actions taken by the Pahlavi regime.

Economically and politically, the establishment of a Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation in 1976 at the level of the finance ministers of the two countries, and the holding of three rounds of meetings in Tehran, Brasilia, and Tehran during the years 1977-1979, were key actions that shaped political and economic cooperation between both countries. Additionally, the signing of a

commercial cooperation agreement in 1977, as well as a technical cooperation agreement, and the visits of various Brazilian officials to Iran and vice versa, were significant in furthering the relationship. In summary, Brazil's initial connection with Iran aimed to introduce the country to Iran and the Middle East region more broadly through films, books, music, theater, trade, and the exchange of professors and students (Preiss, 2011).

Moreover, the economic ties between both countries during this era were predominantly focused on commercial collaboration. Iran was a major supplier of oil to Brazil, selling up to 150,000 barrels per day, while simultaneously acquiring agricultural products like soybeans and sugar from Brazil. Prior to the Iranian revolution, especially in the 1970s, considering Iran's abundant energy resources and Brazil's dependence on oil and credit, the trade balance favored Iran. Consequently, Iran emerged as the largest oil provider in the region and a significant investor in Brazil. For example, in 1978, a year before the Islamic revolution in Iran, Brazil imported nearly 1.8 billion dollars worth of oil from Iran. Iran became the seventh largest exporter to Brazil, constituting 8.3% of the country's total imports. During this decade, approximately 90% of Iran's exports to Brazil comprised oil and oil derivatives. Conversely, Brazil exported products like steel, sugar, soybeans, soybean oil, and aluminum to Iran (Mortean, 2012).

This historical account highlights the multifaceted bilateral relationships involving cultural, political, and economic collaborations. Notably, the Pahlavi regime's amicable relationship with the United States played a pivotal role in facilitating bilateral cooperation, and Brazil expressed a keen interest in collaborating with Iran. However, despite efforts to foster strong ties between Iran and Brazil, these initiatives failed to contribute to a deeper

understanding and exchange of knowledge and culture between the two nations. Visits from Brazilian economic and commercial delegations to Iran were hindered by logistical challenges stemming from geographical distance and limited mutual awareness, which obstructed the advancement of bilateral relations. Ultimately, the pre-revolution political instabilities and the subsequent victory of the Islamic revolution in 1979 brought about significant changes in the mutual relations.

### **5. 3. Post-Islamic Revolution Iran's Approximation towards Brazil**

The victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 marked a significant turning point in Iran's relations with Brazil, as well as with other countries around the world. During this period, profound domestic developments in both countries, alongside major international and regional events, influenced their bilateral relations. The fundamental change in Iran's political system and its subsequent withdrawal from the pro-US Western Bloc, the Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988), the dissolution of the Brazilian military regime in 1985, the end of the Cold War and the bipolar system, and finally the simultaneous emergence of leftist governments in Brazil and Iran, all contributed to deep-seated political and economic changes in both countries. To better explain the fluctuations in their relations over the past decades, this section examines Iran-Brazil relations from 1979 to 2005, dividing it into the Iran-Iraq war period (1980-1988) and the post-Iran-Iraq war period (1989-2005), with a special emphasis on the foreign policy priorities of the ruling governments in Iran.

The first decade after the revolution, which coincided with the Iraq-Iran War, was marked by a serious downturn in bilateral

relations. During this time, Iran and Brazil were aligned with different political blocs. Brazil was still under military dictatorship until 1985, and due to the pro-Western alliances of the Brazilian authorities and their distrust of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, bilateral relations were strained. It is noteworthy that in the final years of the former Iranian regime, the Brazilian Oil Company (Petrobras) suspended its activities in Iran due to political instability. The Brazilian company, which had been primarily involved in oil exploration in Iran before the revolution, shifted to importing oil from Iraq after delays in Iran's oil exports to Brazil. Moreover, several major Brazilian companies subsequently signed significant contracts with Iraqi counterparts in various sectors, including the construction of the Baghdad Railway, the sale of military equipment, and technical cooperation for nuclear technology (Preiss, 2011). In addition to technical assistance, despite declaring neutrality in the Iraq's Imposed War on Iran, Brazil sold substantial military equipment, including aircraft, armored vehicles, radar systems, and various weapons to Iraq. Although after the war Brazil sold 25 EMB-312 Tucano trainer aircraft to Iran, and according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, they were delivered to the country between 1989-1991 (SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, 2024), bilateral relations continued to deteriorate.

In contrast to the deteriorating political relations, the economic ties between Iran and Brazil were characterized by fluctuations depending on the circumstances. At times during the war, Brazil was seen as a source for importing basic economic necessities, including food and industrial products, due to economic sanctions. Initially, the average trade between the two countries was about \$400 million. However, in the middle years of the war, as Brazil's

demand for crude oil grew, there was an increase in imports of Iranian oil from Brazil. During this time, the value of trade exchanges between the two countries exceeded \$1 billion for the first time since the Islamic revolution, and Brazil began to develop its trade relations with Iran. However, this trend did not last long, and Brazil shifted its focus to Iraq for selling military equipment to the country (Mortean, 2012). It is worth noting that Brazil not only sold 25 EMB-312 Tucano trainer aircrafts to Iran, but also exported a significant amount of military equipment to Iraq and provided training to pilots from both countries in Brazil (Preiss, 2011). This approach, known as equidistant foreign policy, was later extended to Brazil's policy regarding other Middle Eastern countries, demonstrating a commitment to maintaining neutrality and engaging in mutually beneficial relationships with all parties involved in regional conflicts.

The stagnation in relations between the two countries, driven from the national, regional and international conditions, took an opposite path in the post-war era. After the end of the war until about 2005, the administrations of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) and Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), known as the Governments of Construction and Reform respectively, tried to re-establish relations between Iran and Brazil. Diplomatic trips from Iran to Brazil to discuss and reform attitudes, as well as reciprocal calls and visits made by Iranian and Brazilian authorities, were the outstanding determinants of the bilateral relations during this period.

A few months after the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Brazil decided to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a joint commission with Iran. This Memorandum of Understanding was signed on September 26, 1988 (4 Mehr 1367 SH) during the

presidency of José Sarney (1985-1990). The next Brazilian President, Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992), strongly criticized Brazil's technical assistance to Iraq during the war. He made efforts to repair and strengthen relations with Iran, which had been affected by the war. This included the organization of three joint commissions between 1988 and 1992, held in Brasilia, Tehran, and Brasilia, respectively.

Another significant development took place on February 19, 1992 when a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the ministries of agriculture of both countries. This laid the foundation for the development of cooperation in the agricultural sector. An important milestone during this period was the official visit of Ali Akbar Velayati to Brazil on May 31, 1991. He met with his Brazilian counterpart Francisco Rezek to enhance relations between the two countries. As a result of these negotiations held during this visit, the two countries exchanged official memorandums on visa waivers for politicians and passport holders on July 10. In the same year, Francisco Rezek visited the Islamic Republic of Iran, marking the first visit by a high-ranking Brazilian official to Iran in the post-revolutionary period. Furthermore, the two countries discussed mechanisms for political dialogue at the level of deputy foreign ministers. This initiative, which began with the visit of the Brazilian Deputy Foreign Minister to Tehran in 2000, was followed by the regular holding of eight meetings in the capitals of both countries (Rezaee Eskandari, 1392 [2013 A.D.]; Espejel Pineda, 2020).

Accordingly, economic interactions between both countries intensified during these years, and Iran's attractive market for technical and engineering services during the Construction Government caught Brazil's attention. As a result, the value of

trade between Iran and Brazil, particularly Brazilian oil imports from Iran, increased. The average trade value between the two countries, which was approximately \$607 million in 1989, surpassed \$1.3 billion in the years 1991-1993, marking a historic peak in the post-revolution era. Furthermore, during the same three-year period, Iran benefited from a trade surplus of over \$500 million due to the growing exports of Iranian oil to Brazil (Ministry of Development, Industry, Commerce & Services. (2020). It is worth mentioning that Petrobras, the Brazilian oil company, obtained the license for oil exploration in Iran in 2003, and in 2004, the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance trade relations. With the development of trade relations, Iran became Brazil's largest trading partner in the Middle East, capturing the majority of Brazilian exports to the region.

Cultural interactions during these years experienced significant growth. Luiz Felipe Lampreia, the Brazilian Foreign Minister during the presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2003), expressed support for Iran's President Khatami's positions regarding the Middle East (Preiss, 2011). Brazil also embraced the designation of the year 2001 as the "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations", a proposal put forth by Iran's President Khatami, which led to the adoption of the concept of the Alliance of Civilizations at the UN General Assembly in 2005. Additionally, numerous seminars on this topic were held in Brazil, and the country actively participated in similar seminars in other nations (Rezaee Eskandari, 1392 [2013 A. D.]).

However, in 1994, Brazil's failure to achieve its economic goals in Iran, such as participation in Iran's reconstruction projects, coupled with increased international pressure on Iran, strained bilateral relations once again. As a result, Iran's exports to Brazil



decreased to \$1.3 million, and the volume of trade exchanges dropped to 552 million dollars. Furthermore, as Brazil stopped importing oil from Iran, the trade balance gradually shifted in favor of Brazil, and since 1998, it has consistently been in Brazil's favor (Ministry of Development, Industry, Commerce & Services, 2020). Lack of trust, communication, and bilateral understanding led to a prolonged stagnation of relations for several years. In sum, the post-revolutionary years from 1979 to 2005 were characterized by a gradual and cautious approach with significant fluctuations resulting from internal political changes in both countries.

#### **5. 4. Iran's Approximation towards Brazil during Lula's First and Second Administrations**

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the current president of Brazil, who also served as the President of the country from 2003 to 2011, was a prominent leader in the Latin American Pink Tide movement. It is worth mentioning that in 2003, Lula became the president of a country that is considered the political and economic leader of Latin America due to its large size, population, and economy. Brazil's geographic position has traditionally ensured its geostrategic superiority over other countries in the region, and consequently, these countries have integrated their immense neighbor into their political and economic calculations. Moreover, Brazil has the largest economy in Latin America and plays a major role in international trade, particularly in agriculture, mining, and manufacturing. It has historically been an active participant in regional organizations, such as the Union of South American Nations<sup>1</sup> and the Southern Common Market<sup>2</sup> and has been involved

---

1. UNASUR

2. MERCOSUR

in mediating regional conflicts. Since Brazil's return to democracy in 1985, the Brazilian authorities have made efforts to preserve the country's political stability and promote economic growth by addressing internal political, economic, and social issues, while also enhancing Brazil's position at regional and international levels.

Aligned with these objectives, the election of leftist Lula da Silva as Brazil's president in 2003 and his foreign policy aimed at promoting peace and sustainable development, made Brazil a leading actor in Latin America and the Global South. Lula's foreign policy focused on increasing involvement in organizations such as Mercosur, the World Trade Organization<sup>1</sup>, and the United Nations Security Council<sup>2</sup>. He sought to establish alliances with strategic partners, improve relations with Argentina, uphold Brazil's leading role in South America, engage in multilateral and regional negotiations, strengthen relations with China and Russia, and enhance Brazil's political influence globally. The approach, known as the Global South Strategy<sup>3</sup>, made Lula a prominent leader among the countries of Global South.

The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the president of Iran in 2005 marked a significant turning point in the relationship between Iran and Brazil. This period witnessed a notable increase in bilateral relations, fueled by regional and domestic developments in both countries. The growing economic and political ties, along with a rise in commercial interactions, the political consultations at various levels, and the exchange of high-level delegations between the two nations, were key aspects of this period of mutual approximation. It is worth noting that Ahmadinejad's populist presidency,

---

1. WTO

2. UNSC

3. GSS

characterized by his anti-US rhetoric, and Lula da Silva's leadership as a leftist figure, combined with his Global South Strategy (GSS), played a crucial role in facilitating the emergence of a new era of political dynamics between Iran and Brazil.

During this period, the development of relations between Iran and Brazil witnessed unprecedented political advancements. There was a notable increase in the exchange of high-level political and economic delegations, as well as the signing of various documents and agreements, surpassing the levels seen in previous periods. In 2008, the foreign ministers of both countries met on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly's annual session in New York. Subsequently, the Brazilian Foreign Minister, Celso Amorim, visited Tehran on November 2, 2008. In return, Manouchehr Mottaki, the Iranian Foreign Minister, traveled to Brazil on March 25-26, 2009. These visits were significant, as they took place approximately 18 years after the previous bilateral visits of both countries' foreign ministers in 1991 (Rezaee Eskandari, 1392 [2013 A.D.]). The bilateral meetings between Iran and Brazil extended beyond the foreign ministers and encompassed ministries of Science and Technology, Development, Industries and Trade, as well as international organizations. Numerous Iranian delegations traveled to Brazil at various levels, highlighting the depth of engagement. In the period spanning from 2005 to 2012, the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made several visits to Latin American countries. He visited Bolivia (three times), Brazil (once), Ecuador (twice), Cuba (once), Nicaragua (twice), and Venezuela (six times). Conversely, Latin American leaders visited Iran, including Bolivia (twice), Brazil (once), Ecuador (once), Guyana (once), Nicaragua (three times), and Venezuela (nine times) (Johnson, 2012). Notably, Lula da Silva visited Tehran in May 2010 and the most prominent outcome of these bilateral visits was

the signing of cooperation documents, symbolizing the strengthening of cooperation between the two nations. During Ahmadinejad's visit to Brazil in 2009 and Lula da Silva's visit to Iran in 2010, a total of 53 documents were signed, including agreements, memorandums of understanding, and other initiatives in the economic, commercial, banking, and cultural fields. This number was significant, representing almost all the documents signed throughout the history of Iran-Brazil relations until 2010 (Rezaee Eskandari, 1392 [2013 A.D.]). It is worth mentioning that during Lula da Silva's visit to Tehran, he attended the G-15 summit in Tehran and the historic "Declaration of Tehran" on the resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue was signed in partnership with three countries of Iran, Brazil and Turkey. However, the historic agreement signed by all three countries (Iran, Brazil, and Turkey), was later rejected by the US and Western powers for political reasons, and bilateral efforts in this regard failed.

Figure 1. Iran-Brazil Trade (2003-2012)



Source: Trade Map, 2023

The Figure 1 displays the trade balance interactions between Iran and Brazil during the period of 2003-2012. The data presented in the figure indicates a shift in the trade balance between Iran and Brazil, which historically favored Brazil, but gradually began to tilt in favor of Iran. Notably, there was a significant increase in the volume of trade interactions between the two countries during this period. From 2002 to 2012, the trade volume between Iran and Brazil surged from \$500 million to over \$2.2 billion. Brazil accounted for more than half of Iran's trade with all Latin American countries, and a substantial portion of Brazil's exports to the Middle East were directed towards Iran. It is important to note that the primary export items from Brazil to Iran included agricultural products such as sugarcane, corn, soybeans, and chicken meat. On the other hand, Iran's main exports to Brazil encompassed petrochemicals like propane and liquid butane, polyethylene, nuts, and carpets (Mortean, 2012). This shift in trade dynamics reflected the evolving economic relationship between Iran and Brazil during the specified period. Nevertheless, there were still several persistent economic challenges in their bilateral relations. These challenges included the absence of a comprehensive bilateral economic agreement to facilitate trade, the lack of free and preferential trade agreements, the small share of each other's market, the insufficient recognition of the economic advantages that Iran and Brazil could offer each other in bilateral trade (such as Iran's oil and gas resources and Brazil's geopolitical situation), Iran's non-membership in the World Trade Organization, the adverse impact of banking and shipping sanctions, and the absence of direct airlines and banking relations between the two countries. Moreover, the geographical distance separating the two nations and the limited awareness among Brazilian and Iranian traders about the diverse range of products available in each other's markets further contributed to the existing challenges.

According to Souza (2022), the principles and traditions of Iran and Brazil's foreign policies played significant roles in the outcomes of the diplomatic efforts of Lula and Ahmadinejad. Souza emphasizes that shared foreign policy principles, such as pragmatism and South-South cooperation, along with similar strategies of presidential diplomacy, contributed to political results such as Brazil's increased international presence and Iran's reduced international isolation. However, the economic results were not as remarkable. Souza (2022) further explains that Brazil's foreign policy, which is based on universalism, multilateralism, and autonomy, along with its strategy of multilateralism, institutionalism, and a moderated Third World discourse, yielded diplomatic and institutional outcomes. These outcomes included the expansion of Brazil's diplomatic relations, cooperation agreements with various countries, and engagement in multilateral and institutionalized actions such as the South American-Arab Countries Summit<sup>1</sup> as well as the Declaration of Tehran in 2010, among others. On the other hand, Souza highlights Iran's different foreign policy approach based on anti-imperialism. He asserts that Iran's strategy, characterized by bilateralism, personalism, and a radical Third World discourse, resulted in a selective expansion of diplomatic relations with leftist countries, cooperation based on shared ideologies (e.g., ALBA and left-wing governments) and limited institutionalism (Souza, 2022, p. 149).

To gain a deeper understanding of Iran-Brazil relations during the administrations of Lula and Ahmadinejad, it is necessary to re-evaluate the previously explained points through the lens of balancing theory. While Lula was successful in balancing the US power during most of his presidency, his ability to advance and

---

1. ASPA

preserve Brazil's Global South agenda faced significant hurdles due to both internal and external pressures. This was evident in his failure to make significant progress in addressing the issue of Iran's nuclear program. On the other hand, Ahmadinejad, despite facing challenges in implementing his Latin American policy, actively sought to expand his anti-imperialist agenda and counter the growing threat from the US in its traditional backyard. His efforts to establish friendly relations with regional leaders, including Brazil, can be seen as a notable achievement on its own, although it was not free from political and economic hindrances. Iran's anti-imperialist agenda played a crucial role in its engagement not only with leftist countries in Latin America, but also with Brazil, as the region's most influential nation.

All things considered, the Iran-Brazil relationship during Lula da Silva's first and second administrations achieved several historical milestones, especially in the case of Brazil's support for Iran's peaceful nuclear program. The positive balancing strategy was beneficial to both countries: Iran could extend the limits of its strategy to counter the threat from the US by establishing a friendly relationship with the political and economic leader of Latin America, traditionally known as the US's backyard, and Brazil could elevate its Global South agenda to the level of mediation in one of the world's most controversial issues, i.e., Iran's nuclear program. Moreover, this positive engagement had the potential to be effective in showcasing the splendor of anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist alliances, bringing together all liberation ideals and movements under emerging political leaders. However, the foundations of the positive balancing were not as robust as expected, and Iran's strategy towards Brazil faced new challenges in the following years.

## 5. 5. Iran's Approximation towards Brazil after Lula's Administration to the Present

After Lula's departure from power, political relations between the two countries became strongly influenced by the orientations and positions of the successive Brazilian governments. This section aims to provide a general overview of the approach taken by these governments. During Dilma Rousseff's rise to power (2011-2016), the United States increased its pressure on Iran, and the Middle Eastern countries became deeply involved in various military crises. In contrast to Lula da Silva, Dilma Rousseff took a serious stance against Iran on many issues, including its nuclear program and human rights matters, as evidenced by her voting against Iran in various international organizations. In the first year of her administration in 2012, Iranian trade with Brazil, its main partner in Latin America, decreased by 6.7% compared to the previous year. Brazilian exports to Iran reduced to \$2.402 billion, a decline of 6.4%, while Iranian exports to Brazil decreased to \$23.7 million, a significant drop of 32.7% (Mena, 2014, p. 4). Despite these challenges, Dilma Rousseff attempted to propose new paths of economic collaboration. However, U.S. trade sanctions posed serious obstacles to the development of Iran's trade relations, and efforts to foster economic ties were curtailed. Over time, Iran gradually became less prominent in Rousseff's foreign policy, partly due to her impeachment crisis and also due to Iran's nuclear negotiations with the G5+1 on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action<sup>1</sup>, signed in 2015.

During Michel Temer's presidency (2016-2018), there was a continued lack of interest in restoring bilateral relations between Iran and Brazil. The interactions remained limited to brief discussions at international meetings. However, the complexity of

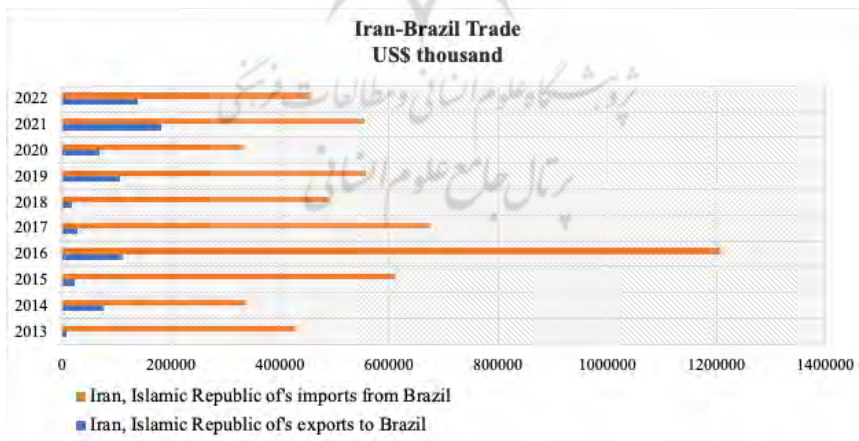
---

1. JCPOA



bilateral relations significantly increased with the policies of Jair Bolsonaro, a pro-US president, who served from 2019 to 2023. One event that significantly strained bilateral relationship was when Petrobras, the Brazilian state oil company, prevented fuel from being supplied to Iranian vessels in 2019. This action further eroded the relationship, causing Iranian businessmen to lose confidence in trade with Brazil. These tensions, which were unprecedented in Iran-Brazil relations, not only deteriorated Iran's relations with Brazil, but also led to a lack of trust in Brazil, which had been Iran's largest trading partner in Latin America. Despite former President Lula's efforts to develop bilateral relations with Iran and establish a solid foundation within the framework of the Global South Strategy, external factors such as the outbreak of the Corona virus pandemic and increasing US sanctions against Iran had a devastating impact on the country's foreign policy priorities. Subsequently, Bolsonaro's policies resulted in a significant reduction in Brazil's relations with Iran.

Figure 2. Iran-Brazil Trade (2013-2022)



Source: Trade Map, 2023.

The Figure 2 illustrates the trade balance interactions between Iran and Brazil in the years following Lula's administration. As mentioned earlier, between 2002 and 2012, the volume of bilateral trade grew from \$500 million to over \$2.2 billion, with Brazil accounting for more than half of Iran's total trade with Latin American countries. Additionally, Iran served as the destination for nearly 29 percent of Brazil's exports to the Middle East. However, during this time, Iran maintained a significant negative balance in favor of Brazil, with imports far exceeding exports.

Currently, Brazil accounts for only 0.13 percent of Iran's total exports, amounting to \$16.53 billion in 2023, ranking 41<sup>st</sup> among Iran's trading partners. In terms of imports, Brazil holds the 16<sup>th</sup> position out of a total of \$65.59 billion in Iranian imports (Jahan-e San'at, 1402 [2023 A. D.]). Despite factors such as the 2015 nuclear deal, the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, and the rise of the extreme right in Brazil, the examination of changes in the weight and value of exports and imports between Iran and Brazil reveals that bilateral trade was not significantly affected by these factors. However, the decline in trade between the two countries in 2019-2020 can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic (Jahan-e San'at, 1402 [2023 A.D.]). This data suggests that despite the controversial policies of Bolsonaro, which not only strained Iran-Brazil relations but also led to Brazil's unprecedented diplomatic isolation on the international stage, the economic progression of Iran-Brazil relations in the post-Lula era maintained a slow and steady rhythm, despite political fluctuations.

It is worth mentioning that the previous economic challenges of bilateral relations still persist. However, it is estimated that Iran's recent inclusion in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) could potentially provide the country with opportunities to

address these challenges. That is to say, joining BRICS may offer Iran the chance to tackle issues such as inflation, weaknesses in joining the transnational production chain, and reforming the banking and financial system. Ultimately, such developments could contribute to facilitating Iran's economic interactions with Brazil. Furthermore, Lula's return to power in Brazil in 2023 amidst various global tensions such as the Russia-Ukraine war conflict and ongoing wars in Middle East, has brought renewed hope for the restoration of his Global South Strategy. Additionally, there is expectation for the re-extension of Iran's Latin American approach to Brazil, considering the strong Latin American agenda of Iran's current President, Ebrahim Raisi.

Although Iran's balancing strategy towards Brazil during Lula da Silva's administration created a historical turning point in bilateral relations, the political foundations of this strategy were not robust. The contradictory foreign policies of Brazil's successive presidents and changing political priorities of Iran dramatically reduced the level of political cooperation. However, the economic interactions between the two countries continued along a similar path, despite facing numerous challenges in reaching satisfactory levels. Therefore, despite Iran's efforts to maintain its balancing strategy towards Brazil, pressures from the US on Brazil to deter its emerging power in the regional and international arena hindered the advancement of constructive engagement between both countries. Brazil's failure to pursue its Global South agenda, and subsequently its fragile balancing against US power, weakened the foundations of the bilateral rapprochement. Additionally, this situation coincided with increasing Western pressures on Iran's nuclear program, which further impinged upon Iran's balancing strategy in Brazil. However, the slow but steady rhythm of Iran-

Brazil economic interactions and Iran's membership in BRICS are factors that fuel hopes for the restoration of Iran's balancing strategy in Brazil and the consequent reinforcement of its balancing strategy in Latin America.

## 6. Conclusion

The relations between Iran and Brazil can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the first Iranians visiting Brazil in 1810. However, official relations between the two countries were established in 1903, when a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce was signed. Over the years, the bilateral relations between Iran and Brazil gradually advanced, with the establishment of embassies and increased political, economic, and cultural interactions. During the pre-revolutionary era, Iran and Brazil had friendly relations, collaborating politically and engaging in economic and commercial activities, particularly in the petroleum sector. The common affiliation to the Western Bloc further facilitated cultural exchanges. However, the extent of interaction between the two countries was not substantial. After the Islamic revolution in 1979, there were significant changes in the bilateral relations, marked by cautious and gradual approximation. The post-revolutionary years witnessed fluctuations due to internal political developments in both countries. Overall, the historical relationship between Iran and Brazil has experienced instabilities, but has generally maintained a growing trend.

A significant turning point in the relationship between Iran and Brazil occurred in 2005, when leaders Lula da Silva of Brazil and Ahmadinejad of Iran showed a reciprocal inclination towards cooperation. This marked the first step towards positive balancing

in their bilateral relations. Theoretically, developing countries, including Brazil and Iran, often seek to reinforce their power in world politics without resorting to aggression. As such, Iran's approach to most Latin American countries, particularly Brazil, has been based on the positive balancing strategy. Factors such as the intervention of great powers like the United States in Iran's internal affairs, the instability of neighboring countries, US sanctions, and economic pressures have created conditions that prompt Iran's policymakers to pursue a strategy of balancing existing threats. The concept of balancing threats has played a decisive role in Iran's approach to Latin America, with Brazil being seen as a fundamental step in the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, given its status as the economic and political leader of the region.

The convergence of Iran's desire to balance the US threat and Brazil's interest in countering US power under Lula's Global South Strategy created a favorable context for closer ties between the two countries. During Lula da Silva's administrations, Iran-Brazil relations achieved significant milestones, particularly in Brazil's support for Iran's peaceful nuclear program. The positive balancing strategy benefited both nations: Iran could counter the US threat by establishing a friendly relationship with the political and economic leader of Latin America, while Brazil could elevate its Global South agenda by mediating in one of the world's most controversial issues, i.e., Iran's nuclear program. This constructive engagement had the potential to showcase anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist alliances, uniting liberation ideals and movements under emerging political leaders. However, the foundations of this positive balancing were not as strong as anticipated, and Iran's strategy towards Brazil faced new challenges in subsequent years. The shifting foreign policies of Brazil's successive presidents, as well as

the changing foreign policy priorities in Iran led to a decrease in political cooperation. Nevertheless, economic interactions between the two countries continued, albeit, with difficulties in reaching satisfactory levels. Furthermore, pressure from the US to deter Brazil's emerging power in the region and on the international stage, hindered the progress of constructive engagement between Iran and Brazil. As a result, Brazil's failure to pursue its Global South agenda and its weakened balancing against US power undermined the foundations of the bilateral rapprochement. However, with Lula's return to power and Iran's growing Latin American agenda under Iran's Raisi, there is hope for the restoration of Iran's balancing strategy in Brazil and the reinforcement of its strategy in Latin America. The ongoing slow but steady pace of Iran-Brazil economic interactions, along with Iran's membership in BRICS, contribute to these hopes.

## References

- Amorim, C. (2010). Brazilian Foreign Policy Under President Lula (2003-2010): An Overview. *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*. 53 (spe), 214–240. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-73292010000300013>
- Barbé, E. (1987). El "equilibrio del poder" en la teoría de las relaciones internacionales [The "balance of power" in international relations theory]. *Revista CIDOB d'Afers internacionals*. 11(..), 5-17.
- Brun, E. (2016). Brazil's Relations with Middle Eastern Countries: A Diplomacy in Search for Constancy (2003–2014). In M. Tawil Kuri (Ed.), *Latin American Foreign Policies towards the Middle East: Actors, Contexts, and Trends* (pp. 37-58). Springer.

- Coaracy, V. (1955). *Memórias da cidade do Rio de Janeiro* [Memories of the city of Rio de Janeiro]. Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio Editora.
- Corti, L., & Thompson, P. (2004). Secondary Analysis of Archived Data. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J.F. Gubrium & D. Silverman D. (Eds.). *Qualitative Research Practice* (pp. 297-313). SAGE Publications.
- Dehghani Firoozabadi, S. J. (1395 [2018 A. D.]). *Osul va mabāni-ye beinol melal* [Principles and Fundamentals of International Relations]. SAMT.
- Espejel Pineda, M. E. (2020). Aproximación de irán a América Latina: Retos y Oportunidades para México y Brasil [Iran's approximation to Latin America: Challenges and Opportunities for Mexico and Brazil]. In M. G. García. *Irán a 40 Años de Revolución: Sociedad, Estado y Relaciones Exteriores* (pp. 289-312). Ciudad de México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
- Fischer, M. (1992). Feudal Europe, 800–1300: Communal Discourse and Conflictual Practices. *International Organization*, 46(2) 427–66. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706859>
- Gardner, P. (2006). *Historical Analysis*. <http://srmo.sagepub.com/view/the-sage-dictionary-of-social-research-methods/n91.xml>
- Gharayagh Zandi, D. (1387 [2008 A.D.]). Osul va mabāni-ye siāsat-e xāreji-ye jomhuri-ye eslāmi-ye irān: jostāri dar motun [Principles and Foundations of Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Survey on the Texts]. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 11(40), 277-313. [https://quarterly.risstudies.org/article\\_937\\_f7a0d265f5f3f116a528089c7f9497b1.pdf](https://quarterly.risstudies.org/article_937_f7a0d265f5f3f116a528089c7f9497b1.pdf)
- He, K. (2012). Undermining Adversaries: Unipolarity, Threat Perception, and Negative Balancing Strategies after the Cold War. *Security Studies*, 21(2) 154–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.679201>.

- Jahan-e San'at. (1402 [2023 A.D.]). Elzāmāt-e tose'e-ye tejārat-e irān va brezil [Requirements of Iran-Brazil Trade Development]. Jahan-e San'at Daily. <https://jahanesanat.ir/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B2%DB%8C%D9%84/383618/>.
- Javadi, H. (1983). Abol-Ḥasan xan-e ilčī [Abol Hasan Khan Ilchi]. In E. Yarshater, *Encyclopædia Iranica. Vol. 1/3: Ablution, Islamic–Abū Manšūr Heravī*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Johnson, S. (2012). *Iran's Influence in the Americas*. Center for Strategic International Studies.
- Khani, M. H., & Mohammadisirat, H. (1395 [2017 A.D.]). Ta'sir-e ideologi bar manafe'-e melli dar siyasat-e xareji-ye jomhuri-ye eslami-ye irān; ba ta'kid bar andiše-ye emām xomeini (rah) [The Impact of Ideology on National Interests and National Security in Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran; Emphasizing on Imam Khomeini's Ideas]. *Quarterly Journal of Political Research in Islamic World*, 6(4) 91-117. <https://priw.ir/article-1-430-en.pdf>.
- Lotfian, S. (2010). The New Role of Latin America in Iran's Foreign Policy. *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, 1(3), 33-62. [https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/irfa/v1i3/f\\_0021954\\_18137.pdf](https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/irfa/v1i3/f_0021954_18137.pdf)
- Mearsheimer, J. (2001). *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Norton.
- Mearsheimer, J. (2009). Reckless States and Realism. *International Relations*, 23(2), 241–256. <https://www.mearsheimer.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Reckless-States-and-Realism.pdf>.
- Mearsheimer, J. (2020). Structural Realism. in T. Dunn; M. Kurki & S. Smith (Eds.), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (pp. 77-94). Oxford University Press



- Mena, S. I. (2014). *Las relaciones entre Irán y América Latina después de Chávez y Ahmadinejad* [Iran-Latin America Relations Under Chavez and Ahmadinejad]. Centro de Estudios de Medio Oriente y África del Norte, CEMOAM Universidad Nacional Costa Rica. [http://web.isanet.org/Web/Conferences/FLACSO-ISA%20Buenos Aires%202014/Archive/814f7b99-7f55-432d-a176-6c46fc28ee4a.pdf](http://web.isanet.org/Web/Conferences/FLACSO-ISA%20BuenosAires%202014/Archive/814f7b99-7f55-432d-a176-6c46fc28ee4a.pdf).
- Ministry of Development, Industry, Commerce & Services. (2020, Aug. 20). Estatísticas de Comércio Exterior em Dados Abertos [Foreign Trade Statistics in Open Data]. <https://www.gov.br/mdic/pt-br/assuntos/comercio-exterior/estatisticas/base-de-dados-bruta>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (1402 [2024 A.D.]). Ravābet-e siyāsi-ye irān va brezil [Political Relations between Iran and Brazil]. <https://brasilia.mfa.ir/portal/generalcategoryservices/4734>
- Mortean, J. M. de S. (2012). *Comparative Analysis on the Economic Policies and Bilateral Trade between Iran and Brazil in the 1970s and the 2000s*. [Master Thesis, School of International Relations Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tehran, Iran].
- Pape, R. A. (2005). Soft Balancing against the United States. *International Security*, 30(1), 7-45. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4137457>
- Parent, J. M., & Rosato, S. (2015). Balancing in Neorealism. *International Security*, 40(2), 51-86. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43828295>
- Paul T. V. (2005). Soft Balancing in the Age of US Primacy. *International Security*, 30(1), 46-71. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4137458>

- Paul T. V. (2018). *How 'Soft Balancing' Can Restrain Trump's America*. Global Affairs. <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/august-2018/how-soft-balancing-can-restrain-trumps-america/>
- Preiss, J. L. S. (2011). Brazil-Iran Relations: From the Background to Developments in the XXI Century [As relações Brasil-Irã: dos antecedentes aos desdobramentos no século XXI]. *África del Norte y Medio Oriente*, 1(1), 45-60. <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/169449/ANMO%201%20Completo%20Final.pdf>.
- Rezaee Eskandari, D. (1392 [2013 A. D.]). Moruri bar tārixçe-ye ravābet-e do jānebe-ye irān va berezil (ham takmili ha ham čaleš ha [An Overview of the History of Iran-Brazil Bilateral Relations Co-evolutions and Challenges]. *Foreign Relations History*. 14(54), 123-146. [https://www.hfrjournal.ir/article\\_77100\\_f41f1f960c63ae80ea1348d3f40117b7.pdf?lang=en](https://www.hfrjournal.ir/article_77100_f41f1f960c63ae80ea1348d3f40117b7.pdf?lang=en)
- Santos, L. G. dos. (1825). *Memorias para servir à historia do Reino Unido do Brazil* [Memories to Serve the History of the United Kingdom of Brazil]. Lisboa: Impressão Régia.
- Sariolghalam, M. (1388 [2009 A. D.]). Siāsat-e xāreji-ye jomhuri-ye eslāmi-ye irān: qābeliat ha va emkān-e taqir [The Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Potential and the Possibility of Change]. *A Quarterly Journal of Foreign Relations*, 1, 21-40. <https://ensani.ir/file/download/article/20101120204154-9.pdf>
- Shafiee, E., Afshari, A., & Shahnori, N. (1394 [2015 A. D.]). Taqir va tadāvom dar siāsat-e xāreji-ye berezil dar qebāl-e jomhuri-ye eslāmi-ye irān [Change and Continuity in Foreign Policy of Brazil towards Islamic Republic of Iran]. *Political International Researches*, 7(23), 195-220. <https://sanad.iau.ir/fa/Journal/pir/DownloadFile/1012285>
- SIPRI Arms Transfers Database. (2024). Transfers of Major Weapons: Deals with Deliveries or Orders Made for 1979 to 2022. [https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade\\_register.php](https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade_register.php)

- Souza, B. M. de. (2022). A Comparative Study of Lula's Diplomacy in the Middle East and Ahmadinejad in Latin America. *AUSTRAL: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations*, 7(13), 120-158. <https://doi.org/10.22456/2238-6912.80369>
- Trade Map. (2023). Iran-Brazil Import and Export. <https://www.trademap.org>.
- Walt S. (2002). Keeping the World off-balance: Self-Restraint and US Foreign Policy. In J. H. Ikenberry (Ed.), *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (pp. 121–154). Cornell University Press.
- Walt, S. M. (1987). *The Origins of Alliances*. Cornell University Press.
- Watson, P. L. (2017). Iran's Latin America Strategy: 2005 to Present. *Democracy and Security*, 13(2), 127-143. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48602428>
- Watson, P. L. (2021). Iran's Latin America Strategy and the Challenges to the Balance of Power. In G. L. Gardini (Ed.), *External Powers in Latin America: Geopolitics between Neo-extractivism and South-South Cooperation* (pp. 138-152). Routledge.