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Volume 49, 2017 - [Issue 3: Prisons, Punishment, and Policing in the Americas. Across the region, violence continues to spiral. What can be done?](#)

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Around the Region

Brazil Rolls Back Regional Integration

Under President Michel Temer, Brazil takes a decisive turn away from regional integration, towards courting the United States and pushing free trade.

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Pages 284-286 | Published online: 14 Sep 2017

“ Cite this article

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2017.1373945>



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MICHAEL FOX

Brazil Rolls Back Regional Integration

Under President Michel Temer, Brazil takes a decisive turn away from regional integration, towards courting the United States and pushing free trade.

On May 31, Defense Minister Raul Jungmann announced that Brazil had signed an agreement with the United States, permitting the use of its Alcantara missile base in Maranhao. The news came less than a month after the United States reported it would be joining Brazil and nine other countries, including Argentina, Canada, and Chile, for joint military exercises in the Amazon in November near the Brazilian border with Peru and Colombia. It will be the first time U.S. troops will participate in any kind of military exercises in the Amazon.

These collaborations would have been unthinkable in Brazil only a year and a half ago, under the Workers Party government of Dilma Rousseff, and are indicative of the larger foreign policy about-face that has taken shape under the government of current president Michel Temer. Gone is the embrace of regional integration and South-South ties. Brazil is back to courting the United States and pushing free trade.

The very day after Brazil's Lower House voted to remove President Rousseff from office, the head of Brazil's Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Aloysio Nunes, traveled to Washington, in part to assuage concerns abroad that the impeachment had indeed been a legislative coup. Nunes was the vice presidential candidate for the right-wing Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) in the 2014 elections against Rousseff and an active proponent of Rousseff's impeachment.

A month later, Temer's first Foreign Minister, Jose Serra, visited the country's closest right-wing ally: Argentina under President Mauricio Macri. Serra, who stepped down from his post this February, citing health reasons, was the former presidential candidate for the PSDB. He lost to both Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva,

in 2002 and Rousseff in the 2010 elections. After his resignation, Nunes replaced Serra as Foreign Minister.

According to a 2009 WikiLeaks memo from the U.S. Embassy in Brazil, Serra had promised Chevron that he would look to open massive offshore oil reserves for foreign companies if elected in 2010. He drafted legislation in the Senate, proposing to do just that. Congress approved it late last year, in a move that many on the left saw as an attack on Brazilian sovereignty and a step toward privatization.

In his transition speech last spring, Serra promised to push for free trade and develop greater relations with Brazil's "traditional partners:" Europe, the United States, and Japan. Serra also took a jab at the previous governments' foreign policy approach. "Diplomacy will once again reflect the values of Brazilian society and the interest of its economy, and no longer be at the service of the ideological preferences of one political party and its allies abroad," he said.

Foreign policy had indeed topped the agenda for the Workers Party governments of Lula and Rousseff. Under Lula, Brazil was finally accepted as a player in the global geopolitical arena. In October 2009, *Foreign Policy* magazine blogger David Rothkopf called Brazil's Foreign Minister Celso Amorim "the world's best foreign minister." Backed by high commodity prices and a strong economy, Brazil helped to unite the G20 group of developing nations as a counterbalance to U.S. and European interests amid the global financial downturn in 2009. Lula forged relations with Africa and the BRICS countries, negotiated the Iran-Turkey-Brazil nuclear deal in May 2010, and called for the democratization of the United Nations. By 2016, Workers Party governments had opened 48

Additional information

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Michael Fox is a freelance journalist based in Brazil. He is the former editor of the NACLA Report on the Americas and the co-author of *Latin America's Turbulent Transitions: The Future of 21st Century Socialism* (Zed Books, 2013).

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