

Review of the book *A questão geopolítica da Amazônia: da soberania difusa à soberania restrita*

Reseña del libro A questão geopolítica da Amazônia: da soberania difusa à soberania restrita

RIBEIRO, N. de F. **A questão geopolítica da Amazônia:** da soberania difusa à soberania restrita. Brasília, DF: Edições do Senado Federal, 2005. 596 p.

Abstract: The book *A questão geopolítica da Amazônia: da soberania difusa à soberania restrita* [The geopolitical issue of the Amazon: from diffuse sovereignty to restrict sovereignty] approaches the Evolution of the importance of the Amazon and of Brazilian sovereignty over the region. Nelson Ribeiro, author of the book, highlights the increasing International attention to the Amazon, especially during the Second World War due to the interest in the rubber and the war efforts. Ribeiro also discusses the attempts of internationalization of the Amazon and the reaction of the Amazonian countries, in addition to state intervention programs in the region. The author analyzes the mineral exploration in the Amazon and the International pressure on Brazil, emphasizing the Brazilian diplomatic strategy to defend the sustainable development of the region, including the project of environmental monitoring of the Sistema de Vigilância da Amazônia (SIVAM – Amazon Vigilance System) and the Sistema de Proteção da Amazônia (SIPAM – Amazon Protection System).

Keywords: Amazon; sovereignty; geopolitics.

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The expansion of the concept of security—beyond the political and military focus, to include other areas such as the human and environmental—which rose with the end of the Cold War (1991), resulted in the emergence of the multilateral debate on the environmental issue in the world. The Amazon, and consequently Brazil, plays a central role in this issue, and the degradation of the Amazon biome has become the latest instrument in the international rhetoric that has tried, since the mid-nineteenth century, to impose on Brazil a restricted sovereignty over this vast portion of national territory.

In this context, the Amazonian Nelson Ribeiro, born in Terra Santa, a district of the municipality of Faro, in the state of Pará, in the heart of the Amazon Rainforest, describes the potential and the weaknesses of this national heritage with singular accuracy, and warns that political and scientific leaders from developed countries, including the United Nations (UN) itself, are unveiling their stratagems to restrict Brazil's sovereignty over the region by ostensibly stating that the Amazon is a world heritage.

The book is structured in five parts, articulated in 72 chapters that are interconnected by a chronological sequence of the facts and events described. The author's analysis was guided by the historical process of building Brazil's sovereignty over its portion of the Amazon biome. In this regard, Nelson Ribeiro begins his analysis by showing how the land division of the new world, discovered by Spain and Portugal, shaped the Amazon geopolitics during the Colonial Period.

The first part, called "*A Amazônia Espanhola e a Amazônia Portuguesa: do Tratado de Tordesilhas (1494) ao Tratado de Madri (1750)*" [The Spanish Amazon and the Portuguese Amazon: from the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) to the Treaty of Madrid (1750)] covers the initial phase of Spanish domination of the region, according to the division made by the Treaty of Tordesillas, proceeds to the phase of Luso-Hispanic domination, the result of the Iberian Union (1580–1640), and ends with the phase of Portuguese domination, inaugurated under the terms of the Treaty of Madrid.

In the first part, the author highlights the discovery of the mouth of the Amazon by the Spanish navigator Vicente Yañez Pinzón in 1500 and the geopolitical repercussions of this discovery. He goes on to present the geopolitical effects of the Iberian Union on the occupation of the mouth of the Amazon River and the interior Amazon due to the expeditions of the Lusitanian navigator Pedro Teixeira. He characterizes Portuguese sovereignty in the region from the Treaty of Madrid and the strategy of establishing fortifications at the main crossing points in the Amazon basin.

Also in this section, the author aptly explains how myths about the immeasurable riches of the Amazon tend to arouse the curiosity and greed of foreigners. Thus, he describes how the first news about the new lands, arriving in Europe accompanied by the legends of Eldorado and the Warrior Indians, soon provoked the interest of the kingdoms and contributed to fueling the spirit of adventure in search of riches.

In the first part, Nelson Ribeiro also describes the campaign by D. João VI, who was already installed in Brazil, to take Cayenne (1808), strengthening the Portuguese position in the Amazon geopolitics. He also highlights the joining of Grão-Pará to independence and its importance in consolidating the sovereignty of independent Brazil over the Amazon.

The second part is called "*A Amazônia Brasileira*" [The Brazilian Amazon] and covers the period from Brazil's Independence to the end of World War II (WWII). In this part, the author addresses three moments that well characterized Brazilian geopolitics and sovereignty over the Amazon: the consolidation of the Amazonian borders (resolving the issues of Amapá, Rio Branco,

and Acre); the interests of the United States of America (U.S.) in the Amazon; and the impact of the rubber economy on the region.

Regarding the consolidation of the Amazonian borders, the author highlights the diplomatic strategy of José Maria da Silva Paranhos, the Baron of Rio Branco, to reach a favorable solution for Brazil on the issues of geographical boundaries that persisted with France (Amapá Issue), England (Rio Branco Issue), and Bolivia (Acre Issue).

As for U.S. interests in the Amazon, Ribeiro shows that the first attacks began in the second half of the nineteenth century, during the Second Reign, when the American government pressured D. Pedro II to open up the region to free navigation and the settlement of black Americans, freed after the American Civil War. For the author, this moment inaugurated the conjuncture of foreign pressures on Brazil, motivated by diffuse interests around the Amazon.

Regarding the rubber economy in the Amazon, Ribeiro presents latex extraction as the first economic activity that attracted large migratory flows to the Amazon, boosting infrastructure projects such as the Madeira-Mamoré railroad, which led to the emergence of numerous villages in the border region with Bolivia and contributed to the solution of Acre's boundaries issue in favor of Brazil by the *uti possidetis* principle.

The book points out that the rubber cycle reached its peak in the 1930s and the Amazon region received a major economic boost from the extraction of this raw material. Demand for latex, especially from the U.S., increased during this period, especially as the automobile industry's interest in rubber grew. In addition, for the author, the outbreak of WWII increased the importance of the product on the international market and made the Amazon an area of attention for the Allied war effort. As a result, the U.S. became the country with the greatest interest in the Brazilian Amazon.

In the third part of the book, called "*A Pan-Amazônia: uma nova ótica de abordagem geopolítica da região*" [The Pan-Amazon: a new perspective on the geopolitical approach to the region], which goes from the end of WWII to the beginning of the 1970s, the author shows the first attempts to internationalize the Amazon, such as "the attempt to create the International Institute of Hylean Amazon" (2005, p. 204). He then shows the reaction of the Amazonian countries with the Amazon Cooperation Treaty, which sought a greater articulation of projects aimed at the sovereignty of that group of countries over their respective portions of the Amazon biome.

Internally, Ribeiro brings up state intervention programs in the Amazon region from 1946 onwards, which will lead to a larger project: the National Integration Plan (PIN) and the large mining-metallurgical projects.

In the fourth part, called: "*A mundialização da questão ambiental e suas implicações sobre a geopolítica amazônica*" [The globalization of the environmental issue and its implications for the Amazon's geopolitics], which goes from the Stockholm Conference (1972) to the end of the Cold War (1991), the author shows how the emergence of the environmental issue in the world began to shape the geopolitics of the Amazon.

In this context, Ribeiro highlights the inauguration of environmental debates on the UN stage, starting with the World Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm (1972). In the wake of the "Our Common Future" Report, commissioned by the Club of Rome, the author presents the international repercussions of the Amazon's environmental devastation and the pressure from developed countries on underdeveloped countries to stop environmental exploitation, including that promoted by Brazil in the Amazon.

By highlighting the geopolitical connotations of the official international reactions to the Amazon's environmental devastation, Ribeiro warns of the dangers of these manifestations to Brazil's sovereignty over the Amazon territory. In another moment, the author presents Brazil's reaction to these threats, going on to list and detail the advent of the national environmental policy, the National Environment Council (Conama), the Calha Norte Program (PCN), the *Nossa Natureza* Program [Our Nature Program], among other state actions to demonstrate its willingness to tackle the problem.

At the end of the fourth section, Ribeiro shows the peak of intentions to internationalize the Amazon, present in the allusion to creating a supranational entity to manage the Amazon biome, proposed at the Hague summit (1989). He also presents the response to that proposal, embodied in the Declaration of Manaus (1889), whose defense of the sovereignty of the Amazonian countries over that biome was made explicit in the passage: "[...] the sovereign right of each country to freely administer its natural resources, bearing in mind the need to promote the economic and social development of its people and the adequate conservation of the environment" (2005, p. 346; our translation).

In the fifth part, called: "*A Questão Geopolítica Amazônica: na transição do segundo para o terceiro milênio*" [The Geopolitical Issue of the Amazon: in the transition from the second to the third millennium], Ribeiro presents the facets of mineral exploration in the Amazon and its effects on national geopolitics. He shows how international pressure on Brazil has taken the form of contesting the country's ability to contain environmental degradation in the Amazon, resulting in threats and sanctions in the political and economic spheres.

In this final section, the author describes Brazil's diplomatic strategy to defend the sustainable development of the Amazon. In this context, he shows how the design and implementation of the Amazon Surveillance and Protection System (Sivam/Sipam), particularly Sipam, the largest environmental monitoring project in the world at the time, was able to dissuade speeches by U.S. authorities who questioned Brazil's ability to protect its part of the Amazon biome.

In summary, the book gathers historical data and information about the Amazon from its discovery to the current day; it describes the Amazon's heritage and reports on the numerous attempts of foreign intervention; it analyzes and evaluates the globalization of the environmental issue in the last three decades of the twentieth century; it warns that the Amazon environmental issue has become a serious international geopolitical issue; it also warns that society as a whole should be concerned about statements made by political and scientific leaders in developed countries, who ostensibly claim that the Amazon is a world heritage; and points out that this problem must be tackled with wisdom and skill, in order to deter any aggressions against national sovereignty.

Finally, the importance of the work for understanding the geopolitical contours that the Amazon's environmental issue has taken on over the last century was very well defined by Army General Rubens Bayma Denys, also a former Minister of State, when he concluded the preface of the work as follows: "The Geopolitical Issue of the Amazon is a book of particular interest to the researcher, but also, and above all, to the public person with functional responsibility in relation to the region" (2005, p. 28; our translation).