

COLLATERAL ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON BRAZILIAN AGRIBUSINESS DUE TO U.S. FOREIGN POLICIES AGAINST IRAN AND THE USE OF LAWFARE IN THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC WAR

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ABSTRACT

In an unprecedented diplomatic incident, in July 2019 the Islamic Republic of Iran threatened to cut off all trade relations with Brazil if there was no supply of its ships, Bavand and Termeh, which were docked at the port of Paranaguá-PR, loaded with tons of Brazilian corn destined for export, and which were not supplied by Petrobras fearing economic sanctions by the United States, which retaliate economically against the Iranians. In this context, although Brazil and Iran have no history of disputes, this episode demonstrated how the US foreign policy has the potential to harm the interests of Brazilian agribusiness, an economic sector that currently exports the most and generates a surplus in the country's balance of payments. Therefore, this article, conducted through a qualitative approach and bibliographic and documentary review, examined, from a diplomatic incident between Brazil and Iran, the geopolitical reasons for the conflict between Iranians and Americans, and also how the utilization of lawfare,

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especially by the U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation, as an instrument of foreign policy in the commercial and geopolitical war against countries, companies, international organizations and even individuals, can have a collateral impact on the economic interests of Brazilian agribusiness.

Keywords: Brazilian agribusiness; economic sanctions; impacts; Iran; U.S.

***IMPACTOS ECONÔMICOS COLATERAIS AO AGRONEGÓCIO
BRASILEIRO EM RAZÃO DAS POLÍTICAS EXTERNAS
NORTE-AMERICANAS CONTRA O IRÃ E O USO DE LAWFARE
NA GUERRA ECONÔMICA INTERNACIONAL***

RESUMO

Em um incidente diplomático sem precedentes, em julho de 2019 a República Islâmica do ameaçou cortar todas as relações comerciais com o Brasil caso não houvesse o abastecimento de seus navios, Bavand e Termeh, que estavam atracados no porto de Paranaguá-PR, carregados com toneladas de milho brasileiro destinados à exportação, e que não foram abastecidos pela Petrobras temendo sanções econômicas por parte dos Estados Unidos, que retaliam economicamente os iranianos. Nesse contexto, embora Brasil e Irã não tenham histórico de disputas, esse episódio demonstrou como a política externa dos Estados Unidos tem potencial de prejudicar os interesses do agronegócio brasileiro, setor econômico que atualmente mais exporta e gera superavit na balança de pagamentos do País. Portanto, este artigo, conduzido por uma abordagem qualitativa e de revisão bibliográfica e documental, examinou, a partir de um incidente diplomático entre o Brasil e o Irã, as razões geopolíticas do conflito existente entre iranianos e norte-americanos, e, ainda, como o uso do lawfare, especialmente pelos órgãos U.S. Department of Justice e Federal Bureau of Investigation, como instrumento de política externa na guerra comercial e geopolítica contra países, empresas, organizações internacionais e até mesmo pessoas, pode impactar colateralmente os interesses econômicos do agronegócio brasileiro.

Palavras-chave: agronegócio brasileiro; Estados Unidos; impactos; Irã; sanções econômicas.

INTRODUCTION

In July 2019, *Petróleo Brasileiro S.A. (Petrobras)*, fearing economic sanctions from the United States, refused to supply the Iranian cargo ships *Bavand* and *Termeh*, which were docked at the *Paraná* port of *Paranaguá*, loaded with tons of Brazilian corn for export, as both the Iranian vessel owner and the Iranian maritime operator are part of a list of economic sanctions unilaterally imposed by the US government on the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In retaliation, the Iranian government, in an unprecedented incident in the history of countries, threatened to cut off all trade relations with Brazil if there was no supply of its ships and, as a consequence, *Brasília*'s eventual adhesion to the US economic embargo.

Without questioning the rightness or wrongness of sanctions led or unilaterally imposed by the US government, because this is not the objective of this work, it is a fact that Iran, as well as the Muslim market in general, are important buyers of Brazilian agricultural products, and the US foreign policy of financially and commercially isolating countries, companies and people out of line with their interests, such as the Iranians, brings, as a side effect, threats of concrete damage to Brazilian agribusiness, currently the main exporter and surplus generator of the national economy.

Indeed, agribusiness is currently the economic base of many Brazilian states and municipalities, enabling the production of food not only to meet internal needs, but also to generate surpluses for exports. It is not by chance that Brazil is currently the world's largest exporter of sugar (48%), coffee (27%), orange juice (76%), soy beans (43%), beef (20%) and chicken (42%); the second largest for corn (20%), oil (12%) and soybean meal (22%). It is also the world's largest producer of sugar, coffee and orange juice; the first in the production of soy in grains, the second in beef and chicken and the third in world corn production.

In addition, in 2020 the sector's exports reached the figure of US\$ 100.80 billion, an increase of 6.77% compared to 2019 (R\$ 96.85 billion), and a surplus of US\$ 87.76 billion, representing, by itself, 48% of all Brazilian sales in the foreign market. The sector's imports totaled US\$ 13.04 billion, a decrease of 5.2%, thus demonstrating its enormous surplus characteristic.

In this context, this article does not aim to defend any internal or foreign policy of both Iran and the United States, but rather, based on a

diplomatic incident between Brazil and Iran, to examine the reasons for the conflict between Iranians and Americans and, also, how the use of lawfare, especially by the U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation, as an instrument of foreign policy in the commercial and geopolitical war against countries, companies, international organizations and people, can impact the economic interests of national agribusiness.

Regarding the methodology, this article is driven by a qualitative approach, and can also be classified as a bibliographic and documentary review, since a bibliographic survey was carried out on the thematic sections relevant to the development of the work. In addition, the choice for qualitative research was mainly due to the interest and need to deepen, as a general basis, the knowledge and analysis of the effects of unilateral international sanctions carried out by the United States against countries, companies, international institutions and individuals, as well as, from a practical point of view, how this can collaterally affect Brazilian agribusiness.

As it is well-known, this category of study aims to put the researcher in direct contact with what has already been written on a given subject, aiming to clarify a given problem, however, with a new focus or approach, using information and data available from theories and works already published.

Thus, a bibliographic survey was carried out on: (a) the economic and geopolitical reasons for the conflict between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America; and (b) how the use of lawfare by the US Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation, as a foreign policy instrument in the international economic war, can impact the economic interests of national agribusiness.

Regarding the data presented in this work, these were obtained from official (inter)national government information, scientific and journalistic articles, primarily of a political-economic nature and, finally, from (inter) national legislation. It was thereby possible to describe the events and conclusions related to the object under analysis.

1 IMPOSITION OF UNILATERAL ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AS A UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY INSTRUMENT

Former British Prime Minister Henry Palmerston, in a speech held on March 01, 1848 in the English parliament, coined the famous phrase that England had no eternal allies nor perpetual enemies, and that the

country's interests are the ones that are eternal and perpetual. Likewise, Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State in the Nixon administration, adapting the English discourse, declared that the United States also has no permanent friends or enemies, but only interests (KISSINGER, 1982; KISSINGER, 1999; MATLOU, 2019).

Indeed, from a pragmatic point of view, nations do not have friends or enemies, especially eternal ones, but interests of all kinds, whether momentary or long-term, on which economic, cultural, friendship, and cooperation relationships and even conflicts are developed (KISSINGER, 1982; KISSINGER, 1999). However, despite not being exclusive to the Americans and the British, the premises defended by Palmerston and Kissinger define well the extension and concrete effects of the US foreign policy, the world's largest economy and military power, which, far beyond just defending its private agenda, inaugurated, through economic sanctions, a new era of trade managed by merely unilateral interests, however, with geopolitical side effects.

Another important reflection for this work concerns the way to approach the construction of hierarchies and disputes in the international order, as this is the object of our study. In this sense, it is important to consider the contributions of Susan Strange (1994) regarding the role of Power in economic life. According to her, it is power that determines the relationship between authority and the market. Markets cannot play a dominant role in the way a political economy works unless allowed by those in power and authority.

In the study of political economy it is not enough to ask where authority resides, who has power. It's important to ask why they have it and what the source of power is. Is it the command of coercive force? Is it the possession of great wealth? Is it the moral authority?

Taking this into account, as well as the fact that the United States is at the center of the world political, economic and financial system, its apparatus of Power is quite comprehensive, whether for its "hard power" "soft power" or even "smart power". On this account, the United States, especially in the face of nations, companies and people that do not align with its economic and geopolitical agenda, end up resorting to a broad arsenal of advantages and, above all, severe disadvantages, to fulfill their interests, such as is the case of economic, commercial, financial and military sanctions (WILSON III, 2008; BERTONHA, 2009; GRAY, 2011; PEREIRA, 2011; HOOK, 2016; OFAC, 2021).

In addition, the United States government, even without having international jurisdiction to do so, threatens, with the application of secondary sanctions, countries, companies, people and organizations that come to break the unilaterally imposed embargo WILSON III, 2008; BERTONHA, 2009; GRAY, 2011; PEREIRA, 2011; HOOK, 2016; OFAC, 2021).

In this context, countries such as Burma, Russia, Cuba, Syria, Congo, Iraq, North Korea, Lebanon, Somalia, Venezuela, Unit Arabs Emirates, Qatar, Liberia, Belarus, Ivory Coast, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Iran, as well as other thousands of people and companies all over the world, suffer sorts of economic sanctions by the United States (OFAC, 2021).

Examples of this are (a) asset freezes, (b) travel bans, (c) bans on economic transactions in US currency, (d) partial and even total bans on exports and imports from the United States and its allies and (e) financial and technological prohibitions of all kinds. However, there are some exceptions granted, such as humanitarian goods, correspondence, food and medicines (OFAC, 2021).

In these circumstances, and fearing the loss of the US market and other important short- and long-term advantages, many countries, companies and international institutions end up directly or indirectly adhering to the sanctions imposed unilaterally by the US government. Nevertheless, countries with greater political, military and commercial strength, such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom, China and Russia, seek to overcome the embargoes unilaterally imposed by the United States, defending the free trade of their companies with those sanctioned (KHAN; FOY, 2018; ROSENBERG, 2018; TURAK, 2018).

However, this is not the case in Brazil, which presents all kinds of difficulties in extricating itself from the collateral effects of the sanctions imposed by the United States on other nations and companies that are commercial partners of Brazilians. A recent example of this side effect was the threat by Iran, in 2019, to suspend all imports from Brazil and to replace all suppliers of Brazilian agricultural products, if there was no supply of Iranian-flagged ships, which were docked at Paranaguá-PR and came to the country to complete the sale of urea and purchase of corn (VALLE, 2019).

Under the terms of this example, the US government, through the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List, of its Office of Foreign Assets Control, linked to the National Treasury, effectively prevents US citizens and companies as well as countries, agencies and

international entities allied or interested in doing business with the United States, to carry out economic, financial and maritime transactions with those economically sanctioned.

2 POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SANCTIONS ESTABLISHED BY THE UN AND THE UNITED STATES ON THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Economic sanctions, whether imposed multilaterally or unilaterally by the United States, the European Union or the United Nations Security Council, have permeated the reality of Iran for decades, especially since its Islamic Revolution.

As far as the United States is concerned, since the end of the 1970s, the country has imposed types of unilateral sanctions on countries, companies, organizations and even people who trade economically with the Iranian regime. Furthermore, from the geopolitical point of view, the sanctions imposed on Iran – some even supported by the United Nations Security Council (Resolutions 1696/2006, 1737/2006, 1747/2007, 1803/2008, 1835/2008, 1929/ 2010 and 2224/2015) – aim to prevent the country from trading mainly oil, gas and petrochemical products and from carrying out financial transactions in insurance and maritime transport (UN, 2015; OFAC, 2021).

For the United States, the Islamic Republic of Iran, currently led by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the country's Supreme Leader, is embodied in a republic of the Shiite religion, of an extreme Islamic theocratic nature, which professes severe hostility to the Americans and their allies, notably by sponsoring various acts and groups of a terrorist order (FIOREZE; VISENTINI, 2018; UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, 2018).

In addition, the Americans accuse the Iranians of seeking, since the 1950s, uranium enrichment to enable the construction of nuclear weapons, especially ballistic missiles, as well as sponsoring destabilizing conflicts in the Middle East, as it is the case of its military and paramilitary activities in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon and Gaza (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, 2018).

Also according to the US government, the main reason for imposing sanctions on the Iranians lies in its nuclear program and, mainly, in the fear of the production of weapons of mass destruction, since the country has a history of systematic support to extremist paramilitary organizations, as

is the case, for example, of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force, Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces and Al-Ashtar Brigades, all of them considered of a terrorist nature by the US government and by the international community (U. S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2018).

Despite Tehran expressly refuting the accusations, the US government also cites the effective participation of Iranians in terrorist acts around the world, especially from 1979, with the Islamic Revolution (U. S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2018).

The United States also accuses Iran of being responsible for the attack, in 2019, on the oil company Aramco, from Saudi Arabia, as well as on oil tankers, in the Gulf of Oman, as is the case of *Kokuga Courageous*, from Japan, and the *Front Altair*, from Norway (LOPES; KLEIN; ZUCCHETTO, 2019). Furthermore, the Iranians still profess the extinction of the State of Israel, one of the greatest allies of the United States, which has a strong internal political influence in the Jewish community (BEN-MEIR, 2010).

Due to Iran's refusal to suspend its uranium enrichment program and the expansion of nuclear reactors, the United Nations Security Council, on December 23, 2006, imposed the first multilateral sanction on the Iranians (Resolution 1737), determining the member countries to prohibit the supply of materials that could be used by the country in its nuclear program or directly in the production of weapons (UN, 2006).

Subsequently, on March 24, 2007, Resolution 1747 determined a ban on the purchase and sale of Iranian weapons (UN, 2007), while resolutions 1803 (March 3, 2008) and 1929 (June 9, 2009) determined: (a) the prohibition of financial-banking activities to promote Iranian exports; (b) blocking of assets; (c) travel restrictions; (d) extensive control of cargoes originating from or destined for Iran; (e) prohibition of transfer of ballistic and nuclear technology; (f) prohibition of uranium mining in the country; (g) sealing off the supply of Iranian ships suspected of carrying prohibited materials; (h) freezing of resources of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards-Force and the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines; and (i) prohibition of international activities of the Iranian financial system (UN, 2008; UN 2009; CARNEIRO, 2013).

In 2012, new and impactful economic sanctions were applied to Iran directly by the United States, as well as adhered to by several allies, due to the risks of its nuclear program and the alleged disrespect for human rights (CARVALHO, 2017).

Nevertheless, in July 2015, in the scope of the UN Security Council, a historic agreement took place on Iran's nuclear program, called the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action" – JCPOA (Resolution 2231/2015), a 104 pages document which took 12 years of negotiation, in which the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, China (the P5) and Germany signed the conditional and progressive suspension of multilateral and unilateral economic sanctions against the Iranians, with the commitment to, in summary: (a) reduce its stock and enrichment rates of uranium; (b) reduce the number of nuclear reactors and centrifuges; and (c) permanent and unlimited monitoring and inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (UN, 2015).

Therefore, on January 16, 2016, the first partial suspensions of the economic sanctions imposed on Iran until then occurred, as the International Atomic Energy Agency had attested that the Iranians were in fact complying with the terms of Resolution 2231/2015, notably, the determinations established in its annexes and protocols (GASPAR, 2016). In the following reports, especially the verification and monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of the United Nations Security Council resolution 2231 (2015), of November 11, 2019, the International Atomic Energy Agency, with observations, continued attesting to the fulfillment of the nuclear agreement by Iran (LAUB; ROBINSON, 2018, IAEA, 2019).

With regard to Brazil, on February 11, 2016, the Decree of the Presidency of the Republic 8669 was issued, which provided for the repeal of the sanctions regime against Iran, adopted by the United Nations Security Council (BRASIL, 2016).

However, the agreement is in the hot seat or even terminated, as, on May 8, 2018, the United States announced its withdrawal (National Security Presidential Memorandum/NSPM-11), under the allegation that Iran was not complying with the restrictions set out in Annex B of Resolution 2231/2015, notably: (a) in continuing its nuclear weapons construction program; (b) denying the International Atomic Energy Agency – IAEA access to military sites covered in the context of inspection; (c) violating heavy water storage limits; (d) continued support for terrorist groups; and, finally, (e) repeated disregard for human rights.

With this, all unilateral U.S. sanctions that had been suspended by Executive Order 13716 of January 16, 2016 were reinstated, including the so-called "National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012", "the Iran Sanctions Act of 1996", "the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human

Rights Act of 2012” and “the Iran Freedom and Counterproliferation Act of 2012” (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, 2018).

In addition to these reasons, there is also an understanding on the part of the United States that Iran is the greatest obstacle to peace in the Middle East and the main obstacle to the realization of the US economic, military and geopolitical agenda in the region (RUMER, 2019). Indeed, the withdrawal of the United States from the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action” was also aimed at meeting the interests of Israel and Saudi Arabia which, for various reasons, have always opposed the agreement and are defenders of the anti-Iranian coalition (FIOREZE; VISENTINI, 2018).

On the other hand, on June 27, 2018, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, in her fifth report presented to the Secretary-General, stated that since the entry of Resolution 2231 (2015) of the Security Council, the International Atomic Energy Agency assures that Iran has been fulfilling its commitments related to nuclear energy, and that said resolution is very crucial for nuclear non-proliferation and for regional and international security, so that its complete and effective implementation is critical to ensuring the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear program (UN, 2018; UN, 2019). In the same direction, the Iranians have always declared that their nuclear program is of a peaceful nature, aiming only at increasing energy production (KERR, 2019).

Faced with this scenario and, above all, with the assassination of the Iranian General Qassem Soleimani by the United States, Iran announced that it would leave the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action” and resume its nuclear program, without any restrictions, notably, the enrichment of uranium. However, despite the content of the declaration, as well as the defense carried out by Germany, France, United Kingdom, United Nations, Japan, China and Russia regarding the importance of the continuity of the nuclear agreement, the Iranians affirmed that they will continue to contribute with the International Atomic Energy Agency, leaving the possibility of resuming the terms of the agreement (JCPOA) if international sanctions on its economy are suspended (FITZPATRICK; ROUHI, 2020; GORDON, 2020).

Nevertheless, on January 10, 2020, the U.S. government, in retaliation for the Iranian attack carried out against U. S. bases in Iraq, intensified economic sanctions on Iran, especially in relation to items such as steel, iron and copper, used in missiles, in accordance with Presidential

Executive Order No. 13876, of June 24, 2019 (U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY, 2019th, POMPEO, 2020).

Therefore, there is now a scenario in which these military and economic tensions increasingly lead countries to make unpredictable decisions, with unexpected consequences and, most of all, with geopolitical effects (GUTERRES, 2020).

Moreover, it is important to note that we are not acquiescing here to the U. S. vision or to the Iranian reasons, but only contextualizing the main reasons why various sanctions are imposed on the government of Tehran.

3 THE COMMERCIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAZIL AND THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

The Islamic Republic of Iran (Land of the Aryans, former Persia) is a regional power in the Middle East and, for different reasons, has a historical rivalry in the region with both Saudi Arabia and Israel, great allies of the United States (CARVALHO, 2017; FIOREZE; VISENTINI, 2018). However, even with all the multilateral and unilateral economic sanctions imposed mostly by the United States, Iran is currently the second largest economy in the Middle East and North Africa, having large oil reserves (4th largest in the world), gas (2nd largest in the world) and ore, as well as a good and diversified industrial, scientific, technological and innovation structure (CARVALHO, 2017).

The country's economy had an important recovery in 2015, with the nuclear agreement adopted on July 20, 2015 by the United Nations Security Council (Resolution 2231) and a partial lifting of international economic sanctions. This measure brought to Iran: (a) the important release of financial resources; (b) authorization to import products; (c) export of oil, petrochemicals and gas; and (d) the reduction of costs with the triangularization of commercial and banking operations, adopted to circumvent international sanctions (CARVALHO, 2017).

With this scenario, there was, indeed, a great potential for growth in the Iranian economy and, most of all, enormous opportunities in its domestic market in aviation, machinery, industrial, pharmaceutical and agricultural equipment, as well as in civil construction, mining, energy, gas and infrastructure. Nevertheless, in 2018 there was another shock to its economy, with the announcement of the United States withdrawal from the nuclear agreement signed in 2015 and, consequently, the re-establishment

of economic sanctions on the Iranians (CARVALHO, 2017; FIOREZE; VISENTINI, 2018).

With regard to Brazil, diplomatic relations began in 1903 and, since then, there has been great empathy between the Iranian people and Brazilians, mainly due to the country's historic stance of neutrality and, at various times, of solidarity in favor of Iran (CARVALHO, 2017). Also on account of this Brazilian soft power, there was substantial growth in trade relations between the countries.

Regarding the recent history of Brazilian exports to Iran, in 2020 Brazil exported US\$ 1.15 billion, concentrating basically on agricultural products, which were not considered by the sanctions imposed by both the United Nations Security Council and the United States, such as is the case for: (a) corn in grain (49%); (b) ground soybeans (23%); (c) frozen, fresh or chilled beef (14%); (d) bran and residues from the extraction of soybean oil (8.8%); and (e) cane sugar (1.2%) and f) soy oil (1.1%) (BRASIL, 2020b; BRASIL, 2021).

With regard to Brazil, US\$ 116 million were imported from the Iranians, mainly urea, semi-manufactured iron or steel products, floated, ground or polished glass, in plates or sheets, ethylene, propylene and styrene polymers, glass objects for domestic use and fresh or dried fruit (BRASIL, 2020b; BRASIL, 2021).

Regarding the generation of surplus, while Brazil exported a total of US\$ 2.26 billion in 2018 and US\$ 2.11 billion from January to November 2019, Iran sold a mere US\$ 39.92 to the country in 2018 and US\$ 88.94 million in 2019 (BRASIL, 2019a; BRASIL, 2020b). Therefore, in this example, the trade balance was favorable to Brazil by US\$ 2,028 billion from January to November 2019 and US\$ 2,218 billion in 2018 (BRASIL, 2019a; BRASIL, 2020b).

Thus, Iran has held in that period the 23th place in the ranking of Brazilian overall exports, however, when the subject is an agribusiness, occupied the 5th position, accounting for 2.37% of total sector exports in 2019 (BRAZIL, 2019a; BRAZIL, 2020b). Also as an example, in 2017 around 72% of all corn, 64% of all soy and 91% of all beef imported by Iran were from Brazil (OEC, 2017).

Therefore, the balance of trade has always been largely favorable to Brazil, and trade between the countries was not greater because of the sanctions imposed by the United States, which severely affect the financial system and the availability of credit and insurance to the Iranians

(CARVALHO, 2017).

However, US sanctions did not prevent or make exports to Iran unfeasible, as is the case with meat producers, who are forced to triangulate routes, changing delivery routes through Jordan, Dubai and Turkey, and receiving amounts via the Emirates Arabs, Europe and China. Brazilian meat-packing companies, despite not being targets of US sanctions, end up facing problems with the international financial system, as many banks have given up operating with the Iranians, excluded from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication – SWIFT, an international system whose main function is to allow the exchange of banking information and financial transfers between financial institutions (MANO, 2019; FEBRABAN, 2021).

Thus, trade relations between Brazil and Iran are far from being negligible, especially for Brazilians, with a large advantage in the balance of trade. Therefore, any and all movements by Brazil in the diplomatic and geopolitical field have been followed with great attention by Brazilian exporters, especially in agribusiness.

Indeed, an important example in this regard occurred early in 2020, with the disclosure of the assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, head of the Quds Guard Revolutionary Force, by the United States, on January 2, at the International Airport of Baghdad, Iraq (GARDNER, 2020), an opportunity in which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, not opting for neutrality or a kind of pragmatism, supported the North American attack, notably, by endorsing and even calling for the international struggle of all nations against terrorism, a practice of which Iran is accused by the United States and part of the international community of sponsoring.

In addition, Itamaraty expressly condemned the attack on the American embassy in Baghdad, allegedly engineered by Qassem Soleimani, according to the United States, while remaining inert in relation to the American attack, which killed one of the top authorities in Iran (BRASIL, 2020c; GARDNER, 2020).

In view of the posture of the Brazilian diplomacy, Itamaraty confirmed, on January 6, 2020, that the government of Iran summoned diplomatic representatives of the Brazilian embassy in Tehran (IRAN CONVOCA, 2020; LINDNER, 2020), a posture that, in the diplomatic sphere, usually represents a kind of reprimand or discontent in the country (LAFER, 2018).

However, as a result, the United States government, in a kind of

bilateral concession to Brazil, declared its express support for the country's entry into the OECD, supposedly due to the Brazilian position in favor of the US government (ADGHIRNI, 2020; BRASIL, 2020e). However, the U.S. began to pressure Brasília to commercially isolate Tehran (GIELOW, 2019). This, however, will represent huge losses for Brazil, especially in the export of agricultural products, a sector in which the country has a large trade surplus not only with Iran, but also with the huge Muslim market.

Therefore, taking a position on one side presupposes that it is guided by serenity, pragmatism and maximum attention to national interests, notably due to the potential to bring all kinds of negative consequences to Brazil.

4 THE DIPLOMATIC INCIDENT CAUSED BY PETROBRAS' REFUSAL TO SUPPLY THE IRANIAN SHIPS BAVAND AND TERMEH AT THE PORT OF PARANAGUÁ-PR

The geopolitical conflicts between the United States and Iran began to directly affect Brazil's economic and political interests. A concrete example of this was the recent stance taken by Petrobras, which, fearing sanctions from the United States, refused to supply, in June 2019, two Iranian ships (Bavand and Termeh) that were docked at the port of Paranaguá, Paraná, operated by Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, and which came to the country to land Iranian urea and load Brazilian corn. However, both the ships and the shipping companies and operators are currently part of the list of sanctions imposed by the US government on Iran.

In view of this refusal, the Brazilian company Eleva Química Ltda, a transport contractor and operating in the commodity import and export market, filed a lawsuit against Petrobras Transporte SA, requesting the determination of the provision of fuel necessary to supply the vessels, so that they could complete the export operation of almost 100,000 tons of corn to Iran, until then the world's largest buyer of the Brazilian commodity, as well as the fifth largest importer of soybeans and sixth largest buyer of Brazilian beef in 2019 (BRASIL, 2019a; BRASIL, 2020b).

Petrobras Transporte SA's refusal to supply fuel to the vessels was substantiated by the fact that both the ships Bavand and Termeh, as well as their owner, Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, were included in the list of Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List, from the US Office of Foreign Assets Control, linked to the US National Treasury,

which prohibits US citizens and companies, as well as countries, companies and international entities allied or interested in doing business with US citizens, to carry out economic, commercial, financial, operational and maritime transactions with those who were included in that list (BRASIL, 2019e).

In view of these facts, Petrobras claimed to the Brazilian Judiciary the total impossibility of carrying out the supply, as such a situation could imply, on the part of the US government, its immediate inclusion in the same list of sanctioned companies, thus causing enormous risks of commercial, financial and even diplomatic losses to Brazil (BRASIL, 2019e).

An example of this was the sanction imposed by the US government in 2019 on the Italian maritime carrier PB Tanker S.P.A., as well as their respective vessels Silver Point, Alba Marina, Gold Point, Ice Point, Indian Point and Iron Point, which operate in the oil transportation market, because they allegedly transported Venezuelan oil from PDVSA to Cuba. As a result, both the company and its ships were included in the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY, 2019b).

In addition to maritime carriers, several other oil and petrochemical companies from the European Union, China, Hong Kong, the United Arab Emirates and Venezuela, were also sanctioned by the United States, for direct involvement in the export of oil and gas originating from the National Petroleum Company of Iran (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY, 2020).

For its part, in a warning to the country, Iran threatened to suspend all imports from Brazil and replace all Brazilian suppliers of agricultural products, especially corn, meat, sugar and soy, in case there was no supply to the ships (VALLE, 2019).

Therefore, in addition to the serious diplomatic conflict, an enormous economic problem was also unleashed, with the possibility of substantial damage to Brazilian agribusiness, especially in the South, Southeast and Midwest regions of the country, the largest producers of commodities sold to Iran (BRAZIL , 2019a; BRAZIL, 2019b).

In a judicial analysis, the request to grant a preliminary injunction for the supply of ships (0004997-45.2019.8.16.0129) was denied by the trial court, which motivated the filing of an interlocutory appeal by the company Eleva to the Court of Justice of the State of Paraná (0030758-77.2019.8.16.0000). However, when analyzing the case, Judge Fernando

Paulino da Silva Wolf Filho granted the preliminary injunction, determining Petrobras to supply fuel, within a maximum period of 72 running hours, under penalty of application of a daily fine and fuel seizure, from the understanding that the supply was relevant to the interests of Brazil (BRASIL, 2019e).

Subsequently, there was no reconsideration of the preliminary injunction issued by the Court of Justice of the State of Paraná, which is why Petrobras presented directly to the Federal Supreme Court a request for Suspension of Provisional Guardianship (136), arguing, in summary, that if it came to be included in the list of those sanctioned by the US government, the main companies in the oil and gas sector abroad and in Brazil, as well as financial and insurance institutions, would no longer do business with the company, in order not to run the risk of being harmed by the United States, a situation that would bring enormous financial, operational and commercial impacts not only to Petrobras itself, but to Brazil's economy (BRASIL, 2019e).

Petrobras also claimed the enormous risk of being excluded from access to the international financial system and of no longer being able to continue and sustain the activities of exploration for oil, gas and all its derivatives (BRASIL, 2019e).

On the other hand, the company Eleva Química Ltda. upheld the need to maintain the decision issued by the Court of Justice of the State of Paraná, under the arguments, in summary, (a) of the risks of the vessels being adrift, (b) of the risks to the Brazilian environment, especially on account of eventual collision of the ships against other vessels, (c) of the fact that it is not the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines company that is postulating the supply, but a Brazilian company and without restrictions by the US government and, finally, (d) that there are no impediments either from the UN or from the United States regarding the export of food to Iran (BRASIL, 2019e).

In his inaugural order, Minister Dias Tofolli, then president of the Supreme Court, determined the secrecy of the process and granted the preliminary injunction postulated by Petrobras, suspending the decision to supply fuel to Iranian ships, due to the risks to the company and to the national economy itself. Nevertheless, when analyzing the merits of the case, the minister rejected Petrobras' request, fully upholding the decision issued by the Court of Justice of the State of Paraná, with the understanding, in the first place, that the transport contractor is the company Eleva, which

would not have any restrictions on the part of the US authorities, as well as because there is no possibility that Petrobras will suffer the aforementioned sanctions, but, in theory, Eleva itself, which assumed the risks of contract with the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, owner and operator of the ships Bavand and Termeh (COELHO, 2019; PUPO; FERRARI, 2019).

Minister Toffoli also claimed that the supply would take place by court order, a condition that, in his view, would avert risks to Petrobras, as well as for humanitarian reasons, as it would configure food transport and, finally, the absence of any injury to the primary interests related to national sovereignty, administrative order and the economy, due to the supply of Iranian vessels (COELHO, 2019; PUPO; FERRARI, 2019). As a result, the ships, which were docked for almost two months in Paranaguá-PR, were properly supplied and headed towards the ports of Iran, with corn imported from Brazil.

It is also worth mentioning that, so far, there has been no suspension of imports of Brazilian products by Iran, nor has there been any sanction on Petrobras by the US government (BRASIL, 2019a; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY, 2019a; BRAZIL, 2020b).

Notwithstanding the relevance of the issue and the factual and legal arguments presented by Minister Dias Toffoli, it is noteworthy, first of all, the fact that the Brazilian Judiciary, rather than the diplomacy of the Brazilian government, has settled this diplomatic conflict, which is undeniably a very intricate international issue, one that can bring enormous economic, commercial, financial and social repercussions not only for Petrobras and the national oil and gas sector, but for the Brazilian State itself, with the possibility of concrete multiplication of harmful effects to the entire Brazilian society.

Therefore, the cause transcends the jurisdiction and, above all, the understanding of the president of the Brazilian Supreme Court, drawn up, in isolation, during the recess of the judiciary, notably because of the provisions of articles 49, I, and 84, VII and VIII, of the Federal Constitution of Brazil, promulgated on October 5, 1988 (BRASIL, 1988), which attributed to the President of the Republic the exclusive competence to maintain relations with foreign states and accredit their diplomatic representatives; enter into international treaties, conventions and acts, subject to a referendum by the National Congress, which is responsible for resolving, definitively, on international acts that entail burdens or commitments that are burdensome to the national patrimony.

In addition, Dias Toffoli's statement that Petrobras 'would not run the risk' of being punished by the US government is surprising, since the supply would take place by order of the Brazilian Judiciary, and not by the company. Therefore, unless better understood, for Minister Dias Toffoli, the US government would incline to the jurisdiction and determinations of the Brazilian Supreme Court, and would as well attenuate a possible sanction to Petrobras, just because the supply occurred by its decision.

The example under analysis shows that this entire geopolitical movement can bring significant collateral damage to agribusiness, the country's largest exporter. However, despite the importance of agricultural trade relations with Iran, in calculating this diplomatic equation it cannot be ignored that, in addition to the economic, technological, commercial, financial, military and geopolitical weight, the United States is currently Brazil's second largest economic partner, with imports of Brazilian products of US\$ 21.48 billion in 2020 (BRASIL, 2021), as well as the main export destination of Brazilian manufactured and semi-manufactured products, with higher added value. The United States is also one of the countries that invest the most directly in Brazil (BRASIL, 2020a; BRASIL, 2020d; TAMARINDO; PIGATTO, 2020).

In addition, Americans are also buyers of Brazilian agricultural products (BRASIL, 2020d). However, in some chains, such as the soy complex, corn, cotton, sugar, ethanol and meat, they are strong competitors, especially in relation to the European and Asian markets (MARANHÃO; VIEIRA FILHO, 2017; TAMARINDO; PIGATTO, 2020).

In addition, there is a strong presence of US companies in Brazilian agribusiness, with an important participation (a) in industry, (b) in agribusiness, (c) in import and export, (d) in the production and development of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, (e) in financing, (f) in the pharmaceutical-veterinary sector and (g) in the science, technology and innovation that permeate the sector.

In this context, it is certain that both Iran and the United States are important to Brazilian agribusiness and, consequently, to Brazil's economy itself. Nevertheless, even though the Americans' unilateral position represents a kind of geopolitical blackmail and a threat to free world trade, it is a fact that a disruption in diplomatic relations with the United States, without due compensation, would, in practice, bring consequences to the Brazilian economy.

On the other hand, an eventual replacement by Iran of Brazilian

agricultural imports will bring significant market losses, especially for Brazilian meat, soy, sugar and corn producers. However, most importantly: the balance of trade is largely favorable to Brazil, with a huge surplus.

Given this scenario, in which changes in international relations are taking place at an accelerated pace, the formulation of Brazilian foreign policy needs to consider that the national interest must fluctuate between these two conditionalities, namely, politics and economics, so that each step or impact must be carefully measured, especially with regard to the strategic alignment of the country. Thus, neutrality or pragmatism are options that, in theory, would better meet national interests and, historically, denote the profile of Itamaraty, not the automatic ideological alignment (LIMA; MOURA, 2018; LIMA, 2018).

Also from a strategic point of view, the recent geopolitical, military and commercial disputes promoted by the United States may represent an important opportunity for Brazil to increase exports of its products, especially agricultural ones, machinery and industrial equipment, as effectively occurred after 2015, when Russia suffered sanctions from the United States and the European Union after annexing Crimea. However, these disputes and, mainly, a mistaken diplomatic conduct, can also cause serious consequences to the Brazilian economy, especially if it decides to interfere in matters that do not belong to it or, effectively, its position is unnecessary, as well as merely ideological alignments and devoid of substantial counterpart to national interests.

5 LAWFARE: THE UTILIZATION OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE WAR

The example of Iran demonstrates how the United States uses all its economic, geopolitical and military power to impose sanctions of all kinds on its adversaries and, collaterally, on those who maintain economic relations with them, regardless of the rules for international conflict resolution and extraterritorial jurisdiction aspects. Indeed, there are no limits on the part of the United States to what the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China has called ‘unilateral sanctions’ and ‘long-arm jurisdiction’ (FMPRC, 2019).

Indeed, from a pragmatic point of view, the United States has engendered a global system of countries and companies that support it greatly,

as they depend on its cooperation in various sectors and, mainly, on its businesses, on its influence or control over international organizations. Therefore, countries and companies that oppose unilateral embargoes end up suffering increased sanctions by the Americans.

At this point, there is also the accusation against the United States of commercial lawfare, in which the law and the country's judicial and investigative system are used, albeit extraterritorially, as weapons in the economic war against people, foreign institutions and companies that, directly or indirectly, have a kind of economic, financial, administrative or commercial link with North Americans (DUNLAP JR., 2001; KITTRIE, 2016).

As an example, the United States unleashed a real international war on Chinese telecommunications companies ZTE and Huawei, and the latter's vice president, Meng Wanzhou, was arrested in Canada at the request of the Americans and is currently under house arrest in Vancouver (THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, 2019a). However, why does Huawei bother the United States so much? In general terms, it is currently the center of technological and commercial disputes between the United States and China, as the Chinese company is (a) one of the leaders in 5G communication technology, (b) a supplier of 28% of the global communications equipment and (c) to one of the world's largest sellers of smartphones and other high value-added electronic equipment.

Nevertheless, Huawei is accused by both the US Department of Justice and the FBI of being manipulated by the Chinese government, as well as of carrying out: (a) espionage and theft of US technological secrets, especially from T-Mobile and Apple; (b) obstruction of justice; and (c) support for banks to circumvent sanctions against Iran (CHAN, 2019; HUAWEI'S DOMINANCE..., 2019; BARIFOUSE, 2019; THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, 2019a).

In addition, the United States is trying to dissuade allies from using the equipment and technologies of the Chinese ZTE and Huawei, even if it is sold indirectly, alleging risks of espionage, threats to national security and possible control of communications by the Chinese in the face of countries that adopt their systems. However, if there is a refusal to comply with its guidelines, the United States threatens to end the sharing of information with countries that adopt Chinese communications technologies.

So, again, American threats are permeating the relationship with those who do not align with its guidelines. However, in this specific case, Brazil,

which has more than a third of the infrastructure of Chinese technology communications networks, confirmed Huawei's indirect participation in its auction of 5G technology, for the supply of equipment, which should take place in 2021 (BARIFOUSE, 2019; CHAN, 2019; HUAWEI'S DOMINANCE..., 2019; HARRIS; SCHIPANI, 2020; RODRIGUES; WARTH, 2019; THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, 2019a).

Again, the United States is using its entire arsenal of persuasion to prevent, at all costs, the imminent loss of world leadership in 5G communications technology to the Chinese. In this context, even the merger of giant communications companies (T-Mobile and Sprint), already approved by the US Department of Justice, is being evaluated by the US government as a means of preventing the realization of Chinese leadership (PLATT; FONTANELLA-KHAN; SHUBBER, 2019; THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, 2019b).

Another example to be mentioned is that of Frenchman Frederic Pierucci, former vice president of global boiler sales at the French energy and transport company Alstom, which operated in the American market through a subsidiary in Connecticut, and arrested when he landed in New York, on April 14, 2013, at the request of the US Department of Justice, on charges of violating the US Foreign Corrupt Practices and Anti-Money Laundering Acts, as the company would have bribed members of the Indonesian parliament (THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, 2013; PIERUCCI, 2019).

On the other hand, Frederic Pierucci, who accuses the US government of having set up a real scam to harm the French company, remained imprisoned for more than two years, even in high security prisons in the United States, leading the Alstom company to pay one of the largest fines in the news to US law enforcement agencies, as well as assigning strategic commercial areas (PIERUCCI, 2019).

However, even if Pierucci's version has not been effectively proven, it cannot be denied that, as a practical effect of this operation, the French company did, in fact, lose billionaire contracts in nuclear plants for US companies, especially for the largest competitor: General Electric.

Another example occurred with Siemens between 2006 to 2008, because, as it refused to adhere to economic sanctions on Iran, the US government determined the opening of several investigation procedures, which culminated in billionaire fines and indemnities of the German company to American justice agencies (KITTRIE, 2016).

Also for commercial involvement with Iran, Balli Aviation Ltd., a subsidiary of Balli Group PLC, headquartered in the United Kingdom, was investigated in 2010 by US judicial and asset control bodies, and then fined US\$ 15 million, for reselling to Iranians three commercial aircraft, model Boeing 747, without license and export authorization (THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, 2010).

At the national level, it is worth mentioning the Brazilian companies Braskem, Embraer, Petrobras and Odebrecht, which also underwent this procedure in the United States.

In the case of Embraer, there were investigations in 2015 and 2016 by both the US Department of Justice and the US Securities and Exchange Commission, for alleged non-compliance with US anti-corruption laws in certain aircraft sales in Central American and Asian countries, culminating, in the end, in the obligation to admit guilt and pay more than US\$ 200 million in fines and damages (EMBRAER, 2016a; EMBRAER, 2016b).

At the time of the investigations, Embraer even announced, on July 29, 2016, that there were no guarantees that the company would be able to enter into a definitive agreement with the US authorities, because other investigations were in progress and could still result in substantial additional fines, in addition to other sanctions and consequences to the company (EMBRAER, 2016a). However, on October 24, 2016, Embraer announced that it had concluded definitive agreements to resolve allegations of criminal and civil non-compliance with US anti-corruption laws (EMBRAER, 2016b).

However, as a result, the commercial aviation part of the Brazilian company was incorporated by the North American Boeing (EMBRAER, 2019), which is why there is an understanding that it was not a coincidence, but rather a strategy of the US for acquisition of one of the world's largest manufacturers of mid-size aircraft and executive jets (MARTINS; MARTINS, 2018). On the other hand, the deal did not materialize, exclusively on the part of Boeing, due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which devastated the world airline industry, and the billionaire losses caused by the two accidents with its main aircraft: the 737 MAX (HOLLINGER; BUSHEY; SCHIPANI 2020).

It is also worth mentioning the FIFAgate case, in which the FBI launched several investigations and even arrests against FIFA leaders, after the defeat of the United States by Qatar for the right to host the 2022 World Cup (THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, 2015;

BENSINGER, 2019).

In this context, even if the merits of the correctness or not of the investigations pointed out have not been entered into, it is right to state, nevertheless, that these examples do demonstrate that there is indeed a kind of economic and judicial war conducted by the United States against countries, companies and people from all over the world when their interests are somehow thwarted. In effect, this ends up being made possible mostly because there is no international area that is still completely free from the reach of the US political influence, currency and financial market.

CONCLUSION

This article did not seek to defend any domestic or foreign policy of both the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America, but rather, based on a diplomatic incident between Brazil and Iran, to analyze what kinds of economic sanctions unilaterally imposed by the United States on its opponents inaugurated, outside international law, a new era of trade managed by merely unilateral interests, with geopolitical side effects to third parties though.

The use of lawfare was also analyzed, especially by the U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation, as an instrument of foreign policy in the commercial and geopolitical war against countries, companies, international organizations and people, as well as how it may have a collateral impact on the economic interests of Brazilian agribusiness.

In fact, the greatest example of this is practiced today by the United States, which use economic, military, technological, financial, ideological and even its justice and investigation bodies to impose their interests in commercial and international geopolitics, mainly to those who do not align with its regime.

In this context, the results of the work indicated that, whether unilateral or multilateral, changes in international relations are occurring at an accelerated, intense pace, so that, in the formulation of foreign policies, there are no absolutely neutral decisions without geopolitical consequences, and each step must be analyzed and the impacts carefully measured, especially with regard to strategic alignment between nations.

Furthermore, it was demonstrated that the intensification of conflicts between the United States and Iran, as well as in relation to other nations and companies, especially those that challenge the US financial and

technological hegemony, has the potential to harm essential and strategic business segments of the Brazilian economy, as is the case of Brazilian agribusiness, currently the largest exporter and generator of surplus in the country's balance of payments.

In effect, the United States, exerting all manner of pressure and strategy in defense of its interests, ended up building a global system of unilateral economic sanctions, with geopolitical side effects, notably because there is no international area completely free from the reach of the American currency and financial market, in addition, of course, to its enormous political and military power.

With that, and fearing this set of international punishments, including already imposed on several international oil and petrochemical companies, the Brazilian Petrobras decided, in principle, to adhere to the US economic embargo on Iran, refusing, in 2019, to supply Iranian ships that were docked at the port of Paranaguá-PR and that came to Brazil to conclude operations of importing Iranian urea and exporting Brazilian corn.

All of these strategic examples of imposing economic sanctions or commercial lawfare contextualize the kind of economic and geopolitical war that the United States has been waging for decades in the international defense of its interests. Nevertheless, from a pragmatic and historical point of view, the United States does not have – and does not want – eternal enemies, which is why it would even be the first to offer machines, equipment, commodities and contracts of all kinds to the Iranians, in case, in theory, they aligned with its guidelines. However, even if they do not fully align, there is interest in gaining access to the Iranian market.

Corroborating this understanding, let's consider that, despite all the conflicts with the Iranians, the United States authorized Boeing in June 2016 to supply 80 commercial aircraft to the airline Iran Air, in a hefty US\$25 billion contract. In addition, due to bilateral agreements with the European Union, the same authorization was granted by the United States to Airbus, which sold 118 aircraft to the Iranians in the same period (WALL, 2016). In other words, the United States had to authorize a European company to negotiate with the Iranians.

In these circumstances, and as there are no totally neutral and inconsequential decisions in the scope of foreign policy, the Brazilian government must seek pragmatic international action in trade relations, politically and strategically preserving its relations with both the United States and other nations and companies, even if sanctioned by the US treasury. Therefore,

one must choose a balanced position that best serves national interests, as all these conflicts can even favorably impact Brazilian exports.

Nevertheless, a mistaken diplomatic strategy can have harmful consequences for the Brazilian economy, especially if the option is made for purely ideological alignments and lacks a substantial counterpart to Brazilian interests.

To paraphrase the countryman, Brazil needs not to sow wind so as not to end up reaping a whirlwind.

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Article received on: 07/13/2020.

Article accepted on: 09/01/2021.

How to cite this article (ABNT):

PIRES, M. C.; TAMARINDO, U. G. F. Collateral economic impacts on Brazilian agribusiness due to U.S. foreign policies against Iran and the use of lawfare in the international economic war. *Veredas do Direito*, Belo Horizonte, v. 18, n. 41, p. 293-328, may/aug. 2021. Available from: <http://www.domhelder.edu.br/revista/index.php/veredas/article/view/1909>. Access on: Month. day, year.