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Brazilian foreign policy: from the combined to the unbalanced axis (2003/2021)

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Abstract

From 2003 until 2021, Brazilian foreign policy has endured several changes and upheavals that are affecting its international relations traditions and projection. This process is generated by domestic political struggles, the instability of the world's balance of power towards multipolarity and is linked to a more comprehensive strategy of public policies. Based on a qualitative review and critical analysis, the aim of this article is to examine these agendas, and the combined and unbalanced axis of the current foreign policy transition.

Keywords: Brazilian foreign policy; Brazil-US bilateral relations; Emerging nations; multipolarity.

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Introduction

More than ten years after the end of the Workers Party's (PT) Luis Inácio Lula da Silva two-term presidency (2003/2010) the shadow of its domestic priorities and autonomous foreign policy is still present. Analyzing Dilma Rousseff's (2011/2016), Michel Temer's (2016/2018) and Jair Bolsonaro's (2019-current) governments, this project is taken as a reference. The core of these comparisons lays on the fact that on the one hand, Lula's agenda was part of a broader change in the state's strategic domestic and external planning, and, on the other, an answer to the transformation of world power. As Hirst (2019, 65) mentions, "The innovations pursued in the international realm relied upon the belief system of Brazilian foreign policy intertwined with recent domestic political changes."

As a result of this politicization process (Milani and Pinheiro 2017), foreign policy is either defined as too good or too bad. In

a non-exhaustive review, some examples can be listed. Positive views tend to praise Brazil's success, since it lessened economic and political inequalities and repositioned the country in the international system as an emerging nation in an upcoming multipolar order (Visentini 2013; Schutte 2012). Negative assessments are more heterogeneous: some point out that policies were flawed due to a combination of excessive ambition and lack of resources, others argue that corruption undermined all efforts, and some accuse Brazil of acting as an aggressive nation that confronted the US and isolated itself from the Western world (Malamud 2011; 2017; Mares and Trinkunas 2016).

It is not the intention of this text to theoretically, or historically, focus on all the paradigms of foreign policy in which these perceptions are rooted. Classical works such as Cervo and Bueno (2015), Ricupero (2017) and Visentini (2020), just to mention a few, present this evolution. It is our goal to understand the contemporary dynamics of these clashing trends as they are linked to personalities, coalitions, the model of development, and domestic and international structural changes (Caballero and Crescentino 2020). These variables are part of the foreign policy analysis practice (Hudson 2014; Ramanzini Jr and Farias 2021).

We are taking for granted the idea of enduring guidelines of foreign policy and autonomy. Enduring guidelines refer to values and practices such as peaceful coexistence, pragmatism, multilateralism, non-interference and respect for the law, as presented by Cervo (2008). As for autonomy, we support our evaluation on Pinheiro and Lima (2018). They argue that "Autonomist approaches to foreign policy were the result of a combination of systemic opportunities and the actions of agents wishing to alter the terms of the country's insertion within the international order". These policies identified as autonomous had clear strategic purposes to promote the increase of Brazil's resources, the remission of its vulnerabilities and the reform of the international status quo.

To stress the relevance of Lula's international relations, we once more rely on Pinheiro and Lima (2018), as they remind us that there were only three other autonomists periods: the first Getúlio Vargas government (1930/1945), the Independent Foreign Policy (1961/1964), and the responsible pragmatism agenda (1974/1979) during the Military Regime (1964/1985). Policy results from 2003/2010 led to two counterhegemonic reactions: from the US and domestic elites, which are not solely related to foreign policy. Brazil does not exist in a vacuum, and the exercise of an autonomous policy will affect pre-existing dynamics of social groups and relations between states.

We focus on a qualitative analysis and a critical reflection that could lead to future research, in particular about the most recent periods. To face the challenge proposed, the article is composed of this Introduction and four other parts: The Combined Axis (2003/2010); Retrenchment and Rapprochement (2011/2018); Crossroads (2019/2021); and Conclusion.

The Combined Axis (2003/2010)

The analysis of Lula's presidential leadership and its active, affirmative, and assertive diplomacy (Amorim 2015) is quite well known in the literature, and subject to several interpretations,

as mentioned. In terms of paradigms, just to mention a few definitions, there were autonomy through diversification (Vigevani and Cepaluni 2007), the combined axis of foreign policy (Pecequilo 2008) or a bridge between old and new powers (Burges 2013).

The combined axis can be defined as a trade-off between structural domestic and international policies. The domestic priority was to correct social-economic imbalances that impaired Brazilian society through welfare policies that would also serve as means to project influence. It enhanced access to goods, services and spaces that were so far limited to the upper classes. The most relevant programs were linked to income and the fight against extreme poverty (*Bolsa Família*), the fight against hunger (*Fome Zero*), health (*Farmácia Popular*), education (basic and universities, public and private ones with affirmative action policies and financing through *Prouni*). These welfare policies had become global references, and incorporated in United Nations (UN) efforts, such as the Millenium Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda.

Regarding international relations, structural changes were two-fold: first, the mutual reinforcement of the South-South Cooperation (SSC) and the North-South Cooperation (NSC) agendas and, second, Brazil's repositioning due to a new system of alliances as a nation from the Global South. Due to the US power vacuum as a result of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and focus on Eurasia, these movements were defined as soft balancing (Walt 2006), as they were strategic, political, economic, social and cultural alliances, and not military ones. Soft balancing had both defensive and offensive goals: as a means to contain US unilateralism, and as a tactic to further interests, either by the reform of existing institutions or by the creation of new arrangements.

For Brazil, several efforts could be listed as soft balancing. Regionally, South America was a platform for SSC in projects such as the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South American (IIRSA) and the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), the creation of Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) in 2008 and of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in 201, as well as, from 2004 to 2017, Brazil's command of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Globally one could mention IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa, or G3), the G-20 coalition in the World Trade Organization (WTO) Doha Round talks, and the establishment of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) in 2009.

IIRSA, MERCOSUR and UNASUR provided a framework for cooperation in areas that ranged from health to education, but also to security, as envisioned in the South American Defense Council (SADC). The SADC would act as mediator and security provider, which meant dealing with border, drugs, environmental and migration issues. There were some setbacks with the gas nationalization in Bolivia and the pressures to update Brazil-Paraguay Itaipu agreement, but there were no definite ruptures.

This framework was a novelty in hemispheric relations. Since 1947/1948, the Interamerican System was dominated by US-led institutions, such as the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance and the Organization of American States, as well as the fear of intervention. Presently, US policies focused on the war on drugs, the transnational threats of the Triple Frontier (linked to terrorism), and the opposition to popular governments in Cuba and Venezuela (Hugo Chávez)

and the “Pink Tide” (Chodor, 2015). The “Pink Tide” identified the political movement of left and center left governments elected in Latin America, in which Lula and Chávez were included, as well as Nestor Kirchner (Argentina), Evo Morales (Bolivia), José Mujica (Uruguay), to mention a few.

An ideal type of combined axis coalition was the Brazil, India, Germany, and Japan alliance in favor of UN Security Council (UNSC) reform (the G4), which was highly active and lost strength when the US started to support only India’s and Japan’s claims. Brazil also accelerated agreements with nations such as France in order to revitalize its defense industry, searching for new technological investments and modernization of its Armed Forces (Herz et al. 2018)

SSC extended to Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The political goal was to reinforce coalitions and gain support for Brazil’s candidacy to the UNSC as a permanent member. Economically, the purpose was to increase exports and influence. Brazilian multinational companies, known as the “national champions,” such as Odebrecht, Vale do Rio Doce, Camargo Correa, Votorantim, JBS, Marfrig, among others, with the support of the Brazilian National Development Bank (BNDES), gained significant ground (Bresser-Pereira 2018; Bugiato 2014).

As Bresser-Pereira (2018) points out, this was one of the components of the domestic pact: public financing (BNDES), support for agricultural, livestock, mining and industrial and infrastructure business and the financial elites, that would benefit from the foreign expansion. Before being elected in 2002, Lula lost all previous presidential elections – 1989, 1994 and 1999 – and the forging of this pact was strategic (Berringer 2015). Vice president José de Alencar came from the ranks of a more traditional industrial sector and represented this bridge to the center and center-right wing political parties, the so-called “Centrão”.

Despite being defined as a new-developmental policy, mainly due to its social content, the economic model was focused on commodities and kept features of the 1990s neoliberal agenda. As Bresser-Pereira (2018) indicates, these were: lack of regulation, fewer trade barriers, exchange rate variations and high interest levels. No governments reverted vulnerabilities such as deindustrialization, privatization, lower investments in technological innovation and reprimarization.

The BRIC experienced its first movements as a relevant player between 2009 and 2010, in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis that hit the US and the European Union. The BRIC is very diverse and there are several discussions regarding its nature (Rinaldi 2021), but it can be defined as a soft balancing alliance proposing reforms to the 1945 Bretton Woods system. In international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, these nations were underrepresented due to their economic growth.

The role of emerging nations was also seen in social and cultural symbols of modernity, the great sports events, the World Cup and the Summer and Winter Olympics. Mostly, they were held in the political North, in the US-EU axis (and eventually Asian allied nations such as Japan and South Korea), and presented as models of development. Attached to their new status, emerging

nations hosted them: World Cups were held in South Africa (2010), Brazil (2014) and Russia (2018), and the Summer Olympics in China (2008) and Rio de Janeiro (2016).

In 2010, China became Brazil's most relevant import/export individual partner, replacing the US, and trade with this country was one of the anchors of Lula's economic policies. China's advances in Brazil were part of an overall expansion of its influence in Latin America, Africa and Asia, a clear focus of concern for the US. Brazil was taking part in talks traditionally dominated by the US and developed nations in the Middle East: Israel-Palestinian peace and the Iran nuclear negotiations. The Iran issue was a low point of Lula's foreign policy, as it clearly represented a shock of political positions and expectations between the American and the Brazilian governments. It was an issue that spilled over other areas: human rights and the support for authoritarian governments such as Venezuela and Honduras.

Why did the 2010 Tripartite Nuclear Agreement Iran-Brazil-Turkey (Tehran Declaration) resume this role? In sum, as this issue was explored by Amorim (2015) and Hirst (2019), these talks represented a break due to its geopolitical relevance. In US strategy, a permanent priority is to prevent the rise of any power that could harm American interests, so Brazil's and Turkey's success, added to other emergent movements such as China's could be interpreted as a hindrance for US projection. The ability to close this deal and other initiatives in multilateralism represented the possibility to become a "rule maker" and not only a "rule taker".

Obama's suspension of the agreement was part of a changing US policy from accommodation to containment of emerging nations. All these nations would still be hailed as new centers of powers (The United States of America 2010) or strategic partners (Patriota 2008). However, structural demands to change IO, projections of power and practices of soft balancing needed to be restrained. In a 2011 speech in Westminster, Obama stated:

Countries like China, India, and Brazil are growing (...). We should welcome this development, for it has lifted hundreds of millions from poverty around the globe, and created new markets and opportunities for our own nations. And yet, as this rapid change has taken place, it's become fashionable in some quarters to question whether the rise of these nations will accompany the decline of American and European influence around the world. Perhaps, the argument goes, these nations represent the future, and the time for our leadership has passed. That argument is wrong. The time for our leadership is now (The United States of America 2011).

Brazil underestimated these trends and domestic pressures. As Milan (2016) and Chodor (2015) indicate, there was an underlying issue by Pink Tide governments: the attempt to promote a comprehensive social revolution and to engage traditional economic sectors. As part of the political-economic pact, elites would continue to benefit from higher profits and interest rates. But social changes were affecting oligarchic structures, which ignited polarizations, and the economic model was vulnerable to external forces.

As Hirst (2019) points out,

Throughout Lula's government, center-right parties and sympathizers severely attacked foreign policy orientations and practices. Dividing views on regional and global preferences gave way to growing politicization, which involved politics, academia and the media. While, opposing orientations on foreign policy were familiar in Brazil, they escalated to a new degree of confrontation. This is part of a broad process of maturation, linked to persisting attempts of pushing forward autonomous-oriented foreign policies (Hirst 2019, 66).

This led to contradicting agendas in the 2010 presidential elections which would be adapted for the 2014 and 2018 disputes. Brazil was portrayed as an enemy of the US and the sponsor of an ideological foreign policy. The nature of the ideology varied: anti-American, Bolivarian, Communist, or all of the above. The country was out of tune with multilateralism as it aligned with rogue nations, disrespectful of democracy and human rights regimes, it was intervening in regions in which it had no interests or enough power resources to project, it was exploiting poorer nations with companies that were an arm of "South-South imperialism", the nation lacked modernization since the state was paternalist, it was disrespecting family and Christian values. Corruption was depicted as endemic, and "Mensalão" was already under way (Farias and Alves 2020).

Brazil was, at the same time, too strong to impose its will on smaller nations and forge an alliance with anti-democratic regimes, but too weak, as it lacked resources to lead and was being held hostage by political and economic corruption. There were two strong points of convergence: Brazil was dangerously distancing itself from the US due to "anti-American" stances, and PT was the main culprit. None of the foreign policy initiatives during the period were revolutionary against the US or domestic elites. Nevertheless, they were policies of reform and soft balancing that would naturally confront interests and redistribute power and income.

Retrenchment and Rapprochement (2011/2018)

Lula's policy created a network of international coalitions and positive political and economic legacies from which Dilma Rousseff's presidency should take off, after defeating José Serra from PSDB in 2010. However, the landing was unsuccessful. Even though the opposition agenda was contradictory, it was able to forge a united narrative. Rousseff's policies were of retrenchment, due to lack of political will, leadership, an unstable pact with Michel Temer's vice presidency and the worsening of international conditions, which affected domestic revenues.

Dilma's retrenchment could still be defined as a combined axis foreign policy, as the logic remained the same (Bastos and Hiratuka 2020; Bresser-Pereira 2018). Though we agree that there were no paradigmatic shifts, and more difficulties arose, the government lacked in execution and

resolution (Cervo and Lessa 2014; Silva and Pérez 2019). There were two phases in foreign policy: from 2011 to 2012, and from 2013 to 2016.

The first, 2011/2012, tried to promote an accommodation in two areas: human rights and Brazil-US bilateral relations. In the first, the president rushed to distance herself from criticism during the campaign and promised to be less tolerant with authoritarian regimes. At the same time, there was a significant effort to review unpunished violation of human rights by state officials, the National Truth Commission (Comissão Nacional da Verdade), which displeased conservative groups. In Brazil-US bilateral relations the appointment of Ambassador Antonio Patriota, who served in Washington, for the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs, was envisioned as a gesture of good will. In March 2011, Obama and his family visited Brazil, and the goal was to “reset” the partnership (Pecequilo 2014).

These initiatives were reactive, and agendas that needed more attention such as UNASUR (Fuccille et al 2017) and the BRIC, were put aside. The timing was ill-fated and lacked an understanding of the scenario. The turning point was the change in economic policies, which affected elites’ interests. Bastos and Hiratuka (2020), present an interesting assessment,

The reaction (...) was to interrupt the tendency toward currency appreciation and (...) to negotiate with foreign affiliates an increase in national content in global production chains. This can be seen as a partial questioning of the neoliberal framework (...) What is regrettable is that such changes had not occurred before. When they occurred in 2012, it may already have been too little, too late (...) some industrial entrepreneurs complaining about high interest rates and an overpriced real were increasingly opposed to the approach to the so-called Bolivarian countries of South America, while others complained of both Third Worldism and the changes in monetary and exchange-rate policy that, in theory, would favor industry (...) in addition to the rejection of a regional bloc whose rationale seemed more political than economic, we have to factor in the loss of attractiveness of the region as the ability to import from the main partners was impaired by the deterioration of the terms of trade (Bastos and Hiratuka 2020, 16).

The key year was 2013, when protests hit Brazilian cities for several reasons, such a raise in transport fees, a plea for transparency and good governance, among others. They were described as “spontaneous, social-media driven, democratic, youthful, non-political, non-partisan and without leadership”. Most of these movements, Free Brazil Movement (MBL) and Come to the Streets (Vem pra Rua), were conservative. National symbols of an emerging Brazil were attacked by slogans such as “there will be no World Cup” and “health and education with FIFA standards”. The fight against corruption was directed to the “national champions” (Farias and Alves 2020).

The year of 2013 led to the 2016 debacle, even though Dilma sustained her 2014 reelection against PSDB candidate Aécio Neves. How did foreign policy fit into this? It was an anchor to try to salvage prestige and resources. In the second phase, the catalyst was the espionage scandal

brought forth by Edward Snowden's accusations that the National Security Agency (NSA) was monitoring foreign leaders and strategic companies. This was a leadership opportunity, and led to the cancellation of Dilma's visit to the US. Other disputes would involve the support for digital privacy laws and the Responsibility While Protecting (RwP) concept. RwP confronted the Responsibility to Protect's (R2P) humanitarian agenda, linked to the 2011 intervention in Libya, authorized by the UN and conducted by the North American Treaty Organization (NATO).

The presidency was also involved in a crisis with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ambassador Patriota was ousted in 2013, replaced by Ambassador Luiz Alberto Figueiredo (2013/2015) and Ambassador Mauro Vieira (2015/2016). Vieira was also a former Brazilian Ambassador to the US. A new "reset" of bilateral relations would come in 2014, when vice president Joe Biden visited Brazil during the World Cup, and Dilma's US trip in 2015, which achieved some concessions: the opening of the bovine meat market and the Global Entry visa for business.

Three other issues composed this agenda. The first was the deepening of Brazil-China bilateral relations with two projects in 2012 (Cooperation Plan) and in 2015 (Joint Action Plan); second, the creation of the New Development Bank (also known as the Bank of the BRICS) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangements (CRA) at the BRICS Summit in Fortaleza 2014; third, the revitalization of Mercosur-EU talks. The NDB and CRA were the most significant, as they recovered a policy of status quo reform.

The opposition's offensive remained. The World Cup (2014) and the Rio de Janeiro Olympics (2016) were hailed as failures. Brazil's 7X1 loss to Germany in 2014 was seen as a symbol of weakness, lack of pride and dignity. Between 2015 and 2016, the government was held hostage, and "Operation Car Wash" gained track, as well as accusations on Dilma's budget and fiscal practices. The 2016 impeachment was the closure of the counterhegemonic reaction. Michel Temer's government reframed the coalition in power, disengaging the left and center left and empowering the center-right.

Foreign policy was replaced by a rapprochement with the US and the northern agenda, breaking the combined axis. It recovered a pattern of Brazil-US alignment and integration in the structures of the international system. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was handed to PSDB Senators José Serra (2016/2017) and Aloysio Nunes Ferreira (2017/2018). As Saraiva (2020) argues, this was a result of policy inflections related to the domestic transition.

The country sustained the general guidelines of foreign policy and maintained good economics, non-confrontational relations with the region and the BRICS (Silva and Pérez, 2019). It continued to vouch for international regimes and multilateralism, in human rights and the environment. China was also regarded as a valuable partner for trade and investments, but diplomacy was deprived of the political strategic content of soft balancing and reform. Farias and Alves (2020) point out:

On the international scene, that administration claimed that it would render foreign policy less ideological (...) Brazil placed emphasis on trade diplomacy to the detriment

of a geopolitical grand strategy and focused on strengthening the ties with traditional partners: US, Europe and Japan (...) decreased its engagement in the South-South axis while attempting to preserve the relations with important countries on which depend its foreign currency earnings, notably China (...) a universalist approach only has connoted an interest in increasing trade and investment flows (Farias and Alves 2020, 31).

In regard to NSC, there were four priorities that extended until the government of President Jair Bolsonaro: the use of the Alcantara Basin by the Americans, the EMBRAER-Boeing deal, the MERCOSUR-EU talks and OECD membership.

The Alcantara Basin concession to the Americans and the EMBRAER-Boeing deal converged in several aspects, such as sovereignty and technological autonomy. Both agreements were closed in 2019, and the Alcantara basin guaranteed US preferential access without scientific cooperation. The EMBRAER-Boeing joint-venture was highly praised, even though its first impacts were the loss of jobs and technological transfers for Boeing with no reciprocity. The company was still an important player in the civil and military aircraft markets, but was presented as failing to justify the merger. The deal, and above all its cancellation in 2020, is still very elusive in terms of information, with EMBRAER still trying to overcome its impacts.

The MERCOSUR-EU talks accelerated and ended successfully in 2019. By September 2021, the deal had not been implemented, as will be discussed. Finally, Brazil's goal of being a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) could be understood as the Temer government's highest bet. The government used the OECD to promote a "new" state that was reliable for investments, due to its transparency, efficiency, good governance and respect for environmental and social standards. Therefore, it should advance labor, social security and tax discipline reforms.

These reforms, in particular labor and social, with the loss of rights, deregulation, cuts in welfare and pensions, were implemented at full speed and supported by oligarchic structures. Public opinion was divided by a misunderstanding of these policies' impacts and a belief in the governmental logic that deregulation would favor the creation of jobs and increase the workers' power of decision.

In the 2018 presidential election, a diverse oligarchic pact was in place. However, the mood was more radical, as center-right coalition candidates such as PSDB's Geraldo Alckmin were not able to gain support, and the looming economic crisis was allowing the left and center left to regain influence. Therefore, additional strategies emerged in order to assure the continuity of the coalition in power. Which were these strategies and players?

The motto of efficiency and transparency was accompanied by harsher criticism toward PT and the criminalization of its policies and candidacies, excluding Lula from the election, including his incarceration in 2018. Foreign policy and social public policies were also demonized and subject to fake news, and painted as ideological, communist and anti-Christian. For Casarões

(2019, 253), this center-radical-right coalition was at the core of the presidential candidacy of Jair Bolsonaro, in the Social Liberal Party (PSL). In 2019, he left PSL and so far has not affiliated to another party or been able to create his own.

This script was no stranger in the international scenario, as conservatives and nationalists were gaining ground. Since the 1990s, the dissatisfaction of middle classes with representative democracy, the growing inequality, the lack of opportunities and sense of belonging, as well as the failed promises of globalization, added to recurrent economic and security crises, were leading to polarization.

Bolsonaro's candidacy was able to capture this moment. The radical-center-right coalition converged in the 5 "Bs", as Casarões (2019) argues: banks (neoliberal economics), bible (evangelical), bullet (Armed Forces and public security), beef (agricultural and commodities) and anti-globalization (bolsolavistas as the author refers to them, the president's surname and the name of writer Olavo de Carvalho). Other events favored Bolsonaro's election: his absence from the final part of the campaign due to an attempt against his life and, mostly, the lack of a unified opposition.

Crossroads (2019/2021)

Any analysis that deals with current affairs without the benefit of time may suffer from two problems: a journalistic perspective or futurology. Considering the period between January 2019 and September 2021 (taking as a reference the latest speech by President Bolsonaro at the United Nations General Assembly on the 21st), it is possible to present some trends (Saraiva 2020; Maringoni et al. 2021).

According to Doval (2021), Brazil took a turn to the right, based on known oligarchic elites and the resurgence of the Armed Forces and the Church as conservative political forces, as a symbol of development security and morality, represented in the slogan "Brazil above everything, God above all". In foreign policy, it disrupted institutions and guidelines, a dual-break process, as Caballero and Crescentino (2020) argue.

We can identify two foreign policy phases, related to the changing political environment in Brazil and the US: 2019/2020 and January 2021 onwards. Their content unfolds into three dimensions: the political-social-cultural, the strategic-diplomatic and the economic.

The political-social-cultural dimension is marked by four stances: the pro-US-Western, the anti-globalist, the anti-communist and the religious. It is based on the most conservative pillars of the coalition, and the nomination of Ambassador Ernesto Araújo as Minister of Foreign Affairs represented these ideas (Araújo 2017; 2020). Brazil-US-Western bilateral exchanges were at the core, focused on Trump-Bolsonaro personal relations, and the right wing conservative alliance with nations such as Poland, Hungary and Saudi Arabia.

In March 2019, President Bolsonaro visited the US, and a two-track alignment was in place: the right-wing conservative cited and the political-economic (Spektor 2020; 2021). Regarding

this political-economic area, there was the continuity of talks initiated during Temer's government, as previously mentioned: the OECD membership, the EMBRAER-Boeing and the Alcantara basin deals.

Concessions on these areas and others, such as the abolition of visas, export quotas and tolerance with US protectionist measures were proof of Brazil's alignment. In exchange, Brazil only received promises of support for its membership on OECD, NATO (as a special ally) and a bilateral trade deal. None of these goals were achieved. The expectation of aligning with the US for benefits was not a novelty, but the level of the personalization of politics was new. Globalism and communism were defined as part of the radical left, which acted against morality and were socially authoritarian movements.

For the strategic-diplomatic agenda, this meant an anti-multilateralist and anti-international regimes stance. Converging with the US, Brazil was changing historical positions on non-interference, multilateralism, pragmatism and coexistence. Practical examples were the support for Israel and the relocation of the Brazilian Embassy to Jerusalem, the alliance against gender rights and migration pacts, and the opposition to environmental regimes related to global warming, preservation and sustainable development (Paris Agreement and the UN's 2030 Agenda). Brazil supported US efforts to weaken the World Trade Organization (WTO). A negationist and anti-science approach was already present.

In South America, Brazil openly criticized Venezuela and Cuba (and supported US embargos and interferences) and there was the dismantling of CELAC and UNASUR. According to Saraiva (2020), UNASUR's replacement, PROSUR lacked strategic content, and its focus was the promotion of a coalition of right wing governments. Even MERCOSUR and the BRICS were questioned. This deconstruction had a geopolitical purpose and is related to the US' counterhegemonic reaction, the break of soft power coalitions, and China's containment.

China's economic, strategic, diplomatic and technological presence represented a threat for US interests, and the triangulation US-Brazil-China is one of the most contradictory aspects of foreign policy. China is much more relevant for Brazil's economy than the US nowadays, but the pro-US-Western foreign policy and open criticisms of the Chinese regime jeopardized the partnership.

In 2020, these positions affected the handling of the pandemic, considering China-Brazil relations and multilateral efforts. The federal government aligned with the US, and refused to take part in UN and World Health Organization (WHO) talks regarding access to vaccines, intellectual property rights and the fight against COVID-19. Brazil's entry in the COVAX Facility alliance was late and partial, limiting the country's access to vaccines. It delayed any purchase of vaccines, and the government only began to act after the State of São Paulo, led by PSDB's João Dória started to gain political momentum for the acquisition of vaccines in partnership with China's SINOVAC.

As Ventura and Bueno (2021) and Casarões and Magalhães (2021) indicate, the pandemic, as a matter of public health, was turned into a political agenda that was used to mobilize the radical

conservatives against China and vaccines as a whole. It exposed clashes with political adversaries, but also a facet of public policies not well known by society: the significant budgetary cuts on health, education, research and technology, as well as Brazil's dependence.

Thus, we enter the third dimension: the economic. In 2019/2020, Brazil pursued a two-track agenda, with implications for its foreign policy and model of development: a strengthening of neoliberal practices and reforms that started to be implemented by Temer and an attempt to disconnect international economic relations from the political-social-cultural and strategic-diplomatic dimensions.

The first track is being very successful, despite the worsening of the economic crisis that was in place even before the pandemic and the institutional upheavals. Privatization of major strategic sectors in energy, transports, postal services, as well as the administrative, political, labor, health and social security additional reforms are at full speed. The coalition that vouches for these measures and the validation of the primary sector as the main sector in the Brazilian economy have not been contested.

The second track is more sensitive, as relevant economic partners are consistently uncomfortable with Brazilian policies. The pro-Israel stance led to pressures from Middle Eastern partners. In regard to China, public clashes continue to impact talks regarding vaccines, 5G, joint ventures and trade. In South America political misgivings are growing, as some electoral processes are bringing the left back to power. Finally, the biggest bets of this period, the US-Brazil bilateral trade alliance, the OECD and the MERCOSUR-EU agreement fell short.

As for the US, there was no intention in Trump's government to close any deal. Proposals such ATEC (Ministério das Relações Exteriores 2020) focused on trade facilitation measures at most, and the US imposed additional protectionist measures, which were very detrimental for Brazilian exports. The social-political-cultural alignment did not change, even after Trump's defeat at the presidential election.

Until September 2021 the MERCOSUR-EU agreement, hailed as a successful example of non-ideological NSC, is on hold. Policies toward regimes in human rights and the environment are in clear shock with the EU. In the environmental field, we can mention the change in domestic laws regarding protected land areas, pesticides, rights of indigenous populations, Amazon and Pantanal wildfires and the dismantling of governmental agencies.

The gravity of these issues led some parties and civil society movements to present a case against the president in the International Criminal Court (ICC), which is still on hold. Brazil's actions are not only morally questionable, but they also show the option for a predatory and outdated economic exploitation that is harming the future of economic activity, since Brazil is consuming its own resources. The same dilemma applies to the OECD. It is very unlikely that any deal will go forward unless there is comprehensive change in the country.

These misgivings, added to the events in the US, could be seen as a turning point that led to the second phase of foreign policy. Its prelude begins in November, during the US presidential election, and ends with Biden's inauguration on January 20th, passing through the Capitol invasion on January 6th. Brazil was one of the last countries to officially recognize Biden's victory and did

not condemn the riots in DC. During the campaign, Biden criticized Brazil's policies and there were pressures from some interest groups and the Democrat Party to take direct actions against the country. Geopolitical and geoeconomic realities, however, are writing a different story.

Since January 2021, there are many sensitive issues in the bilateral relations. A series of relevant variables that must be considered by the US are the fact that the conservative-radical-right coalition is still linked to Trump, projecting the political-social-cultural fundamentalist religious issue, as well as the potential instability of the Brazilian democratic regime in a polarized hemisphere divided between conservatives and former Pink Tide trends and, most relevant of all, the China card.

The risk of alienating Brazil is too high. A scenario of greater instability hinders US political and strategic interests. The rise of a new center-left government may put Brazil on track of an autonomous foreign policy once more, which directly affects the regional and global balance of power, marked by an ongoing China-US clash.

The government can choose to explore China-US clashes, in a bargaining position in matters related to technology (5G), or other soft balancing actions in the BRICS. In the months of July and August, Brazil was visited by high-ranking US officials, William J. Burns from the CIA and Jake Sullivan from the National Security Council (Folha de São Paulo 2021; G1 2021a).

Curiously, one of the issues on the table was NATO'S special ally membership. On the other hand, the US clearly stated that there is no possibility of a trade deal or support for non-democratic acts (Valor Econômico 2021). In the midst of all this, at the 2021 BRICS Summit, in an official speech, the Brazilian government praised China for its efforts during the pandemic. Is this an attempt to launch a possible foreign policy bargaining?

Even though there was even a change in the Foreign Ministry, with Ambassador Carlos França ahead of Itamaraty, there is no evidence of major adjustments. As of September 21, 2021, President Bolsonaro's third speech at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly followed the same pattern of previous ones (Brasil 2020b; G1 2019; 2021b). The political-social-cultural and the strategic-diplomatic dimensions focused on mobilizing domestic bases, recovering issues such as the danger of socialism and reclaiming conservative family values. A nationalist stance was present in the President's refusal to vaccinate and the support for controversial drugs. He claimed human rights and environmental regimes were subject to the nation's sovereignty, which was presented as recovering economically, depicting a scenario that far from reality.

One may argue that this speech puts aside the idea that there is a second phase of foreign policy as proposed. However, the appeal to the base shows the opposite: a concern for gaining political support, as pressures rise due to the economic crisis and diplomatic isolation, which are affecting trade-offs in the center-right core of the coalition. Pressure from other interest groups may not be enough for the return of a bargaining stance or the combined axis, but it can stop recurring ruptures.

Conclusion

From the combined to the unbalanced axis, Brazilian foreign policy is facing significant upheavals, as a result of domestic coalition clashes and international transformations. This is a debate that goes well beyond the idea of success or failure of Lula's diplomacy. Nonetheless, sometimes as a smoke screen, this is very much present in the literature and the media, concealing political struggles underneath. As discussed, Brazil does not exist in a vacuum, and the intertwining of domestic and external pressures is producing the current turmoil.

All governments tried to promote structural changes that reflected the coalitions in power: some to gain international autonomy and achieve a more equal society (Lula), others to uphold these policies (Dilma) and the last two to dismantle public social policies and reposition Brazil as a pro-US-Western ally (Temer and Bolsonaro). Any transition leads to oscillations, and they are depriving the country of its reliability, credibility, pragmatism, multilateralism, and cordial coexistence. Will this be a governmental trend only? Or will this be the new state paradigm? As 2021 indicates, this is yet to be seen, because,

The future struggle to achieve an independent foreign policy cannot be restricted primarily to international diplomacy and must involve internal political and ideological struggles to transform or modify structures that are as resistant as or stronger than those found in the multilateral forums. (Bastos and Hiratuka 2020, 16)

International conditions are more favorable to an autonomous and balanced policy than in the domestic field. The world is changing rapidly towards a new US-China competitive coexistence. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated geopolitical and geoeconomics tensions, including new types of competition, as shown in the sanitary crisis, intellectual property rights and the access to vaccines. Last but not least, we are facing another unknown territory in international politics, and it is not the pandemic, but the US-China polarization, as this may be the first hegemonic transition in which powers are interdependent and the risk of decoupling could be higher than the stakes of open competition (Farrel and Newman 2020; Abrão 2021).

Brazil seems to be disconnected from the possibilities the world has to offer. The ongoing structural political, economic, and social changes show the consolidation of a neoliberal state, focused on commodities exports, with a loss of welfare policies, economic-strategic assets, in a predatory, non-sustainable, not-inclusive model of development. This is linked to a matter of perception of Brazil's role in the world, as a peripheral and not emerging nation, and a result of the domestic oligarchic pact.

This internal counterhegemonic reaction is still present, and there is a growing fragmentation of both right and left. Which interest groups will prevail in the coming 2022 presidential election is yet to be seen. Unless the dynamic of these coalitions changes, recovering a social-economic reform and an autonomous, or less unbalanced, foreign policy, a new international insertion for Brazil will be unlikely.

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