

Article

Brazil: Geopolitical Challenges in a Multipolar World

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Introduction

Brazil's geopolitical and diplomatic "rise" has been heralded by many commentators in the last few years. A member of important new groupings of states including the expanded G20, IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) in its own region, Brazil has also been a prominent voice in global negotiations over and initiatives involving trade, climate change, sustainable development, global public health, internet governance, peacekeeping, and international security. Brazil's enhanced protagonism in global governance has generated a substantial number of new, insightful analyses.¹ Nevertheless, because of the complexity and changing nature of the topic, answers to important questions about it remain either under-explored or contested.

This special issue of *Rising Powers Quarterly* is dedicated to exploring some of those questions. Reflecting the ongoing work of a group of scholars that also produced a special section of *International Affairs*,² the seven articles that follow offer compelling analysis of at least three important aspects of Brazil's global trajectory and foreign policy.

The first issue is Brazil's recent rise in international prominence and influence. How substantial was that rise? What factors facilitated this emergence? Has Brazil's rise stalled and, if so, why? And is the alleged decline temporary or more

¹ See, for example, Sean Burges (2017) *Brazil in the World: The International Relations of a South American Giant*, Manchester University Press, Manchester; David R. Mares and Harold A. Trinkunas, Harold A. (2016) *Aspirational Power. Brazil on the Long Road to Global Influence*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC; Carlos Milani, Leticia Pinheiro and Maria Regina Soares de Lima (2017), "Brazil's Foreign Policy and the 'Graduation Dilemma'", *International Affairs*, 93 (3), 585-605; and Mathias Spektor (2016) "Brazil: Shadows of the Past and Contested Ambitions" in William I. Hitchcock, Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro (eds.) *Shaper Nations: Strategies for a Changing World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, pp. 17-35.

² Ana Margheritis (2017) "Introduction: The 'graduation dilemma' in foreign policy: Brazil at a watershed", *International Affairs*, Volume 3, Number 3, 2017, pp. 581-584 and the other six articles in the special section, pp. 581-699.

long-term? The authors in this special issue approach these questions from different angles. Antonio Patriota suggests the importance of history, in that the latter furnishes other examples of transitions that opened the world system up to new actors. These were transitions to multipolarity after the end of a unipolar period. This type of transition, Patriota suggests, is happening now and is more universal and cooperative than its 19th century antecedent, which took place after the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the 1815 Congress of Vienna. It is this transition that has furnished Brazil with opportunities to play a more active role in global decision-making.

The articles on Brazilian foreign policy in trade (Rodrigues Vieira), international development (Soldi Hardt, Mouron, and Apolinario Junior) and the defense of democracy (Pereira) largely confirm this view. Rodrigues Vieira, for example, takes a somewhat longer perspective and argues that Brazil is one of the most successful cases of post-WWII industrialization in the world; its industrial output quadrupled between 1965 and 1980, while Japan's tripled during the same period. Soldi Hardt, Mouron, and Apolinario Junior show that Brazil became an important participant in international development cooperation in the late 2000s, increasing its spending in this area significantly, before the impact of its economic slowdown led to a significant retreat.

Both Kai Lehmann and Andres Malamud focus on what they see as Brazil's recent decline in leadership and geopolitical prominence. They acknowledge Brazil's recent rise, in Malamud's case attributing it to domestic stabilization, an energetic and capable foreign policy, skillful leaders and a facilitating international environment, including China's rapid growth in the 2000s. However, each author argues that Brazilian leadership has recently faltered in South America (Lehmann) and internationally (Malamud). This was partly due to recent economic and political crises, including a severe recession, the impeachment of the president in 2016, and a major corruption scandal³, but also due to structural factors and limitations in Brazil's resources and capabilities.

The second set of puzzles, related to the first, concerns the current world order. What are the system's primary characteristics and trajectory? Is it genuinely multipolar, still unipolar, or something else? How real is the danger of major war in the current system? And what role are the rising powers playing in the solution of global problems? Patriota, in the article that follows this one, argues that the

³ The extent to which the corruption of some of its companies abroad (revealed by the Carwash anti-corruption investigation begun in March 2014) has damaged Brazil's image and hampered its foreign policy is an under-researched topic in this area. For example, plea-bargained testimony made public in December 2016 suggests that between 2003 and 2014 the Brazilian construction company Odebrecht paid bribes worth a total of US \$788 million in eleven countries in Latin America and Africa. See Malu Gaspar (2017), "Uma História do Peru: A ascensão e queda da Odebrecht na América Latina", *Piauí* 130, Ano 11, Julho, pp. 18-28; the reference is to page 19.

world order is already more multipolar than many observers are willing to recognize. It still contains vestiges of unipolarity, especially in the military sphere where US dominance is overwhelming, but the institutions of governance have begun to include more actors. For Patriota, this change has not been – up to now – destabilizing. China will become the biggest economy in the world in the next few decades, but shows little inclination to challenge the political status quo; therefore, the existence of the alleged “Thucydides trap” can be questioned.⁴ This is good for Brazil, because it is a rising power that has invested relatively little in military power, and has staked its diplomatic reputation on the peaceful, multilateral resolution of conflicts.

Most of the other authors in this special issue share Patriota’s view that the global order is or is becoming multipolar, as well as his optimism that the system will not necessarily become more conflictual as it evolves. Urdinez and Rodrigues depart from this consensus, however, calling the present system “proto-bipolar”, because the USA and China account for roughly one-half of global gross domestic product. These authors acknowledge that China’s growth has helped Brazil’s balance of trade. But they argue that the unbalanced nature of Brazil’s commercial relations with China (commodities in exchange for manufactured goods) and its loss to China of market share in manufactured goods in neighboring countries and in its own domestic economy (contributing to Brazil’s deindustrialization) has “trapped” Brazil and limited its global rise.

The authors in this special issue take slightly different views about what the main divisions within the current world order are and what the rising powers’ contributions to it have been and could be, reflecting the specific issues that they focus on. For Patriota conventional distinctions between East and West, North and South seem to be less important than the over-arching division between those state and non-state actors willing to participate in “cooperative multipolarity” and those that are not. Crucial members of the former category, argues Patriota, are rising democratic powers such as India, South Africa, and Brazil.⁵ For Rodrigues Vieira, on the other hand, a division between a “West” and “the rest” still retains some analytical purchase in international trade negotiations, with the West consisting of advanced industrialized democracies located in North America and western Europe, plus Japan, Australia, and New Zealand.⁶ For Rodrigues Vieira, if the

⁴ See Graham Allison (2017) *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, New York; James Holmes (2013) “Beware the Thucydides Trap” in *The Diplomat*, 13 June at thediplomat.com/2013/06/beware-the-thucydides-trap accessed on 8 July 2017 and Arthur Waldon (2017) “There is no Thucydides Trap” in *The Straits Times* Opinion 18 June at www.straitstimes.com/opinion/there-is-no-thucydides-trap accessed on 26 June 2017).

⁵ For an exploration of some of the shared dilemmas of these three democratic rising powers, see Marco Antonio Vieira and Chris Alden (2011), “India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA): South-South Cooperation and the Paradox of Global Leadership”, *Global Governance*, 17 (4): 507-528.

⁶ For the argument that Brazil is one of several “non-Western” rising powers, see Oliver Stuenkel

United States pushes the West into a retreat from trade openness, the Brazilian reaction will be to seek bilateral deals, and to set aside the multilateral approach it has favored until recently.

For Soldi Hardt, Mouron, and Apolinario Junior there is a clear difference between the way the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) approaches official development assistance and the way some of the rising powers, including Brazil, engage in “technical cooperation”. This distinction is likely to endure for some time, even though Brazil has now formally applied for membership in the OECD.⁷ My article on the defense of democracy deals with another global dichotomy. It challenges the stereotype that only established powers such as the United States, the European Union and some of the Scandinavian countries actively promote and defend democracy, while rising powers are content to defend traditional notions of sovereignty and non-intervention and generally avoid getting involved in conflicts over democracy outside their borders. At least when it comes to the 2009 Honduran crisis, Brazil’s foreign policy did not confirm this generalization.

The third cluster of questions addressed by this special issue concerns Brazilian views of and contributions to world order. How do Brazilian citizens and policy-makers see the world? What are the factors that produce Brazil’s foreign policy, and what is the relative weight of the domestic and the international among these factors? Is Brazil an anti-systemic actor in world affairs, or a mildly reformist one? And what is the Brazilian record of – and potential for – contributing to global governance?

Malamud argues that Brazil’s South American neighborhood shaped its state formation in ways that distinguish it from European states and other rising powers. In South America wars and state death have been relatively rare and limited, and borders have often been demarcated peacefully, making power somewhat softer than in other regions. This distinctive experience has shaped Brazil’s evolution into a relatively rule-abiding and peaceful global actor, a player whose size dwarfs those of its neighbors but whose behavior is often benign – a “vegetarian dino-

(2016) *Post-Western World: How Emerging Powers are Remaking Global Order*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

⁷ The OECD currently has 35 members, including South Korea, Mexico, and Chile (the first South American country to join). Brazil has been a “key partner” of the organization since 2007, when the OECD decided to increase its engagement with a set of important developing countries that, in addition to Brazil, includes China, India, Indonesia, and South Africa. While Brazil has formally requested membership of the OECD’s Secretary General, the process of admission is likely to take several years and will involve a review by OECD commissions of Brazil’s legislation, policies, and statistics in areas such as taxation, trade, education, science and technology, agriculture, and the environment. From Mauricio Chapinoti and Gustavo Pagliuso Machado (2017), “O trajeto do Brasil e o que esperar da adesão à OCDE”, *Valor Econômico*, 7 July, p. A10.

saur” in the words of former diplomat Rubens Ricupero.⁸ Patriota articulates a similar understanding of Brazil’s actions and intentions. He implicitly denies that Brazil is an anti-systemic actor, and explicitly states that what Brazilian diplomacy strives for is an end to unilateralism. In this view, Brazil wants the fair and consistent application of currently-existing rules to all actors, combined with the creation of new seats at the table of global governance for rising powers.

Rodrigues Vieira’s portrait of Brazilian diplomacy in the Doha Round from 2003 to 2008 matches Patriota’s account. The Brazilian Ministry of External Relations maintained a commitment to global trade liberalization despite skepticism about this position on the part of domestic interest groups, especially Brazilian manufacturers concerned about their industrial competitiveness. During that period, Brazil demanded that the established powers follow their own rules, liberalizing agriculture in the United States and the European Union and opening markets to Brazilian agribusiness. However, in other areas and at other times Brazil seems to want to change global rules, rather than simply apply existing rules more consistently. Soldi Hardt, Mouron and Apolinario Junior show this by looking at Brazil’s engagement in international development cooperation from 2000 to 2016. They depict a rising power with an implicit critique of the neo-colonialism of the foreign aid industry, with its language of “aid”, “assistance” and “donor”, and vertical relations between donors and aid “recipients”. The Brazilian approach, exemplified by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (*Agência Brasileira de Cooperação*), has been to talk of technical cooperation, solidarity between countries of the South, and horizontal relations between partners. This language helps Brazil position itself as a leader among developing countries and the South that is especially helpful in Africa, where it shares, for example, its research in tropical agriculture and its policies to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Whether Brazil’s rhetorical commitments translate consistently into different practices on the ground in its technical cooperation projects is contested and perhaps understudied. One thing that Soldi Hardt, Mouron and Apolinario Junior show, however, is that Brazil’s development cooperation is highly concentrated and leverages the country’s affinities with other members of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP, or *Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa*).⁹ While Haiti received 40 percent of Brazil’s spending on development cooperation between 2000 and 2016 (understandable given Brazil’s leadership of the United Nations peacekeeping mission there beginning in 2004), five

⁸ Comment made during a presentation at the Brazil Institute, King’s College London, 23 October 2012. The presentation was entitled “Smart Power, Rio Branco and Brazilian Diplomacy in the Early Twentieth Century”.

⁹ The CPLP was created in 1996 and consists of nine member countries (Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, East Timor, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, and São Tomé and Príncipe) as well as ten observer countries.

of the top ten beneficiaries of Brazilian technical cooperation in this period were members of the CPLP: Angola, Cape Verde, East Timor, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique. This shows that Brazil is a rising power with a special affinity for and influence over countries that were also part of the Portuguese seaborne empire and that speak the Portuguese language. Brazil is a rising power with many facets; one is that it is a Lusophone rising power.

Urdinez and Rodrigues use survey research to produce an interesting argument about the Brazilian public's attitudes towards the global order. Perhaps not surprisingly, they find that the majority of Brazilians surveyed is comfortable with US influence in the Americas, and do not fully trust China as a trade partner. However, Urdinez and Rodrigues also argue that the majority of survey respondents views the rise of China in relation to the United States as positive. This finding suggests that the Brazilian public, perhaps rather like the Brazilian foreign policy establishment, takes a pragmatic view of world affairs, and would not be upset by China becoming the world's largest economy.

Lehmann and Malamud take slightly different approaches to the question of Brazilian leadership. For Lehmann, Brazil's recent failures to exercise influence in South America (noticeable in its lack of involvement in attempts to mediate between the opposition and the Maduro regime in Venezuela) could be corrected if this failure were systematically addressed within the political system. The decline of Brazil's regional leadership capacity became locked in around 2014, argues Lehmann. However, this is conjunctural, and in Lehmann's view it remains at least theoretically possible for Brazilian policymakers, under conditions of economic revival and political stability, to forge a new consensus on foreign policy and to re-activate regional mechanisms of cooperation.

Malamud seems to see no such opportunity for Brazil to re-emerge, at least at the global level. For Malamud, Brazil's limitations condemn it to a cycle of foreign policy booms and busts, in which periods of economic growth foster international activism, and recessions lead to quietism. These limitations include poor infrastructure, an underperforming educational system, and an over-regulated economy with a low rate of productivity growth and innovation. In this perspective, there is little that policymakers can do about these limitations in the short and even medium term.

Others might interpret the facts presented by Malamud somewhat differently and claim that Brazil could continue to "punch above its weight" in foreign affairs, with a diplomatic GDP that exceeds its economic GDP.¹⁰ Another of Malamud's

¹⁰ Some of the ablest (but not the only) proponents of this view are Brazilian diplomats and former diplomats, including, for example, Celso Amorim (2015) *Teerã, Ramalá e Doha: Memórias da Política Externa Ativa e Alternativa*, Benvirá, São Paulo; Rubens Barbosa (2015) *The Washington Dissensus: A*

claims is also likely to generate debate. That is that considering the apparent US retreat from trade liberalization and cooperation on climate change mitigation, the appeal of Brazil's pacific, green, and rule-oriented approach to world affairs as well as its own racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse society will decline. Some might question this claim. The US government has become more unilateral, isolationist, anti-science and ethno-nationalist, and ethnonational parties are popular in Europe. But large parts of the populations of both the United States and Europe – as well as other regions of the world – remain committed to rationalist, humanist, and cooperative values. Therefore, the appeal of Brazil's defense of peaceful multipolarity, sustainable approaches to development and racial and religious tolerance could rise rather than recede in the contemporary global order.

That issue, like so many others mentioned in this introduction, must be left for readers to decide. This special issue addresses vital questions about world order and Brazilian foreign policy, but it cannot definitively answer any of them. If this special issue serves a purpose, it is to inspire a broad, intense, multipolar debate about the geopolitical challenges facing Brazil in the contemporary global system. I hope that a reading of the seven articles that follow will be worthwhile to those who decide to take the journey.

Bio

Anthony W. Pereira is a Professor and Director of the Brazil Institute at King's College London. He has a B.A. from Sussex University and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Harvard University. He has held positions at the New School, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tulane University, and the University of East Anglia. His books include *Ditadura e Repressão* (Paz e Terra, 2010); and (with Lauro Mattei) *The Brazilian Economy Today: Towards a New Socio-Economic Model?* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). A visiting researcher at the Institute of International Relations at the University of São Paulo in 2017, he is currently involved in a research network on Brazilian foreign policy and working on a book on the formation of the Brazilian state.

Privileged Observer's Perspective on US-Brazil Relations, Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville; Celso Lafer (2009) "Brazil and the World" in Ignacy Sachs, Jorge Wilhelm, and Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, (eds.) *Brazil: A Century of Change*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, pp. 101-119; and Antonio Patriota in this special issue.