

BRAZIL*Shadows of the Past
and Contested Ambitions*MATIAS SPEKTOR

WHAT IS Brazil's strategy to cope with the emerging world order? The question has come up time and again in scholarly writings as analysts try to project whether Brazil is bound to be a "responsible stakeholder" or a spoiler of the emerging system.¹ Answers, however, are not readily available because generations of Brazilian statesmen have rarely couched their foreign policies in the language of "grand strategy" that is common in American scholarly discourse.

In this chapter, I examine what Brazil wants in the world and how it hopes to get it by putting its foreign policy frameworks in context. First, I focus on three underlying factors that have shaped the evolution of Brazilian strategy: domestic politics, ideology, and the intersection between geopolitics and economics. The chapter then turns to the substance of Brazilian strategies, with reference to four core strategic themes that recur in national conversations and in the making of foreign policy—namely polarity, regional order, membership in international institutions, and global justice. The pages that follow frame these issues in a historical perspective; even if my chief concern is with the contemporary period, Brazilian attitudes regarding global order are profoundly shaped by shared national grievances about the past and by the widespread perception that the country remains at the receiving end of a highly unequal and discriminating international system. Across the political spectrum, there is a persistent national historical narrative of relative weakness and dependence that influences behavior.

While critics often point out that a Brazilian foreign policy community bounded by historical tropes risks walking forward while looking backward, the fact remains that shadows of the past must be integrated into any account of Brazil's behavior in the world today.

Core Constraining Factors

Three core factors have shaped the evolution of Brazilian strategy: domestic politics, ideology, and the country's relative position in the international system.

Domestic Politics

Of the three factors shaping current Brazilian strategy, domestic politics is the most salient. Unlike three decades ago when an authoritarian regime ran the country, democratic Brazil defies careful, calculated foreign policy-making by elites. Brazil is as vibrant and messy a democracy as any other: Brazilian presidents preside over an often-fractured governing coalition and they face the challenge of managing a vast federal state with an unruly set of bureaucracies and semi-independent agencies operating within it. Candidates for the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies are chosen on the basis of a highly competitive open-list, proportional electoral system and coexist with twenty-seven powerful state governors and legislatures. Members of the gargantuan judiciary branch are staunchly independent from executive control, and so is the free press. Private lobbies and organized interests seek to and do exert influence at all levels, further complicating the ability of leaders to conduct foreign policy according to a rationally constructed notion of "national interests."²

Domestic factors have been critical in the foreign policies of the last three presidencies: Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002), Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (2003–2010), and Dilma Rousseff (2011 to the present). Facing different domestic circumstances, all three presidents invested in grand strategies that they thought would best serve their ability to govern successfully and retain power. Their individual skill, rhetoric, and experience must figure prominently in any detailed account of their respective foreign policies, but the focus here is on the incentives emerging from the domestic political system that they faced.

For the past twenty years, intense electoral competition between center-right and center-left coalitions have dominated the political scene. For all

of their divisions, however, these two poles came to frame national politics around a set of shared priorities: consolidating democratic rule through free, competitive elections and an independent judiciary; securing financial stability after years of hyper-inflation and economic mismanagement; building an incipient welfare state to assist the poor who still comprise over half the population; and embracing many of the benefits of a liberal global order, like norms governing human rights, free trade, and nuclear nonproliferation.³ But the differences in these coalitions are reflected in the two political leaders—Cardoso and Lula—who emerged on the national political scene as opponents to dictatorial rule and who went on to govern Brazil from 1995 to 2002 and from 2003 to 2010, respectively. The parties they commanded fought for the presidency in 2010, with Lula's anointed successor Dilma Rousseff winning the election that year and gaining reelection in 2014.

Both Cardoso and Lula thought of themselves as statesmen set to transform Brazil's position in the international system. The two of them traveled extensively around the globe and actively used foreign policy to build their authority at home. Perhaps more importantly, each couched his own vision for the future of Brazil in terms of wider changes in the global context. Let us look at their views in turn.

Cardoso took office in the mid-1990s believing that unipolarity was not a fleeting moment but a structure of world politics that was likely to endure. As an academic sociologist years earlier, he had written extensively about global inequality and the dependence of nations from the postcolonial world on the major industrial countries of the North Atlantic. As president, his core conviction was that countries like Brazil had little policy space. Either they had to adapt to the rules of the game or they would be left behind. According to this view, Brazil's ability to shape the international system was limited, and the best foreign policy was one that avoided conflict with the major centers of power and sought to adapt to the dominant regimes and institutions. Normatively, it was the duty of leadership to ensure that Brazil took part in the prevailing wave of globalization, with a view toward stabilizing the economy, consolidating democracy, and transforming one of the most unequal societies in the world into a middle-class nation.⁴

Lula held a very different view as he took office in 2003. He believed a significant transition of power was under way in the world that would benefit countries like Brazil. This was partly the result of changes in the global economy, but also a consequence of what he saw as the failures of neoliberalism under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, as well as Bill Clinton

and Tony Blair. Lula saw the anti-globalization protests erupting in Seattle in 1999 as a signal that the global political mood was about to shift and the international system would become more malleable for a country like Brazil. In his estimation, there was policy space to reform existing regimes and institutions with a view to secure a better place for Brazil, a newfound position that would offer Brazilian authorities more “autonomy” to pursue policies consistent with growing the economy, reducing poverty and inequality at home, and producing a middle-class society.⁵

Even if their ultimate goals were similar, Cardoso and Lula developed very different causal logics. Their thinking shaped two alternative ways of conceiving of polarity, regional order, membership in international institutions, and global justice. Before turning to these in the section below, let us first look at the domestic political incentives influencing the foreign policies of each president.

Cardoso was elected in 1994 on the promise to end the cycle of hyperinflation that had haunted Brazil for the better part of the fifteen years prior to his arrival in power. He launched a major program to reform the state, open the economy to foreign trade, privatize large state-owned companies, modernize public services, and construct for the first time ever a fairly basic but nonetheless impressive welfare state to nurture the poor, who accounted for about half the population, but who had been denied the vote until 1989 (when illiterates first got the right to vote).

Accordingly, Cardoso did not have a major incentive to invest his time and attention in foreign policy. He only assumed a more active interest as his first term came to an end in 1998. This occurred as a response to a more ominous international environment, as financial crises systematically threatened his economic stabilization policies (1995, 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2000). He focused on global financial reform and on fortifying South America against the instabilities of global capitalism, realizing that public opinion was turning markedly against “neoliberalism” in the wake of the anti-globalization protests in Seattle in 1999. When Osama bin Laden attacked the United States on 9/11, Cardoso, who was at the peak of his foreign policy activism, was inclined to emphasize that “terror equals barbarianism, but so does unilateralism.”⁶ In spite of his fast-declining popularity ratings, he knew he had built a major coalition in Congress that would support him.

Lula won office in late 2002 under very different circumstances. The economy was stable, state reform was in process, and a welfare state for the poor was in place. Lula had a clear mandate from the electorate to challenge the

neoliberal orthodoxy and to denounce George W. Bush's foreign policies, but the economic climate was good as the commodity super-cycle saw the value of Brazilian exports (increasingly to China) soar. A favorable global economy allowed Lula to amass unprecedented popular support without having to challenge global capitalism or to confront the United States. Within a decade, Brazil underwent rapid change in its class structure, with some forty million people moving from poverty or extreme poverty up the social ladder.

In this context, Lula and his foreign policy advisors thought they had the material resources and the political space to embark on an activist foreign policy. Overseeing a massive party coalition in Congress, his administration launched an expansive set of international initiatives not so much to challenge the existing global order as to secure for Brazil a better position in that order. By the time Lula's tenure in office came to a close, his critics accused him of overreaching. None of his major foreign policy initiatives had paid off: there was no trade agreement at the Doha world trade conference, no reform of the UN Security Council, and no nuclear agreement brokered between the West and Iran. But supporters highlighted a list of successes: the formation of a coalition of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa); the development of a Union of South American Nations (Unasur); the engagement with Africa that saw trade from Brazil boom; the protection of democratic rule in neighboring countries like Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela; and the strengthening of the G20 as a prime forum for global economic management.⁷

Dilma Rousseff succeeded Lula in 2011 in a domestic and global context that gave her far less leeway to conduct an activist foreign policy. None of the core elements that had undergirded Cardoso's and Lula's activist turns were present anymore: the economy slowed down in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, the coalition supporting her administration showed widening cracks, and the public was far less supportive of expansionist foreign policies in the aftermath of Lula's time in power. For the first time in twenty years, there were renewed fears of inflation and recession. Even if Rousseff enjoyed sufficient popular support to secure reelection, the political climate had changed.

Rousseff's opportunity for an activist foreign policy further diminished in the aftermath of massive protests that erupted around June 2013 and then recurred intermittently. Demonstrators demanded better public services, a curb on government corruption, and political reform to offset the impunity of the powerful that is a hallmark of Brazil's public life. These expressions of

public anger were leaderless and did not translate into benefits for any one single political party. They reflected a widespread malaise about the state of the country, even if economic growth had climbed, social inequality had declined, and public services had improved, however slowly. The malaise illustrated a widespread phenomenon across the developing world—the disruptive nature of international ascent.

Whereas Brazilians throughout the early 2000s saw the world as a place of opportunity for an ascending Brazil, the mood turned to caution in view of an international system that presented Brazil with many obstacles. Rousseff retrenched, scaling back the high profile that Lula accorded to foreign policy. This reduction in Brazil's geopolitical footprint remained relative—military expenditures stayed pretty high, and so did the range of international issues Brazilian diplomats engaged.

For the emerging countries that had benefited from transformations in the global economy over the prior fifteen years, climbing the international rankings came at the price of unsettling old ways of doing things at home. Critics felt empowered to demand better services from their governments, making it more difficult for governments to achieve their goals.⁸ Becoming an “emerging power” and moving up the ranks did not simply expand Brazil's options. On the contrary, it brought a whole new set of constraints on the conduct of foreign policy.⁹

Ideology

The Brazilian view of global order vastly differs from that of the United States. Take for instance people's perceptions of “international threats.” Polls show that the average Brazilian worries little about terrorism, radical Islam, or major international war. Brazilians are more fearful of climate change, poverty, and infectious disease. Odd as it may seem, many Brazilians fear the United States itself—the perceived threat it poses to the natural richness of the Amazon and the newfound oilfields under the Brazilian seabed.

Perceptions may be wrong, but they matter enormously. It is no wonder that Brazilian military officials spend a chunk of their time studying how Vietnamese guerrillas won a war against far superior forces in jungle battlefields. Nor should it be a surprise that Brazil is now developing nuclear-propulsion submarines that, its admirals believe, will facilitate their ability to defend oil wells in open waters against the eventuality of an attack from an unnamed industrial power “from the North.”

Brazilian leaders who govern the country today came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, the period when foreign policy was closely aligned with that of the Group of 77 (G77) developing countries. That this should be the case today is not obvious; Brazil is the seventh-largest industrial economy in the world, it is an urban society, and it shares few commonalities with most members of the G77. But alignment with this group remains a major force shaping what Brazil does in the world. This is partially about self-interest, as the G77 affords Brazil a prominence that it would not otherwise have. It is also about the power of major Brazilian interest groups that rely on government subsidies and prefer to delay the incorporation of liberal norms in areas like human rights, environmental protection, and nuclear nonproliferation. In these respects, the G77 remains an appealing organization.

But the Brazilian view of international affairs is also powerfully about ideology. The memory of colonialism remains influential in a country that was an object of empire or semi-empire in various forms under Portugal, Spain, Holland, France, Great Britain, and the United States. In most areas of foreign policy, the division of the 1960s between North and South retains its purchase in the Brazilian worldview. Ideology and experience especially influence Brazilian attitudes towards the United States. Any thought of alliance or bandwagoning with Washington never gets serious consideration, notwithstanding the fact that Brazil and the United States share several interests. Scant experience with collaborative engagement along with entrenched bureaucratic resistance in both capitals limit the pace and the scope of strategic cooperation. Even if it were in the interest of Brazil to keep its hotline with Washington functional at all times, a working partnership—if it were to exist at all—would need to be nurtured carefully. Any effort to sustain cooperation would have to dislodge deeply ingrained ideological predilections and emotional sensibilities.

Relative Position in the International System

Brazil is a prime example of a country that enjoys “geopolitical slack”—the absence of an immediate threat to its physical security and low probability of finding itself a target of aggression by a major power. Because the country is geographically distant from the major centers of global conflict, there is little reason for worry in Brasília, even when global conflict erupts. Brazil’s gift from geography is that the benefits of its international security situation are plentiful rather than scarce.¹⁰

This grants Brazilian leaders plenty of room for conducting a foreign policy that is “capricious,” to use the famous expression by Kenneth Waltz.¹¹ While there is no doubt that the international system constrains Brazil in several ways, local authorities enjoy levels of leeway that others simply do not. It should be no surprise that in the early 2000s, Brazilian leaders expanded the range of their foreign policy ambitions and their power-accretion initiatives. During this period the regional hegemon, the United States, was occupied elsewhere, while material conditions at home improved quickly. During the years of the U.S. intervention in Iraq, Brazil moved from the fourteenth to the seventh position in the world economy and extreme poverty fell by a factor of 25 percent, leading the way for a “new middle class” to arise and transform Brazilian society.

The fact that Brazil is only loosely constrained by major-power competition does not mean that the international system is irrelevant. In fact, the contrary is the case when we look at the issue from the prism of the global political economy. Brazil has always been, and remains, profoundly dependent on the movement of global capital. Its prosperity in the 1970s was tightly linked to the global spread of manufacturing away from the North Atlantic toward the east and the global South. Its prosperity in the early 2000s cannot be dissociated from the rise of Chinese demand for Brazilian soy, meat, minerals, and iron ore. Likewise, the prevalence of desperate poverty for just over 15 percent of Brazil’s total population is a function, too, of Brazil’s position within global capitalism. If Brazil remains among the most unequal societies in the world—with crime rampant in all major cities—causes are to be found in the perverse connection between an unequal international system and its impact on domestic politics.

Crises of global finance have strategic significance to Brazil; a prolonged recession abroad can have major redistributive effects at home. Brazilian leaders, therefore, believe they have a stake in preserving some of the core principles that have underwritten its recent emergence. Accordingly, they have not tried to overturn existing norms and practices; instead, they have tried to adapt them to suit their own national interests.

Global Order through Brazilian Eyes

Ideas about how power and influence work in international relations have been key elements shaping Brazilian foreign policy strategy in the past few years—namely, polarity, regional order, membership in international institutions, and global justice.

Polarity

“Economic globalization is the new global order,” wrote Cardoso as he took office and embarked on a massive program of economic deregulation.¹² As he did, the president developed closer diplomatic ties with the United States. His analysis was straightforward. “The United States is the only superpower,” he said to his advisers. He went on to say that “our dependence on them is high. Our economic policy depends on the approval of the U.S. Treasury . . . [and] our access to technology depends on the U.S. Congress, the Pentagon and the State Department. Europe is no alternative. Other developing states aren’t an alternative either.” The resulting policy orientation was obvious: “Under these circumstances any fight with the United States would be lost.”¹³

Cardoso’s foreign policy in the first term (1995–1999) focused on getting closer to the United States. Brazil passed a patent law, adhered to the Missile Technology Control Regime and the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and opened up its economy. The two countries began to consult on Latin American affairs on a regular basis, and Cardoso was the first Brazilian president ever to criticize Cuba’s human rights record publicly.

Cardoso’s policies were criticized at home for being subservient to the interests of the United States, a claim that gained a great deal of purchase across Brazil. However, seen from the United States, Cardoso’s moves fell short of a policy of “bandwagoning.” Argentina, Chile, and Mexico at the time were all moving faster toward good relations with the United States. According to the dominant view in the administration of President Bill Clinton, Cardoso was well-intentioned and committed enough to the globalizing project to be invited to take part in meetings sponsored by Third Way (a centrist Washington think tank). But in the Beltway around Washington, Brazil was still seen as a “laggard,” a country that moved slowly and reluctantly toward economic reforms and a better working relationship with Washington.

When he began his second term in office in 1999, Cardoso changed his approach toward the United States. A string of financial crises originating in Russia, Mexico, and East Asia hit Brazil hard and pushed it to the brink of economic collapse. As a result, Cardoso became more critical of market liberalization, as promoted by the U.S. Treasury, and he increasingly ridiculed U.S. trade policy.¹⁴ He also grew more frustrated with the failure to reform the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the United Nations. He argued for a new global conversation on financial governance.

But he never developed a plan to get this done, nor did he receive support from fellow heads of government around the globe.

After 9/11, Cardoso quickly pledged support for the United States and activated the largely symbolic Rio Pact of 1948, whereby Latin American states declared terrorist attacks on the United States as attacks on themselves. But shortly afterward, Cardoso criticized the “War on Terror.” Speaking before the French National Assembly, he denounced the Bush administration as “fundamentalist.” By the end of his tenure in power, Cardoso’s Brazil was distancing itself diplomatically from the United States.

Cardoso began to say that it was not good to be on the U.S. “radar screen.” American attention posed two challenges. It raised expectations in Washington that Brazil would work as a “responsible stakeholder,” according to some arbitrary criteria of what “responsible” meant. And it turned Brazil into a target of U.S. pressure when the interests of the two countries did not coincide. As a result, he eventually came to prefer a policy of “ducking”—hiding your head underwater when the hegemonic eagle was around.¹⁵

Starting in 2002, Lula campaigned not so much on an anti-American ticket as he did on the argument that Brazil did not need to align its foreign policy with that of the United States because the international system was more malleable than Cardoso had thought. Lula’s foreign minister optimistically repeated that the chief goal of foreign policy was to “increase, if only by a margin, the degree of multipolarity in the world.”¹⁶ The United States might well be the only superpower on earth, but its ability to translate raw power into political influence was faltering and a major factor eroding U.S. power was the emergence of key countries from the postcolonial world.

Among Lula’s advisers, the focus on multipolarity was implicit rather than explicit—it was not apparent in official documents. But throughout the early 2000s, the new emphasis on multipolarity did set the tone of the conversation in the Brazilian foreign policy community. Imbued in this discourse was a powerful normative belief that multipolarity was morally superior to any other distribution of global power. Lula’s advisers nonetheless were aware that it would be difficult to govern Brazil and ensure financial stability without the assistance of the United States. In their eyes, Brazil’s rise was deeply intertwined with the perception in Washington that Brazil was a potential partner—one that was moving upward in the global hierarchy.

In terms of actual policy, there were four key outcomes. First, Lula wanted to build up South America institutionally through Unasur. He also hoped

to expand Mercosur (the South American Customs Union) and include new members in order to protect the region against U.S. military and anti-narcotics policies. Second, his administration quickly moved to design a new Middle East policy. He made high-profile visits to Bashar al-Assad in Syria and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, and convened a South America-Arab League summit. In addition, he nurtured closer ties with Iran, a strand of policy that subsequently led to the Brazil-Turkey attempt to broker a nuclear agreement between the West and the regime in Tehran. Third, Lula revived Brazil's leadership within the G77 in the United Nations and in the UN Human Rights Council, and with India within the World Trade Organization (WTO). Fourth, Lula worked hard to institutionalize the G20, hoping to use it to reform the World Bank and the IMF, while also seeking to turn the BRICS group into a coalition with a shared agenda and a formal calendar of high-level meetings.¹⁷

In all these initiatives, Brazil distanced itself from the United States and risked compromising the relationship. However, Lula's behavior was not an attempt to revolutionize the international system. Rather than balancing U.S. power, these policies were seen by the Lula administration as undercutting unipolarity without necessarily confronting the United States. In fact, Lula made it a habit to consult with George W. Bush on a regular basis. His time in office coincided with the best moments in the bilateral diplomatic relationship since World War II.¹⁸ In other words, Brazilian officials were not seeking to break with the Western order as they knew it. On the contrary, they hoped to improve their relative position within the core institutions that comprised that order: the UN, the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank.

There was no sense inside Brazil that the country was willing or able to be a spoiler. There was no desire to attack the existing order with a view to design an alternative one. Inside Brazil, Lula and his advisers were viewed as moderate reformers who were willing to assume a greater share of responsibility for managing global order in exchange for a seat at the major tables and a recognition of special rights. Brazilian officials remained very sensitive to the accusation that they operated as shirkers, who sought the privileges of power without paying any of the associated costs.¹⁹

Lula's efforts to secure the approval and support of the United States, while keeping some distance, were fraught with difficulty. He made it clear to the United States that Brazil would not become an ally like Australia, South

Africa, or even Turkey. He did not seek a too-close relationship; he desired to retain Brazil's independence. As was the case with India, Brazil accepted the core values and basic institutions of the world order that had emerged out of the Second World War, but wanted to carve out a better position for itself.²⁰

Regional Order

Starting in 2000, Brazil set out to turn South America into a cohesive region in world politics. This was a conscious attempt to counter U.S. hegemony in the region by transforming Brazil's "near abroad" into a distinctive regional formation where Brazil could exert some degree of international political authority and secure markets for its own industries. At a time when American foreign policy in the region focused on negotiating a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and a war on drugs centered in Colombia, Brazil sought to resist U.S. encroachment in its immediate neighborhood.²¹

The policy began with Cardoso and survived the political transition from his center-right coalition to the center-left alliance under Lula and later on Rousseff. In September 2000, President Cardoso hosted the first meeting of South American heads of state, and without the presence of a U.S. delegation. He also extended invitations to third parties to join Mercosur, the customs union binding together Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

When Lula ran his presidential campaign in 2002, he accused Cardoso of being too soft on U.S. policies for market liberalization under the FTAA. Lula presented his plans for South American integration as an effort to promote shared social goals within the regional community. For the first time, a Brazilian head of state spoke of the South American regional space as a place to critique U.S.-style globalization and to resist the FTAA.

Lula's first term saw a flurry of regional initiatives to build up institutions in South America. Brazil accelerated negotiations to extend formal Mercosur membership to Venezuela. In 2004, Brazil agreed to a dispute-resolution tribunal for the Mercosur bloc (Tribunal of Appeals) and to the establishment of the office of secretary general to run Mercosur headquarters in Montevideo and to represent it at international meetings. In 2006, Brazil supported the creation of Parlasur, in theory Mercosur's top community institution, and the Mercosur Convergence Fund (FOCEM), a financial mechanism through which Brazil and Argentina could lend money to Uruguay and Paraguay for infrastructure projects.

In 2004, Lula pushed for Unasur. The original plan closely resembled Cardoso's in that it sought to foster infrastructure cooperation among neighbors. But early in his new administration, Lula also argued for a South American Defense Council to promote dialogue among military establishments and to deepen the levels of political consultation within the group.

Unasur was designed as strictly intergovernmental, with no supranational organization. There was no emphasis on the emergence of a new, shared South American identity among its members. Decision-making was kept in the hands of national authorities, capital cities retained veto power over any community initiatives, and no tools were put in place to push countries toward greater integration. Member state presidents—rather than their bureaucracies—set policies. Neither Mercosur's headquarters in Montevideo nor Unasur's in Quito was given a mandate to evolve into autonomous institutions.

Unasur gained momentum in ways nobody in Brasília had expected, and U.S. influence in South America declined. In 2005, regional states closed ranks against a U.S.-inspired “democracy monitoring mechanism” within the Organization of American States (OAS) that sought to target Hugo Chávez, Venezuela's leader.²² Four years later, when news leaked of renewed U.S. military plans in Colombia's “war on terror,” regional countries pushed back and extracted concessions on transparency and confidence-building from Colombia's president, Álvaro Uribe. A year later, the incoming Colombian government of Juan Manuel Santos chose not to ratify the agreement with the United States. It launched its own rapprochement with its neighbors.²³

In the years that followed, with Brazil's implicit or explicit support, Bolivia and Venezuela ejected the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the U.S. Agency for International Development; Ecuador refused to renew the lease on a U.S. airbase in Manta; and Argentina, Mexico, and Uruguay decriminalized drugs for personal use. By and large, South American states bolstered their ties with Cuba and insisted that the U.S. embargo should be lifted and that the island should rejoin the inter-American system. Regional governments also provided strong rhetorical support for Argentina's claim on the Falkland/Malvinas Islands, putting them at odds with the European Union as well as the United States.

Unasur's cause was helped by the wave of *neogolpismo* that saw the Lula administration become closely involved with conflict resolution and dialogue facilitation in Venezuela (2002), Honduras (2009), and Ecuador (2010). In 2012, when the Paraguayan Congress impeached the president in procedures lasting only twenty-four hours, Brazil denounced the violation of due

process and rallied Mercosur and Unasur to suspend the country's membership in each. In 2008, Unasur played an active role in the crisis in Bolivia; it intervened in the aftermath of Colombia's military incursion into Ecuador; and it offered its good offices in the ongoing conflict between *chavismo* and the opposition in Venezuela. In all these events, Brazil tried—although not always with the same intensity or success—to get South America to frame a common response under the auspices of Unasur. To many observers, this was a conscious effort to displace the OAS.

Even if Unasur had none of the explicit anti-U.S. overtones of the 2004 Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), an initiative by Cuba and Venezuela, the region's marked move to the left brought Unasur a far more ambitious agenda than the Lula administration initially had intended. Very quickly, Unasur became a forum in which to debate regional policies for eliminating social exclusion, reducing poverty, providing access to health and social security, and protecting indigenous peoples.

From its very beginnings, however, Brazil's South American project had been tentative and partial. Officials embraced the region in fits and starts, and while Brazilian politicians of all stripes made a *rhetorical* pledge to the idea of a united South America, they remained deeply ambivalent about the implications of such a policy in terms of commitments and resources.

It is perhaps no wonder, then, that today the project shows unquestionable signs of strain. After a decade of high hopes and a plethora of initiatives, the actual results are decidedly mixed. Even the most fervent proponents of the South American strategy now speak of it as an aspiration rather than a reality.

Even while Brazil endeavored to extend its regional influence, it eschewed any significant military buildup. Two fundamental geostrategic factors explain this development. First, after Argentina lost its war against Great Britain over the Malvinas/Falkland Islands in 1982, its military budget shrank, its constitution was amended to limit the range of military actions permitted by officers, and its civilian leaders moved toward greater cooperation and integration with Brazil. They even mandated that all references to Brazil as a plausible military threat be scrapped from the textbooks in their military academies. Without a regional rival threatening attack or seeking to lead an anti-Brazil coalition, Brazilian policymakers had little incentive to develop a robust military presence in South America.²⁴

Another factor accounting for the absence of a military buildup relates to the role of the United States as a provider of international security in South

America and the South Atlantic. To a significant degree, Brazil did not need to arm because there was a major regional hegemon—the United States—that was willing and able to defray the costs of providing a safe regional environment for the Brazilian state. When the FARC guerrillas in Colombia took physical command over large portions of the country, the United States sponsored a plan for a regional “war on drugs.” When fears emerged that terrorist networks were laundering money in South American countries, the CIA and the FBI cobbled together and paid for an initiative to get these countries to respond. And in the South Atlantic, the key transport route for Brazilian exports, the United States continued to secure the shipping lanes and shouldered the fight against piracy.

Free-riding on the United States for security purposes had served Brazil well in the past and was deemed suitable for the future. This did not mean that most Brazilians thought the United States was a benign protector of Brazilian interests. Hegemons, after all, provide security on their own terms. Brazil, therefore, free-rides and preserves cordial military relations with the United States but remains wary of Washington, even while it constrains its own military expenditures. There is no sense of alliance; there is a great deal of pragmatism.²⁵

Membership in International Institutions

A major theme running through the more risk-averse policies of Cardoso and the more activist and expansive policies of Lula was Brazil’s quest for a “seat at the major tables” and for recognition as a player deserving special rights. From the Brazilian perspective, the postwar order of 1945 was never about openness, inclusion, and multilateral governance. In Brazilian eyes, American hegemony was palpable and self-serving. Brazilian officials, therefore, have tried to constrain U.S. dominance.

A cursory look at recent voting patterns in the UN illustrates the point: like the other BRICS, Brazil sought to distance itself from the U.S.-sponsored “war on terror” and from the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The Brazilians voted with the United States fewer times than did the Mexicans, Argentines, Chileans, Canadians, Australians, or Turks; they opposed Washington more often than did France and Russia. Brazilian elites rejected the notion that their country should be an integral part of the U.S. alliance system.

No wonder, then, that some Brazilian officials saw the 2008 financial crisis—which hurt Brazil only very briefly—as vindication. For much of the

1990s, magazines and newspapers like *The Economist* and *Financial Times* echoed the views of Washington officials that Brazil was a “laggard” in opening up its economy to global capitalism. In fact, Brazilian officials, led by Cardoso and then Lula, endlessly warned against the dangers of financial deregulation. At the height of the 2008 crisis, Lula said that “this crisis was created by white men with blue eyes,” who were stubborn enough to ignore the warnings from critics in the global South.

It would be a mistake to discard this sentence as presidential caprice or racism. Running through the Brazilian view of the world there is the notion that global hierarchy is not merely a function of material power. Like Japan in the early twentieth century, Brazilians believe race is a major criterion for deciding who sits and who decides at the big tables. In their eyes, cultural identity is critical for securing access to power and influence in international relations. Unsurprisingly, Brazilian diplomats at the UN sometimes refer to U.S. and European officials (but also to those from allies, like Mexico and South Korea) as “the whites.”

These views reflect Brazil’s concern with the role of race in securing countries’ membership in the major global-governance clubs. Under Lula, Brazil pushed for a pattern of global governance that looked more like a United Colors of Benetton advertisement. He believed that those sitting at the table ought not to remain the traditional powers of the North Atlantic; he insisted that membership should be more representative of the world’s diversity.

Accordingly, Brazil invested heavily in turning the BRICS into a coalition that could exercise some influence in the international system without disrupting ongoing institutions. Brazilian officials wanted the BRICS to have a summit process, common statistical systems, scientific cooperation, a development bank, and a financial rescue system. But rather than overthrow the Bretton Woods Institutions, they wanted the BRICS to have a greater role in global financial governance and garner more resources to support their international ascent.²⁶

Likewise, Brazil responded to talk in the United States of a “League of Democracies” in the early 2000s by sponsoring regular meetings of the IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa) group. In Brasília, this was conceived as an explicit effort to show that democracy at home did not necessitate alignment with the United States or the wider Western formation. Emerging democracies, the argument went, could very well operate independently from the United States and its European allies, drawing on their shared experience of colonialism.²⁷

Brazil's thinking about membership in international organizations was never articulated as traditional nonalignment or standard Third-Worldism. Brazilian officials sought to avoid the rhetoric of "The West versus the Rest." This was because Brazil's self-identity sat at the intersection between the West and "the rest." As a result, Brazil did not seek assimilation into the greater West, but neither did it defy Western norms in any significant way. Firm commitments to economic orthodoxy and democracy at home and a willingness to have a seat at the big tables did not exclude a self-identity based on the image of a non-status quo power committed to challenging existing norms and institutions.²⁸

When Brazilian leaders look back, they think they benefited greatly from sitting on the periphery of the great Western liberal formation. They were never isolated from it (like China under Mao), but they never fully participated in it. They remain firmly committed to keeping this position. In their view, picking and choosing paid off, and they have little desire to alter this orientation.

Justice

Read a Brazilian foreign policy textbook and you will be surprised: global order after 1945 is not described as open, inclusive, or rooted in multilateralism. Instead, you learn big powers imposed their will on the weak through force, strict and often arbitrary rules, and international institutions that mostly served the interests of the most powerful architects of the postwar order. From this perspective, collective security was not really that collective after all. International law was less about great-power binding and self-restraint than about strong players controlling weaker ones. Consequently, the liberal international order was not as benign as its proponents believed.²⁹

These views bred a sense of ambiguity toward the set of liberal ideas, norms, and institutions that Brazilians associated with the Anglo-Saxon West. On one hand, Brazil has benefited enormously from existing patterns of global order. A modest rural economy in the 1940s, it became an industrial powerhouse less than fifty years later thanks to the twin forces of capitalism and an alliance system that kept it safe. But on the other hand, the world also has been a nasty place for most Brazilians. Today, it remains one of the most unequal societies in the world; millions still live in poverty and violence abounds: in 2009, there were more homicides in the state of Rio de Janeiro alone than in the whole of Iraq. No doubt a fair share of the blame is

attributable to successive generations of Brazilian politicians and policymakers, but some of it is a function of the many perversities that prevail when a country is located on the “periphery” of a very unequal international system.

A stable system governed by rules and norms that represent the interest of a community of nations depends on predictability. But from the Brazilian perspective, upon the end of the Cold War, the United States became the single greatest threat to the status quo. Its pattern of interventionism, its use of force, its extraterritorial application of U.S. laws, its emphasis on regime change, its conditional embrace of the norms of sovereignty, and its eagerness to differentiate between “civilized” states and “barbarian” threats made the United States seem especially menacing to international order in the aftermath of 9/11.

U.S. talk of “responsible stakeholders,” therefore, rarely struck a responsive chord in Brazil. What was meant by “responsible” seemed arbitrary. U.S. expectations varied from administration to administration and often seemed unreasonable. The United States itself appeared unable or unwilling to share and devolve power. Domestic politics made it difficult for Brazilian diplomats to strike deals with U.S. negotiators on climate change, financial regulation, and trade. These factors made “gradual assimilation” for Brazil into a U.S.-led formation highly unlikely.

Brazil’s leaders have never articulated their own coherent vision of a global order beyond voicing their abstract aspirations for an international system based on “benign multipolarity” that “promotes peace and development for all.” But there is a powerful sense that unipolarity is morally wrong and ought to be substituted with multipolarity. The core belief is that the United States and its European allies should treat non-Western states with greater respect and some degree of “equality.” In the Brazilian view, U.S. behavior is often imperialistic, unilateral, and dismissive of third countries and of the United Nations—in sum, illiberal.³⁰

Hence, Brazilian officials want to “democratize” international relations. They do not seek to eradicate hierarchy in the international system, but they do want the United States to accept pluralism, a sovereignty-based world order, and strict adherence to the UN Charter. In the Brazilian view, it is the UN that represents the best bet for a system of “benign multipolarity.” Consequently, most, if not all, Brazilian officials endlessly insist on maintaining the authority of the UN—and the need to reform its Security Council, assigning new permanent seats to large emerging powers, including Brazil itself.³¹

Brazil's normative vision has a strong economic element to it as well. The expectation is that the global North should do more to accelerate the improvement of economic conditions in the global South by engaging in some form of redistributive justice: opening up their markets, transferring financial and technical support, offering debt relief, or conceding that there are shared responsibilities over climate change, with the pace of adaptation set to reflect levels of development and past levels of pollution.



Brazil's core strategic concern in the emerging global order pertains to accruing power and influence—and to moderately reform the institutions of global governance in the process—in order to compensate for the country's structural dependence on an unequal international system. However, there is no clear-cut grand strategy. Successive Brazilian administrations have shied away from offering an explicit and comprehensive vision of the reformed global order they claim to want to create.

The essential ingredients of Brazilian strategy are extrapolated from the ideas and debates among policy elites over polarity, regional order, membership in formal and informal institutions, and global justice. But the core factors shaping Brazilian attitudes toward strategy are domestic politics, ideology, and the country's relative position in the international political and economic system. Filtered through the prisms of personal experience and historical memory, these factors establish the parameters within which Brazilian leaders develop their vague notions of global order.

Looking forward, Brazilian leaders are likely to come under increased pressure from within their country and from abroad to make their understandings of global order more explicit and systematic. Domestically, this pressure might arise from a civil society that has undergone rapid change and is becoming ever-more demanding, as the massive protests of June 2013 illustrated. Internationally, pressure might come from those countries that recognize Brazil as one of the major emerging countries of our era. To such countries, Brazil is likely to become a more important player in areas such as global finance, trade, climate change, and poverty alleviation. Because Brazilian leaders and diplomats now have the clout to facilitate or complicate collective action as never before, grand strategic talk is likely to become more frequent among Brazilian officials, scholars, and commentators.