

Brazil's Contemporary Foreign Policy: An Affirmative Agenda

Paulo Fagundes Visentini

From “Sleeping Giant” to Emerging Power

To understand Brazilian diplomacy aspirations and the pattern of its participation in the Financial G20, it is very important to analyse its transformation and upgrade in the last decade. At the turn of the 21st century, the multilateral dimension was a challenge to Brazilian foreign policy through two inflections. In the 1990s, it followed the medium powers, changing from resistance to the ongoing regime towards an acceptance of its bases and rules, putting them in harmony with the general principles of the system that emerged, their regimes and procedures. This move implied distancing itself from the third-world discourse and a perception based on the North-South divide. It involved instead the adoption of the international mainstream and the replacement, according to governmental discourse, of the “autonomy through distance” model to the “autonomy through participation” one.

Foreign Policy during Lula's Government

Lula's election in 2002 and the actions of his new government caused, initially, a great deal of apprehension inside and outside Brazil. Most expected an ideological international behaviour and an unprepared president. However, diplomacy based on a strategic and tactical sense and a long range vision, which elements are going to be discussed, were noticed. Although the present course of Brazilian foreign policy started in the second half of Cardoso's government, there were no qualitative changes at that moment. The former president had not possessed the will nor political basis to implement modifications that could go far beyond timid critic rhetoric. Lula's inauguration transformed this situation and, in the beginning of his government, Brazilian foreign policy has shown a remarkable development and leadership that is surpassing many expectations.

To fulfil his strategy, Lula's government's International Relations was characterized by three dimensions: an economic diplomacy, a political one, and a social agenda. The first dimension is a realist one, the second aimed at offering resistance and assertiveness, whereas the third is a propositive one. They represent a project that has matured over more than a decade, and that is

consistent with the balance of forces present in the country and the world, and not a headstrong policy.

Considering the first point of view, it is necessary to keep the dialogue channels of First World (OECD) open, for attracting resources such as investments and technology, and also for negotiating our foreign debt and giving indication that the government is willing to fulfil its international commitments without any sudden break. In its turn, the political diplomacy represents a field for the reinforcement of national interests and of a true protagonism in International Relations, with the clear intent of developing an “active and affirmative diplomacy”, ending a phase of relative stagnation and emptiness. Lula’s government put Itamaraty back on its former strategic position of formulating and implementing Brazilian foreign policy.

Finally, Lula’s internal governmental project also had a significant international impact, since its social projects were an answer to the need for an agenda that seeks to deal with the asymmetries brought by the globalization based only on free trade and investments. The campaign against hunger had a symbolical meaning that indicates the building of an alternative social-economic model in response to the neo-liberal globalization crisis. Such actions as the stimulus to the internal market and savings, of internal production and the reform of domestic components that impede a more qualified international action (for instance, social inequality, unemployment, crime, weakness and administrative and fiscal disorder), represented the development of this project. The combination of social, energy, urban, agrarian, and productive policies showed a real political will. At the same time, the president’s charisma seemed to have merged in his open and ordinary personality the characteristics that the world most admires in Brazil. This had allowed Lula to sustain an intense international agenda as the speaker of this project.

South American Regional Dimension

In practical terms, the Brazilian government has surpassed the limitations of its predecessor and searched for alliances outside the hemisphere as a means to improve its sphere of influence in the international arena, from the standpoint of an active and pragmatic attitude. The rebuilding of Mercosur and South American integration, creating room for Brazilian leadership, was the starting point and main priority.

Considering South American and Mercosur integration, defined both as priorities, Brazil offered its neighbours a most needed partnership to regain their economic growth, an indispensable condition to make integration concrete, and not a virtual reality, and to create the chance of a global strategic action that reverses the growing marginalization that the region was undergoing. Good governance and development for all South America can only be

guaranteed by regional integration, which is also an indispensable asset in FTAA talks.

This new reality has helped to reinforce the policy launched by South American countries to develop the physical infrastructure (transport, communication and energy) as a means to re-start the integration process. President Toledo from Peru proposed that the international creditors of the countries from the region destined 20% of their loan repayments to these infrastructure works. On the other hand, President Lula views this initiative as an important strategic matter, advancing in substance policies put forward by FHC's government in its closure. Therefore, BNDES (Brazilian Development Bank) has already started to finance the works of South American integration.

In turn, President Kirchner made clear Argentina's will to change the path of the country's economic policies followed in the previous fourteen years, pushing neo-liberalism aside and searching for a model sustained by public investments and the fight against poverty. Whereas considering the international arena, the new president showed his intention of creating a strategic alliance with Brazil, rescue Mercosur and actively cooperate for the deepening of South American cooperation. One's attention is called by the evolution of these new policies, from the era of "flesh relations" ("*relaciones carnales*") with the US to a posture of balanced distance towards this nation. For the White House, this movement was a cause of concern since it might represent an autonomous Brazil-Argentina power pole.

It is worth mentioning that in December 2004, these initiatives gained momentum once more with a Mercosur-Andean Community free trade treaty that was presented by the Brazilian government as a relevant step towards the consolidation of the South American Community of Nations (CASA, or "Home", later UNASUR, Union of South American Nations). In addition, Brazilian diplomacy also continued to exercise an important role as a broker in the region, helping its South American neighbours to face their own internal crisis. Bolivia, Equator, Colombia and the Venezuelan tensions are some examples of these stabilization actions.

South-South Cooperation and Strategic Partnerships

Moreover, the solidarity towards Africa is also fundamental, linking ethical values and national interests. The purpose of deepening relations (and creating a "strategic partnership") with emerging powers such as China, India, Russia and South Africa, among others, as well as constructing a Mercosur-EU association and the appreciation of international organizations (mainly the UN), added to economic advantages, indicate the will to contribute to the consolidation of a multi-polar international order. The democratization of International Relations as a principle was clearly stated.

Whereas considering Brazil's stance in multilateralism, the 2003-2010 period was characterized by several initiatives. In the first year of Lula's presidency, one outstanding feature was his participation in the G8 Meeting in Evian, France. Addressing the reunion as a representative of South America, the president exposed his plan to fight hunger and a proposal to convert 20% of the payment of our foreign debt interest in resources destined to the financing of infrastructure works and development. Lula also presented the well-known criticism towards the protectionism of rich countries and the need to reform multilateral institutions to better address the new realities of power of the post-Cold War world.

Faced by these difficulties, in order to preserve its advanced position and deal with the absence of attention by the rich countries in regards to the needs and demands of Third World nations, Brazil deepened high level diplomatic talks and managed to create the Group of 3 (G3) with India and South Africa, also known as IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa Dialogue Forum). Chancellors Celso Amorim, Yashwant Sinhá and Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma made a pronouncement stating that the group will promote trilateral cooperation, mutual trade liberalization and a convergence and strengthening of agendas in multilateral forums.

The talks would involve Mercosur, South African Customs Union (SACU) and possibly South Asia Area of Regional Cooperation (SAAR). Also, these participants stressed their willingness to attract Russia and China to the Group in the long run, creating a G5 (if this scenario becomes a reality, the Group will represent the sum of almost half of the world's population and of its production, which might significantly affect multilateral talks). The G3 creation represented an opportune initiative, answering the need to mobilize South countries to put forward their demands and change the course of the present international agenda.

Other initiatives that were part of the Brazilian agenda during 2003-2005 and are worth mentioning were Lula's many trips to the Arab countries of the Middle East and Africa. Lula travelled 11 times to Africa, visiting 29 countries and opening 17 new diplomatic missions there. Moreover, the tours were also important not only to the general scope of Brazilian-African relations, but also to advance the creation of an institutional link among Mercosur and the South African Development Community (SADC), that has South Africa at its core in the southern part of the continent (South Africa is a country that is also a member of G3 and a partner in other multilateral alliances and talks of our diplomacy).

Other very important outstanding results of these initiatives were the Africa-South America Summits (ASA) and South America-Arab Countries Summits (ASPA) that took place regularly in those regions and represented the consolidation of the political, strategic and economic links between those regions.

Lula's government started to exercise a strong hand in the defense of Brazilian economic interests. As a global trader, the nation wishes to keep its relations with different areas of the world, giving priority to Mercosur and South American integration. After reversing North American expectations that the government was going to be guided by leftist policies, Lula has, instead, gained Washington's "admiration". It is important to note that as soon as Brazilian diplomacy started to contest some guidelines of US hegemonic power and stress its autonomy, a certain amount of leverage was created. Therefore, it was possible to call attention to our social-economic demands and infrastructure projects with neighbouring nations. On the other hand, Brazil's diplomacy properly prepared itself to face this unavoidable and tough dialogue among opposites, by strengthening its stance in the world and in South America.

Summing up, Brazil developed an autonomous diplomacy, in accordance with the demands of globalization and its development project. Alliances of "variable design" such as G3, G4 and Commercial G20 enabled the nation to exercise a worldwide presence and deepen its influence. Instead of an ideological diplomacy, Brazil built an active and pragmatic agenda that gained several allies in different arenas that allowed the country to present its demands towards developed countries in a confident, but not confrontational, manner. At the same time, Brazil respected, without fully supporting, some problematic nations such as Cuba, Syria, Iran and Venezuela, showing considerable flexibility.

Lula's foreign policy represented the boldest field of action of the government and its success rests on the fact that it is run by Itamaraty, which regained its place, and due to the support of governmental agencies that are concerned with the national issue, such as BNDES and the Armed Forces. However, these diplomatic initiatives generate some problems, leading to extremely high expectations. Internal and external adjustments were taken into account, but international variables remain important since the country still has to depend on a highly unstable world to try to make these projects work.

The Multilateral Dimension

The multilateral space had been defined by Brazilian diplomacy in the 1990s as the best setting for the country's performance, eagerly willing to participate in the building up of rules for the framing of a new world order. During Cardoso's government, the development strategy was based not on a critique of the international system, but on the attempt to influence the construction of its rules with the means of increasing the country's international insertion¹.

¹ See Visentini, Paulo, and Silva, André Reis. "Brazil and the Economic, Political and Environmental Multilateralism" in *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*. Special Edition, Brasília, 2010.

With the change in government, and the swearing in of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the multilateral policy would keep its central position, although its contents and strategies were deeply reoriented. The new multilateral conception was based on a perception of the international system as having a multipolar tendency and power diffusion, but still jeopardizing developing countries. As such, Brazil stood strongly behind the need for increased representation in discussion forums as a means to democratize and augment the efficiency of organizations such as the UN. On the action front, it has sought to explore new bargaining and negotiation spaces through the intense usage of articulation groups.

On the other hand, the multilateral agenda received a new makeover, adding the substantial issues of economic development and trade openness to the necessity of further democratizing the decision-making process (UN). As a result, an institutionalized coordination has been established with other developing countries in forums such as IBSA and the Commercial G20.

An example of the ongoing power of the Brazilian government's diplomacy was the building of another alliance of "variable design" ("*geometria variável*"), the Commercial G20. This G20 has effectively taken part at the WTO Meeting in Cancun (that was preceded by President's Bush phone call to Lula, which was revealing). Friendly, but defiant, Brazilian diplomacy has created its alliance with developing countries that are affected by First World's protectionism and agricultural subsidies. The so-called G20 ignited rich countries' wrath and the South's discontent was heard in the grand closure of the meeting. In spite of the G20 success, its links to the G90 and other groups, countries and institutions, since Cancun some difficulties are being faced by this alliance due to external pressures from developed countries and the attitudes of some members of the alliance.

Even though, Brazilian diplomacy is being able to face these crossroads. Active in supporting peace diplomacy, the country might help the building of a multi-polar world governed by the United Nations system. In this sense, the reform of the UNSC is viewed as a priority by Brazilian foreign policy, and, alongside the G3, the country is also part of the G4. Composed of Germany, Japan, India and Brazil, the G4 advocates the widening of the UNSC to increase its legitimacy and openness, in accordance with the new power balance originated by the end of the Cold War. Brazil's command of Haiti's UN peace-keeping mission is also part of our diplomatic efforts in order to ascend to a permanent seat at the UNSC. However, this reform is a highly sensitive issue and some setbacks are bound to happen, such as the opposition from Argentina and Mexico to Brazil's claim and other regional tensions regarding Japan, India and Germany.

Nevertheless, Brazil's multi-lateral coalitions, bi-lateral strategic partnerships and South-South alliances are enabling the country and its partners to fill a power vacuum in the international field in an effective and fast manner. In this context, it will also be relevant to examine the actions of other significant

regional medium powers and its disputes, or talks, with the main representatives of these areas. For instance, the G3 has a double impact for its members, strengthening their stance towards developed countries and possible regional adversaries too. The Commercial G20, for example, suffers restrictions from poorer countries and its agenda is facing some resistance from the African bloc in WTO's agricultural talks.

Therefore, in order to continue to achieve its goals, Brazilian diplomacy will need to further increase its political capabilities to articulate alliances of "variable design", answering to the demands, challenges and contradictions of North-South relations. Most of all, Brazilian diplomacy must continue to exercise a positive and stabilizing role in South America, deepening its political, economical and strategic integration, projecting the country and its partners in the international arena with renewed confidence and strength.

Back to the Future: A Sustainable Foreign Policy?

It is important to highlight that some features in the current Brazilian foreign policy had begun during Fernando Henrique Cardoso's terms in office. Nevertheless, he was severely restrained on his intentions due to internal difficulties and the international crisis at the time. Under Lula, Brazil started to work on an intense international agenda, transcending a subordinated approach to globalization and simple personal projection objectives. It tried to regain the country's capacity to negotiate concomitantly breaking from the North-Atlantic Liberal Consensus.

Brazil has started to act with optimism and political will, constantly originating political facts on the international scene. Previously, it had a low self-esteem, taking into account that Collor and Cardoso saw the country as delayed concerning the adjustments demanded by the rich countries. In contrast, Brazil now sees itself as a leader capable of negotiating and the architect of a project that can even contribute to inserting a social agenda into globalization. Such a position makes the country eligible to pursue several initiatives, such as its entrance into a reformed UN Security Council as a permanent member.

Instead of focusing on cooperation within large and saturated markets or with countries who see Brazil as secondary, Itamaraty has chosen to concentrate itself on unoccupied spaces. By coming closer together with its South-American neighbours, particularly Andean ones, Southern Africa, Arab countries, and giants such as India, China, and Russia, Brazilian diplomacy was able to advance considerably and immediately, with astonishing business perspectives. The presence of Argentinean guests and businessmen in the Presidential Delegation is an important sign of the new diplomacy's sensibility.

Beyond that, cooperation allowed for the construction of "variable geometry" alliances such as the G3 and the Commercial G20, which are able to exert a global influence. Rather than practicing an ideologically strong diplomacy,

Brazil developed an active and pragmatic posture, seeking allies for each problem, contesting without challenging the big ones (as in trade negotiations and on the disrespect towards the UN), respecting, although not supporting, the position of problematic countries such as Venezuela, Cuba, and Iran.

The G3, as announced during its launching, may come to be a G5, with the virtual inclusion of China and Russia. Evidently, these two countries poses an important weight in the international system, and could form a group capable of exercising a great influence in the alliance with Brazil, India and South Africa. As such, the G3 initiative also seeks to reinforce and articulate the views of the less powerful partners from the group of emerging powers, attempting to turn them into acceptable protagonists. Thus, it is an action which brings Brazil to occupy an idle power space at a low cost, as can be apprehended from the rapid advancement of the initiative. On the other hand, the G20 gave Brazil a large bargaining capacity as the leader of a group of countries with an important agricultural production, and forced a change of focus in multilateral trade negotiations. However, it is necessary to enlarge and incorporate other actors, especially African ones. The G20 still suffers restrictions from poorer countries, and its action has been facing resistance from the African block of countries in agricultural liberalization negotiations in the WTO. To be able to reach its goals, Brazilian diplomacy will have to broaden its political capacity to articulate the “variable geometries” with North-South contradictions and demands.

Brazil’s multilateral environmental diplomacy has also put the country forward as a protagonist, not only through the presence of the Amazon rainforest, but also through initiatives to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and to defend the environment associated with development. Even though environmental policies in Brazil need to advance, the country is on the way to achieving the status of an “environmental power” as a respectable interlocutor in main forums and debates.

Through the reinforcement of multilateralism, taking into account a flexible perspective of alliances and the creation of coalition groups, Brazil has developed its unique diplomacy that is adequate to the era of globalization, also having a development project for the country. However, the unique diplomacy can raise a problem because huge expectations may be created upon it, and it will only provide the expected results along with economic development and changes in the international system. In recent years, building a multilateral environment favourable to the defense of national interests has been one of the central elements for the defense of multi-polarity, development and democratization of international relations.

Finally, during the last decade Brazil has improved its economic and political position in world affairs, and it is maintaining this tendency through the global financial crisis. President Dilma Rousseff, whose government started in 2011, despite some adjustments, is keeping the main aspects of the development and foreign policy of former president Lula. Brazil’s participation in

the Financial G20 and in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, China, India and now South Africa) are only one of the arrangements to deal with the increasing gap between economic and political order.

Paulo Fagundes Visentini is the Professor of International Relations and Head of International Strategic Studies Doctorate at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.

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