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Strategies of rising Brazil: postmortem review, looking forward

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ABSTRACT

Brazil in the early 2000s underwent a process of perceived ascent in the global pecking order, leading scholars to explore the statecraft and strategy behind it. Now that Brazil's fortunes in world politics have reversed it is time to dissect the purported strategies for upwards mobility of that time. This article draws on the concept of Strategic Diplomacy advanced in this special section to review the literatures on rising Brazil in the English language with a focus on four sets of questions. What kinds of international power and purpose did 'rising Brazil' pursue? How did successive administrations framed long-term objectives? How did domestic institutional design condition Brazil's international aspirations? And what role did individual leaders play in shaping strategy? The article then lays out key areas where future work may contribute to improving our understanding of the conditions under which effective diplomatic strategizing in Brazil might occur.

KEYWORDS

Brazil; strategic diplomacy; foreign policy

For a few years in the early 2000s, commentary on Brazil in policy circles, in the media, and in academia portrayed it as a rising power. International conferences, seminars, special reports by *think tanks*, and books across the board set out to make sense of the country's rapid ascent in global hierarchies (for an example, see Council on Foreign Relations, 2011). Unsurprisingly, observers focused on the nature and scope of foreign-policy strategy and its implications for South America, the United States, and other actors in the international system. Given the subsequent demise of Brazil as a growing force in world politics, a post-mortem of the rising years is in order. In this article my goal is to proffer an overview of the extant literature on Brazil's purported rise published in the English language. I also identify pathways for future scholarly research on the conditions under which successful foreign-policy strategizing in Brazil might occur. Readers will profit from consulting two other recent reviews of scholarly writings on Brazilian foreign relations (Casarões, 2018; Ramanzini, 2020), and a summary overview of the evolution of the academic discipline of IR in Brazil (Milani, 2021).

In order to achieve this, I draw on the concept of Strategic Diplomacy first advanced by Prantl and Goh (2016) which now anchors this special section of *Contemporary Politics*. The analytic toolkit in Strategic Diplomacy provides a diagnostic and policy framework

within which to make sense of the different factors shaping Brazilian behaviour in world politics. Strategic Diplomacy is the political process through which states and domestic constituencies, given system-level constraints, construct a vision for foreign policy and set out to implement it in practice (Prantl & Goh, 2016). To make sense of the expert literatures on the rise of Brazil at the turn of the century, this review article focuses on four components of Strategic Diplomacy: intentions, constraints on power and strategic thinking, changing conceptions of the national interest, and political leadership. I summarise each one in turn.

First of all, there is the issue of intentions: did rising Brazil seek to maintain, reform, or overturn the global status quo? The challenge here is capturing the evolution of strategy when background conditions are constantly changing. Brazil's experience of ascent coincided with profound transformations at the level of the international system within which the country operated. Not only did the system transitioned away from uni- to multipolarity, but global capitalism, regional politics, and climate change engendered new forms of interdependence. Concepts that had been at the heart of foreign-policy strategy for decades – e.g. sovereignty and autonomy, self-determination, multilateralism, regionalism, and the quest for global justice – were being shaken to their core.

Second, these changes posed power constraints to Brazil's ability to embrace long-term systemic thinking as a guide strategic action, a major tenet in the Strategic Diplomacy framework. By the 2000s, the key concepts inherited from Brazil's experience of modernisation which had provided the intellectual foundations for diplomatic action – such as 'autonomy' or 'national development' – were coming under growing pressure from two fronts. At the level of the international system, the notions of national autarchy that so many developing countries adopted during the Cold War faced an increasingly hard time in the face of the global governance agenda, from climate change to pandemic controls in global health or financial coordination in a deregulated capitalist system. At home, democratisation eroded the capacity of the Brazilian state to tightly anchor foreign policy objectives within a small circle of homogeneous elites. Contentious politics domestically made it far harder for the key players in foreign policy to plan for and project stable, long-term 'national projects'.

Third, Strategic Diplomacy highlights the degree to which conceptions of the national interest are dynamic, transcending the domestic vs international divide, and forcing leaders to constantly both reassess and adapt their foreign policies to these changing conditions. The premium on adaptability and adjustment is all the greater when societal consensus around the goals of foreign policy breaks down. Brazil's perceived ascent in the 2000s unfolded against a backdrop of major domestic political realignments. This is not a mere story of marginalised domestic social groups securing greater voice, but it is also a story about the collapse of the political centre that had anchored the very policies underwriting the process of international ascent. The causes for this collapse are manifold. Shattering revelations about endemic corruption in the building of governing coalitions in particular cast a shadow on the health and resilience of Brazilian democracy, and opened the field to unusual levels of affective polarisation. Consensus around some of the most basic features of Brazilian diplomacy – like an old-standing quest to secure a permanent seat on a reformed UN Security Council, or the belief that Brazil had an inherent interest in building up regionalism in South America – broke down. Furthermore, changes at the global level like the rise of China, the reemergence of religion as a powerful political

force, and the revival of nationalism engendered new special-interest coalitions in domestic politics which grew to constrain what statesmen and diplomats could aspire to achieve in world politics.

Fourth, Strategic Diplomacy as a policy framework emphasises the role of political leaders in shaping strategic thinking and statecraft. Leaders the world over need to reconcile pressures emanating from the international system and the domestic political clashes that shape their tenure in office, and Brazil is no exception. Here, political psychology meets institutional design to shape foreign action. From Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002) to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2010) to Dilma Rousseff (2010–2016), leadership styles and political constraints profoundly marked diplomacy, strategic thinking, and the conduct of Brazilian foreign relations.

The remainder of this article reviews the extant literature on the country's rise in the early 2000s. A concluding section identifies an agenda for future research on the determinants of strategic diplomacy in Brazil.

Brazil ascending

By the mid-2000s, Brazil's international behaviour was drawing scholars from across the disciplinary spectrum who went on to produce wide-ranging work on the country as an emerging power in world politics. The overwhelming focus of these literatures is the chronological period ranging from the late 1990s to the 2010s. To be sure, this was not the first historical time in which Brazil was widely perceived to be ascending or the first wave of scholarly writing on the country's ascent in global rankings: back in the 1970s and 1980s, a range of experts tackled the widening geopolitical ambitions of Brazil as a fast-modernizing society bent on transcending its historically peripheral position in international hierarchies (Hurrell, 2013; Lima, 2013; Perry, 1976; Roett, 1975; Schneider, 1976). This time around, however, the dominant tenor of the work is marked by the widespread belief that changes in the global power distribution during the 2000s would benefit states like Brazil, emboldening the ambitions of governing elites in Brasília who were themselves experiencing fast-paced, positive domestic political change in what now was no longer an inward looking autocracy but a vibrant, open, multiethnic democracy. Although a handful of observers in the 2000s did overtly question the notion that Brazil was indeed becoming a relevant player internationally (Kagan, 2008; Russell Mead, 2015), the prevalent view had it that for a host of reasons Brazil not only mattered but its leaders were also proactively engaged in flexing diplomatic and strategic muscle the world over (Chase et al., 1999; de Onis, 2008; Hitchcock et al., 2016; Kingstone, 2009; Mares, 2016; Stuenkel & Taylor, 2015).

The nature of Brazilian power

Scholars of rising Brazil by and large agree that the country's expanding international ambitions cannot be reduced to material capabilities. For all of its natural endowments, vast territory, demographics, economic prowess, and economic gain in the early 2000s, Brazil's improving position in the world was highly contingent, contested, and dependent on third-party recognition. According to the majority view, therefore, the fungible dimensions of power only tell a very limited part of the story of Brazilian ascent (Hurrell, 2013; Burges, 2008; Lima & Hirst, 2006; Malamud, 2011; Mares & Trikunus, 2016; Spektor, 2016). What the actual foundations of Brazilian power might be, however, remains

underdeveloped. Because scholars tend to use different concepts and measures, this is an area where cumulative progress has been limited. For example, scholars variously describe Brazil as 'rising state', 'emerging country' or 'middle power'. More often than not, these terms are used interchangeably, blurring profound conceptual differences. Some argue that Brazilian power and influence ought to be measured through diplomatic practice – power as an ability to broker, build consensus, shape new coalitions (Hirst, 2015), the power to be 'a credible and desirable international manager' (Gardini, 2016), or the power to be a trusted facilitator during international crises (Guimarães & Almeida, 2017). Others measure Brazil's power and influence as the ability to instrumentally tweak existing global norms and institutions in the country's favour (Milani et al., 2017). Yet another argument sees Brazil's power in the international system as a result of more structural changes in the global balance of power coupled with domestic political change (Hurrell, 2006; Stuenkel, 2015, 2016). Finally, one argument has it that Brazilian leaders normally confound actual power with diplomatic reach, committing the sins of overexpansion (Malamud, 2017; Schenoni et al., 2019). Some work has detailed how rising Brazil came to expand its national security concerns beyond South America, to include the Atlantic Ocean and the shores of Africa (Abdenur et al., 2016).

Nowhere does the issue of Brazilian power come to sharper relief than in the literatures on regional strategy. Drawing on the Strategic Diplomacy diagnostic framework, the question of the might or plight of Brazilian power needs to be addressed with specific reference to the systemic boundaries – domestic, regional, global – within which power is exercised. Those boundaries are not drawn by the international system alone, they are also a conscious choice by those who make foreign policy (Prantl, 2021). Here, there are two largely distinct bodies of work. The first one holds that Brazil's position in global hierarchies is a function of the prominent role it plays in its own immediate vicinity. On this view, Brasília has sought to manage or facilitate the resolution of regional crises, promote democracy, and project itself as a leading state in South America with the view of aggregating power and leveraging its ability to do well at the global level (Burges, 2013; Lima & Hirst, 2006; Malamud, 2011; Mares, 2016; Nolte, 2010; Schirm, 2010). For example, successive US administrations in the 1990s and 2000s developed the expectation that Brazil should be a regional stabiliser, facilitating dialogue, and leading regional initiatives. An influential view within this strand of writing is Sean Burges (2008), who has argued that Brazil set out to build a type of regional hegemony that is essentially consensual among neighbouring South American states. According to Burges, this non-aggressive, cooperative approach to region building should be seen as a critical component of Brazilian claims to emerging-power status in world politics. Within this, the argument goes, Brazil should be seen as an 'effective political entrepreneur at the global level' (Armijo & Burges, 2009).

Unsurprisingly, whenever Brazil fails to deliver South America, many commentators in this tradition see signs that its power is either declining or inexistent. Some have therefore argued that because Brazilian regional influence is built upon shaky material foundations (i.e. lacking traditional means of state power to either coerce or lure third states), Brazil fails to either dominate (Schirm, 2010) or lead (Malamud, 2011). Others like Schenoni (2014) ask why neighbours never set out to organise a balancing coalition against rising Brazil, suggesting that features at the level of the domestic politics in neighbouring states prevented them from pushing back against Brazilian diplomatic activism. These

views contrast with Villa, Chagas-Bastos, and Macedo Braga (2019), according to whom any notion of balancing dynamics has in effect coexisted with a nascent security community in South America.

A contrasting view has it that South America was and remains a major source of problems that limit rather than propel Brazil internationally (Hurrell, 2009, 2010). Here what the evolution of South American regionalism shows is how difficult it actually is for Brazil to turn its regional environment into a platform for global political activism. Others point out that the region may be seen as a hurdle for Brazil in the sense that the historical construction of a South American identity in the writings of statesmen and philosophers in *Spanish* America has either ignored or ostracised Portuguese-speaking Brazil (Bethell, 2010; Guimarães et al., 2019).

Finally, a set of arguments suggest that Brazilian power and influence in regional politics is a function of domestic constituencies and interest groups. Where the literature has gone furthest in specifying this argument is with regards to Mercosur, the free trade area originally encompassing Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, and then extended to other South American players (Carranza, 2003; Mera, 2005), but more recent work has drawn Brazilian infrastructure multinationals into the fold (Musacchio & Lazzarini, 2014). Some authors have also begun to explore the connection between these domestic constituencies and grand strategic thinking more explicitly, as expressed in the diplomatic use by Brazilian leaders of development banks (Doctor, 2021).

Political and strategic purpose

What values and purposes does Brazilian power serve, and what are the country's intentions in world politics? Drawing on the Strategic Diplomacy diagnostic framework: what is the strategic endpoint of Brazilian power; does the country intend to maintain or change the system? Was rising Brazil satisfied with the distribution of power and authority in the system or bent on overturning it? To be sure, passing judgment on whether states are indeed 'responsible' or not depends on who is looking: Brazil has been deemed both responsible and irresponsible by different players, even if its intentions for affecting change in the system are relatively moderate (Hurrell, 2008, 2010). Also, there is little doubt that Brazilian grand strategy in the years of ascent was largely about pursuing moderate reforms in global governance by carving out spaces for itself: 'Brazil believes that if the current world order is to survive, it must incorporate more perspectives from the South, and that Brazil can represent those perspectives (Mares & Trikunas, 2016, p. 246). But the expert literatures remain fundamentally divided on the issue.

To some, 'Brazil is the quintessential 'responsible stakeholder'' (Armijo & Burges, 2009, p. 16), an argument this review will explore in greater detail below. The alternative view portrays Brazil as a far more militant revisionist of the status quo. On this interpretation, Brazil in the years of ascent was keen on securing special status yet unwilling to share the burden of sustain global order (Patrick, 2010; Schweller, 2011). These arguments see Brazil as more of a challenger of global liberal order, crafting a strategy to deliver a blow on existing US-led institutions and norms. Critics also argue that, in the absence of strong liberal values at home, Brazil's contribution to liberal global ordering was bound to be limited to self-serving economic gains (Castañeda, 2010). These observers were particularly critical of the foreign policy ambitions of president Lula da Silva (2003–2010), with

all its emphasis on active South-South diplomacy in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and in the BRICS.

Key to the debate about intentions is the issue of Brazilian strategies to cope with the United States. Scholars by and large agree that ascent from the late 1990s and early 2000s saw Brazil become ever more distant from Washington's preferences on a range of issues from trade to nuclear proliferation, the 'War on Terror' and climate change. Although the notion is firmly ensconced in the expert literatures that the Cardoso administration (1995–2002) was far more willing to adapt to US power and align policy to the liberal international order than either Lula (2003–2010) or Rousseff (2011–2016), Brazil is always seen as more reluctant to jump on America's coattails than Argentina, Chile, Colombia or Mexico. According to some authors, Brazilian preferences for managing ties with the United States was a form of soft balancing that sought to limit and constrain US power. This is seen to occur through the building of regionalism in South America, through the creation of new international organisations like the BRICS and IBAS, or through the reenergizing of developing-state coalitions like the G77 and the Brazil-India coalition in the Doha Round (Brands, 2010, 2011; Flemes, 2007, 2010; Hirst, 2004; Hurrell, 2006). Spektor (2014) argues that on a host of issue areas the concept of soft balancing misrepresents Brazilian behaviour, which should be seen less as an attempt to complicate the exercise of US power and more like a set of policies that seek to prevent the exclusion of Brazil from the benefits of liberal international order. Schenoni (2012) argues that Brazilian ascent coincided with the relative decline of the United States, increasing the odds of divergence between the two. Mouron and Urdíñez (2014) suggest instead that the divergence is less to do with ascent-and-decline dynamics than it is to do with power gaps, as more powerful South American countries tend to align with the US less than their weaker neighbours.

The most optimistic versions of the argument that Brazil in the ascending years was a constructive force in world politics echoes the view expressed in official documents that this was a soft power strategy with a preference for diplomacy, peaceful conflict resolution, agenda-setting, bridge building, and multilateralism (Chatin, 2016). According to this line of thought, Brazil was a major developing state on the rise that expressed no signs of 'neo-imperialist' objectives (Bry, 2017). The language in these works presents Brazilian policy as essentially altruistic. These literatures credit Lula in particular with developing a positive framework for the conduct of international politics, while chiding his successors for failing to keep up support for an activist foreign policy. Here, the difficulties in implementing soft balancing are not so much to do with problems of design as the lack of political will by governing elites (Vaz et al., 2018). This optimism is prevalent in writings on Brazil-led regionalism in South America (Burges, 2008, 2013, 2017).

Other scholars have been more cautious in attributing success to Brazil's brand of reformism, highlighting the degree to which policy design was problematic from the outset (Hurrell, 2010; Lima & Hirst, 2006; Malamud, 2011). For instance, there is writing on Brazil as a democracy promoter suggesting that activism in this particular front is not a function of overarching global ambitions, but rather a self-serving calculus over the economic and geopolitical stakes involved (Burges & Daudelin, 2007). Milani (2015) claims that the Lula administration revamped human rights policy by drawing civil society into the policymaking process, by aligning Brazil more tightly to the transnational human rights movement, and by avoiding the pitfalls of human-rights securitisation after 9/11.

By contrast, Engstrom (2014) critiques Brazilian human rights rhetoric and suggests its actual performance has been far more checkered than the official line might suggest. A similar tension between optimists and critics recurs in the study of Brazil as a development cooperation provider, in particular in Africa (Cabral et al., 2013). To some, cooperation is seen to be largely egalitarian, with little if any imposition on the part of Brazil (Bry, 2017). Others are less sanguine. Inoue and Vaz (2012), for example, have argued that rhetoric of solidarity coexisted with political and economic interests, involving the preferences of both the Brazilian state and of private companies.

Yet another subject area that illustrates the tension between the optimistic and critical views pertain to Brazil as a peacekeeper. Much of this work come out in the wake of Brazil's UN-mandated mission in Haiti starting in 2004. Lasting over a decade, the mission saw Brazil command multinational troops in what became its largest military deployment since the Second World War. The optimist view is best represented by Kenkel (2010), according to whom Brazil acted as a 'model emerging power' pursuing an 'extremely effective' role in particular in the context of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti. 'One clearly sees the genesis of a promising and original approach to peacebuilding', he concludes, and one that might one day become a 'serious challenge to the 'liberal peace'' (Kenkel, 2010, p. 658). This optimism is questioned by Arturo Sotomayor (2014), the most incisive critique of Brazil's performance in Haiti. Sotomayor argues that the tactics Brazil used to clear the slums of Port au Prince draw from prior experience in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro that relies on coercion and civilian alienation, while failing to address the underlying problems on the ground. Sotomayor also claims that keeping the peace in Haiti was premised on continued presence of troops on the ground, and was bound to implode once the exit strategy unfolded, just as it happened in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. The lack of language training and serious reforms within the Brazilian armed forces in the run up to their deployment also come under fire. As a result, the argument goes, the Haitian experience reinforced the bad institutional habits of the Brazilian armed forces, while bringing little stable peace to Haiti.

Constraints on power

Experts have pointed to several sources of constraint and limitation to Brazil's power in international affairs. Applying the Strategic Diplomacy diagnostic framework, those perceived constraints are also the result of issue framing and the specific systemic boundaries within which limitations to Brazil's power are observed. The extant literature variously locates constraints at the level of the international system, domestic politics, and individual leadership. This section briefly reviews them in turn.

One influential argument suggests the policy space available to policy makers in Brazil is limited by structural factors afflicting low-saving, commodity exporters in a globalised capitalist economy. Under conditions of dollar scarcity and swinging commodity prices, any attempt at securing autonomy is bound to be problematic (Campello, 2015; Campello & Zucco, 2016). This line of enquiry reopens the big conceptual questions drawn from the *dependencia* traditions that were the hallmark of Brazilian IR in a not too distant past, connecting old-time concerns on the dependence of transnational forces with democratic accountability in new – and fragile – democracies.

Another body of work turns to domestic sources of foreign-policy constraint. It is here where the literature is most critical of Brazilian behaviour during the years of ascent, with

an emphasis on environmental policy. Viola and Franchini (2018) attack the myth of Brazil as an environmental leader in climate change negotiations. They show the degree to which Brazil has been an underachieving environmental power in spite of its remarkable natural capital, both due to domestic limitations and to the difficulties inherent in operating in the complex environmental governance system (also Castro Pereira & Viola, 2021). Critical in debates over climate policy is the recurring tension between domestic nationalist and developmental coalitions centred around the Brazilian state, foreign policy establishment, armed forces, and private sector on the one hand, and more open, global-oriented constituencies on the other (Vieira, 2013). Others echo the notion that powerful domestic constituencies are deeply affected by any transition to lower-carbon economy, and do not hesitate to shrink leaders' policy space (Edwards & Roberts, 2015; Hochstetler & Inoue, 2019; Hochstetler & Viola, 2012; Viola & Franchini, 2018). Survey experiments have shown that varying levels of nationalism at the individual level moderate how the public in Brazil reacts to foreign criticism of its environmental policies, and assesses the conditions under which such criticism might encounter nationalist pushback (Spektor, Mignozzetti, et al., 2021).

The first comparative study to assess the balance between systemic and domestic factors in the shaping of foreign policy in Brazil and other Latin American countries is Amorim Neto and Malamud (2015). By looking at voting behaviour in the United Nations, they show that Brazil seems to be constrained by a mix of system-level and domestic-level factors more intensely than either Argentina or Mexico.

Mahrukh Doctor (2015, 2016, 2017) argues that the changing patterns of state-business relations ought to be at the heart of any account of Brazilian foreign relations. Brazil since democratisation moved away from a traditional inward-looking, economic development-oriented set of foreign policy strategies to a far more ambitious strategy of openness to the global economy, but critical to that transition was the ability of business to influence and sometimes capture the policy process. As Doctor's work shows, processes of capture very heavily shape Brazil's international strategy.

Some authors have argued that Brazil in the 2000s rose in global rankings against a backdrop of democratising changes in the decision-making process. Most of the works emphasise the relative decline of the foreign ministry vis-à-vis other domestic institutions. In this sense, Brazil illustrates a wider trend of decline among foreign ministries around the globe, as with *Kantei*-led diplomacy in Japan, *Kanzlerdemokratie* in Germany, and *Kreml* diplomacy in Russia. The seminal piece on the making of Brazilian foreign policy in the English language is Carson and Power (2009). The authors argue that Brazilian presidents have become more influential in shaping foreign policy than it had previously been the case, in particular vis-à-vis foreign policy experts and bureaucrats at the foreign ministry. This, they point out, has taken place alongside the entry of an ever-growing number of actors into the decision-making process, further enhancing the hand of the presidential palace in the conduct of foreign affairs. Amorim Neto and Malamud (2020) specify the conditions under which delegation from presidents to foreign ministries is likely to occur in a comparative study of Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico, and find alternative pathways to delegation that reinforce the role of elite consensus in foreign policy. Diniz and Ribeiro (2008) argue that the Brazilian Congress plays more of a role in the conduct of foreign policy than meets the eye. Milani and Pinheiro (2017) make the point that domestic constituencies shape Brazilian foreign policy to a degree

that renders any talk of a single 'national interest' innocuous. An argument linking the changing nature of domestic political coalitions and the crafting of grand strategy in the transition to the Lula administration appears in Milani and Nery (2019).

The major counterargument here comes from Farias and Ramanzini (2016), who offer a powerful critique against the notion that foreign policy in Brazil has in fact become a more open and contested field. Through a case study of Itamaraty's role in global trade negotiations they show that at least on this particular issue area the policymaking process became more restrictive and closed off than it had been during either the democratic 1940s-50s or the authoritarian 1960s/70s. Political democratisation in the 1980s, they argue, did not open up the policy process to new actors, but rather the opposite. Others have shown that civil society participation in foreign policy has remained largely discretionary, non-binding, and highly informal (Pomeroy, 2017). In other issue areas, good case-study work has shed new light onto the actual workings of foreign policy by thematic area (Ventura & Holzhaecker, 2016; Ventura & Miola, 2009).

Guilherme Casarões (2012) turns to the sources of domestic support for the foreign policy strategies of rising Brazil. He argues that media outlets and foreign policy pundits went out of their way to critique Lula's very ambitious set of foreign policies in ways that were uncommon before. Mares and Trikunas (2016) make the point that, if leaders attempting to flex muscle abroad need domestic support from major constituencies at home, then it is not clear that strategies for upwards mobility are sustainable in the long run. Studies of domestic public opinion and foreign policy remain few and far between (more on this below), but a recent wave of survey experiments finds that deteriorating external conditions coupled with fear of abandonment by the United States deeply affects Brazilian public support for nuclear-weapon acquisition (Spektor, Fasolin, et al., 2021; for the overall evolution of the Brazilian nuclear programme, see Patti, 2021).

Finally, one of the most severe limitations to Brazilian power and influence in international relations is the growing reach of paramilitary gangs whose connections with transnational organised crime and the global drug trade are perniciously eating up the already fragile reach of state control in border areas, ports, and large cities. Tackling this problem is not something that Brazil can aspire to do on its own, given the global political economy that sustains illicit trade flows and the necessity of deep cooperation with authorities in neighbouring states at a time when the regional governance infrastructure seems to have collapsed. New work has begun to shed light onto this phenomenon (Rodrigues, 2015; Rodrigues & Porto, 2017), but given the dramatic expansion of drug-trade fuelled organised crime, it seems obvious that far more need to be done. What we have learned thus far is troubling in that it shows that criminal networks are not external actors challenging the state apparatus, but rather than rings of illicit activity manage to eat up that apparatus from the inside: as paramilitary groups engage in illegal economic activity, they finance political campaigns for city councillors and mayors, state-level officials and governors, members of Congress and the Executive, and purchase support from the Judicial system. This is highly problematic for a country where law and order is patchy at best, and worrying in that it pulls the rug from under the feet of those leaders who are putatively responsible for crafting diplomatic strategy.

In sum, looked at from the Strategic Diplomacy perspective, Brazil faces the fundamental question of how to redesign, regain and maximise policy space in issue areas that are critical to the effective pursuit of diplomacy and statecraft.

Paths forward

Brazil in the 2020s is no longer undergoing a process of international ascent. The general perception among commentators, pundits, and scholars today is that Brazil's overall trajectory in recent years has been downwards. While this is not the place to explore the sources of international decline, causes can be variously identified at the level of the international system, domestic politics, and individual leaders. The election in 2018 of Jair Bolsonaro further contributed to the general perception that Brazil is growing more isolated, weaker, and less influential in world politics (Guimarães & Silva, 2021). For the first time since transitioning to democracy, the risk exists that on issues ranging from climate change to human rights Brazil comes to be seen – as it was the case during the long authoritarian regime (1964–1985) – as a pariah state. As we look into the future, scholars of the foreign relations of Brazil have an opportunity to explore the many factors that got us here. In this final section I would like to identify four key themes from the Strategic Diplomacy framework that are ripe for new theoretical and empirical studies drawing on Brazil's experience of international ascent and subsequent decline.

First, there is new research to be done on the issue of Brazil's strategy vis-à-vis great-power competition in a multipolar system. The consequences of this are major for Brazil, not the least due to the effects of US–China competition on the country's external security, its position in global value chains, and levels of income and employment for Brazilian workers. The dominant view in mainstream IR sees Chinese growing power as a threat to U.S. regional hegemony in Latin America, a trend that is largely consistent with the framing of China as a challenger to the U.S.-led global liberal international order (Mearsheimer, 2019; Shambaugh, 2018). Indeed, many scholars point to the risks posed by both China and the growing clashes between the US and China on regional trade and finance (Lind & Press, 2018; López-Córdova et al., 2007). Many have warned of China reproducing a pattern of predatory engagement with Latin America, inducing a perverse 'debt trap'. Recent work has shown how regional countries vote on human-rights related issues in the UN General Assembly to curry favour with China (Flores-Macias & Kreps, 2013). Yet, among scholars based in Brazil there is much support to the notion that China may actually assist in mitigating Latin American dependence on traditional American hegemony. At least during the first decade of the 2000s, this fuelled the use in policy and scholarly circles of 'multipolarity' as a normative aspiration for Brazilian foreign policy (Schenoni, 2021; Spektor, 2016). More work is needed on the hypothesised mechanisms for each one of these contrasting arguments.

Relatedly, future work would do well to explore the conditions under which anti-China sentiment might arise in Brazil, a test of which has been already conducted for Argentina (Armony & Velásquez, 2015; Urdinez et al., 2018). Campello and Urdinez (2021) find that residents and legislators from localities in Brazil that suffer from trade shocks hold negative views about economic ties with China. A public opinion survey conducted in Brazil points to the lack of social trust in China's ability to maintain international peace, but also suggests individuals in the public believe Chinese economic leadership to be largely positive (Urdinez & Rodrigues, 2017). Brazil's position vis-à-vis US–China competition could also be explored from the standpoint of the fast-expanding field of hierarchy

studies (Mattern & Zarakol, 2016). Recent work along these lines has highlighted the patterns of hierarchical domination in world politics (McConaughy et al., 2018), their impact on hegemonic orders (Ikenberry & Nexon, 2019), and the politics of legitimising hierarchy (MacKay, 2019).

Second, the string of upheavals in Brazilian domestic politics stress the urgency of new scholarship to shed light onto the ways in which institutional design at home shapes statecraft and foreign policy. This point is particularly relevant in answering the critical question of how lost policy space can be regained and maximised in Brazilian diplomacy and statecraft. How does this particular brand of multiparty presidentialism constrain the making of foreign policy? Political science has over the years generated vast amounts of detailed knowledge on the workings of Brazilian democracy (Kingstone & Power, 2008, 2017; Spektor & Mello, 2018), but IR scholars have yet to confront the task of connecting the dots between the logic of political survival at home and foreign-policy strategy in the world.

Third, the arrival of Jair Bolsonaro in office has stressed the importance of scholarly work on the role of leaders and leadership in the conduct of strategic diplomacy. Whereas an influential strand of IR work in this field focuses on military conflict and therefore finds little use in the historical record involving Brazil (Horowitz et al., 2015; Horowitz & Fuhrmann, 2018; Saunders, 2015), new avenues have opened in recent years that directly connect foreign-policy performance to leaders. Students of Brazilian foreign relations may profitably engage literatures that explore the intersection between leader attributes and credibility in international conflict (Horowitz et al., 2018), the effects of leader reputation (Wu & Wolford, 2018), the ways leaders deal with sinking costs (Yarhi-Milo et al., 2018), the pathways through which leaders assess information about international counterparts (Yarhi-Milo, 2014), the reaction of leaders to reputation reversals and face losing (Renshon, 2015), and the formation of leader reputation in world politics (Renshon et al., 2018). Rich studies of the role of leaders can be conducted now that troves of primary sources such as secret memoranda and memoirs are available for research for the period comprising the bulk of Brazil's democratic experience from the late 1980s onwards.

Such studies might assess the degree to which Brazilian leaders surrounded themselves with teams designed to maximise their ability to develop an accurate sense of incentives in the international system or not. They could additionally explore the degree to which leader attributes played a role in both the ascent and the decline of Brazilian standing in world politics. Yet another set of questions would include an interrogation over the insistence of successive Brazilian leaders in the pursuit of foreign policies that were either costly or bound to fail. Are there specific dispositions in individual leaders that propel them to seek or avoid costly foreign policies? Finally, this area of study would allow students of Brazil's international relations to ask how leader personal histories and past political trajectories shape their time in office. From the standpoint of Strategic Diplomacy, leaders matter because it is them who normally infuse diplomacy with an accentuated strategic rationale. It is also they who normally break with the dogmas inherited from the foreign-policy establishments of the past, contesting their terms and reframing short-term diplomatic practice.

Fourth, one productive field of enquiry derived from Strategic Diplomacy pertains to the evolution of national interest conceptions and framings. One strand of work may

involve recent developments in mainstream IR on political psychology. The pioneers of this kind of work in Brazil are Amaury Souza (2008) and Gardini and Tavares de Almeida (2016). As Tavares de Almeida (2016) has shown, for example, the mass public in Brazil does not self-identify with either South or Latin America, and expresses ambivalent feelings towards neighbours. But much remains to be done. Consider for instance the lively area of research that has recently opened up as new studies highlight the role that elites and elite cues play in shaping public opinion on a range of international issues (Golby et al., 2018; Guisinger & Saunders, 2017). Given the dominance of Brazilian elites in the design and conduct of foreign affairs, asking what impact such elites have in determining the contours of the dominant ideas that recur among the public at large seems particularly urgent.

The other issue area of relevance here is Brazil's historical quest for international recognition and special status. Studies of status anxiety in IR are particularly useful as a prism to understand Brazil because so much of the recent politics of ascent and decline is couched in terms of rankings, access, and network development. The possibilities are myriad, but it suffices to point out a selection of areas for future study. One is the relationship between the quest for status and international conflict (Dafoe et al., 2014; Renshon, 2017; Ward, 2018). Another niche within this body of theoretical work pertains to the use of Social Identity Theory as a segue into the pursuit of status and the dramas that follow suit (Larson & Shevchenko, 2014). Additionally, a strand of relevance here is the issue of conspicuous consumption as it refers to the acquisition of international prestige (Gilady, 2018). This is of high relevance for the recent period, where massive expenditures on weapons systems (fighter jets, a submarine fleet, aircraft carriers) and the hosting of major events (the Olympics and the World Cup) dominated much of the public conversation about Brazil's international standing. One final candidate for further exploration is the social dimensions of status seeking (Esteves et al., 2020; Wohlforth et al., 2018).

In sum, the avenues that Strategic Diplomacy opens up should stimulate the scholarly conversation about Brazil's long-term strategy, while recognising the domestic, regional, and global limits and hurdles that any attempt at crafting strategy will bump up against. Such a framework would explicitly acknowledge that Brazilian strategies will coexist with public opinion, contentious domestic politics, private actors capable of capturing the state, transnational governance schemes both legal and illegal, and international institutions in a political process that is both messy and far from preordained. If there is any advantage to the experience of decline that Brazil is currently undergoing is the fact that it is now possible to reopen the big questions about foreign-policy strategy with a view to making the country more resilient to weather an increasingly complex international system in the coming decades. To reverse the current trend, successive Brazilian leaders will have to restore the policy space available to government or at least imagine a set of strategies to mitigate the negative impact of domestic, regional, and global transformations that currently tie up their hands. This is where the Strategic Diplomacy framework will be most useful.

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