THE DECLINE IN BRAZIL'S INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE: FROM AN EMERGING COUNTRY TO AN INWARD-LOOKING STATE¹

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Introduction

From 2016 onwards, Brazil has lost its status as an emerging power. Domestic turmoil, systemic constraints and a passive foreign policy have reversed the previously achieved autonomy in international and regional affairs. A few scholars have attempted to explain that retreat by highlighting different reasons.

David Mares and Harold Trinkunas (2016) have argued that a historical pattern exists according to which Brazil has attempted to rise during times in which the liberal international order was under considerable strains. Yet, a less permissive international environment and insufficient domestic power have thwarted Brazil's emergence. In their view, weak internal institutions susceptible to economic and political crises have been the main cause of recurring setback. The 1980's debt crisis and the corruption scandals in 2014 illustrate that institutional weakness responsible for internal disarray. However, the authors have not elaborated on that inasmuch as they have not paid enough heed to "variations in domestic policy and politics".

¹ The opinions of the authors do not necessarily reflect those of the Brazilian government, especially their institutional affiliations.

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Andres Malamud (2017), in his turn, has asserted that president Rousseff's mismanagement along with adverse international conditions set the stage for Brazil's foreign policy retraction. Such a trend was accentuated during the discredited Temer administration, thereby tarnishing the country's international prestige. Other authors such as Oliver Stuenkel (2015), Kai Lehmann (2017), Alcides Vaz (2018) as well as Amado Cervo and Antonio Lessa (2014) also have posited that rollback in Brazil's international profile has started with Rousseff's lukewarm foreign policy, which was more easily seen in the South-American regional context. Still, the scholars have stayed on the surface without delving in the main roots of the political and economic crises linked to Brazil's international setback.

This paper aims to explain the current decline in Brazil's international influence. We hypothesize that Brazil's political and economic crises, caused by domestic power struggles and international meddling, have weakened its international presence.

We intend to focus simultaneously on the considerable obstacles raised by great powers to a peripheral country that struggles to play a more proactive role on the international stage as well as on the domestic hindrances to a more assertive foreign policy. In that sense, inspired by Peter Gourevitch's (1986) political sociology of historical coalitions and David Baldwin's (2016) conceptual analysis of power, we assess the geopolitical and the internal contexts in which the reversal in Brazil's foreign policy has taken place.

This paper is divided into four sections: firstly, we review part of the academic literature concerned with domestic coalitions and power so as to lay the ground for analyzing the reversal in Brazilian foreign policy. We also discuss autonomy in foreign policy and subsequently propose an alternative reading of that concept. Secondly, we review Brazil's foreign policy from 2003 to 2010. Thirdly, we assess the main drivers of Brazil's ongoing internal crisis as well as its detrimental effects on the country's foreign policy from 2011 to 2018. Finally, we draw general conclusions pointing out some obstacles that Brazil must overcome to resume an assertive international role.

Politics, Policies, Coalitions and International Autonomy

Gourevitch (1986) has posited that international relations and domestic politics are intertwined and therefore need to be jointly analyzed. He has qualified the second image described by Kenneth Waltz (1965) according to which a country's international behavior is explained based on domestic factors. Gourevitch has argued that the international system also has a huge impact on

domestic politics, even though states do have some room for maneuver.

He has underlined the relevance of domestic factors by focusing on politics whereby different groups bargain and vie for support in implementing policies. In that context of political negotiations and disputes on policy alternatives, most groups need to develop their legitimating arguments and build coalitions. In so doing, they affect the final content of originally formulated policies.

Gourevitch (1986) has deepened his analysis on a political sociology of historical coalitions based on the premise that “policy proposals emerges out of politics”. Political coalitions involve the construction of alliances among politicians, officeholders, public servants, parties, interest group leaders and economic actors. These political arrangements become more fluid during turbulent periods. Though traumatic, crises are interesting moments for social scientists inasmuch as they unveil hidden patterns of relationships that remain unnoticed in moments of greater tranquility. During these uncertain times, political strategies are put into question, old coalitions disintegrate and a new consensus needs to be forged.

In order to assess the impact of international crises on domestic politics, Gourevitch (1986) has compared responses given by Germany, the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Sweden to the deflation from 1873 to 1896, to the Great Depression from 1929 to 1949 and to the neoliberal shift since 1971. He has examined how these international economic crises engendered realignments in domestic political coalitions. In spite of suffering far-reaching effects on their national economies, those five countries pursued different strategies due to political bargaining within domestic coalitions, thereby indicating some autonomy vis-à-vis systemic constraints.

In highlighting the relation between politics and policies, Gourevitch (1986) makes a valuable contribution to grasp the importance of domestic political coalitions and their influence on the foreign policy orientation. We argue that it is possible to apply such an approach to gage the reversal of Brazilian foreign policy. In that sense, this paper explores the path opened by Gourevitch for the appraisal of political coalitions without confining itself to the perspective of the “second image reversed”. We understand that a two-way street exists with regard to the relationship between the international system and the domestic policy of a given state. The international system impacts on the domestic political coalitions, while the latter influence the stance that a certain country takes on the international scene.

Besides taking into account its domestic and systemic constraints, the evaluation of Brazilian foreign policy requires a better understanding of the concept of international autonomy. Inspired by Baldwin's conceptual analysis

on power, we posit that autonomy is a specific kind of power wielded by a developing country in the face of a stronger developed state.

Since the second half of the 20th century, Latin-American scholars have regarded the search for autonomy as a driving idea. Their interest in applying the concept of autonomy considerably increased in the 1970s against the backdrop of the debate on the U.S. decline. During that period, a few countries that wielded some regional influence, such as Brazil and Mexico, put the concept into practice by attempting to pursue a more autonomous foreign policy vis-à-vis the U.S. (Giacalone 2012, Russel and Tokatlian 2013, Ticker 2015)

Authors have given different meanings to the concept of autonomy without agreeing on a single definition. Yet, their reflection on that theme constitutes a good starting point to seek a better understanding of that concept, which, according to Fonseca (1998), embodies an aspiration and an asset at the same time. In his view, what autonomy means for any country varies both historically and spatially based on interests and power positions. In the same vein, Russel and Tokatlian (2013) have argued that autonomy is an “essentially political concept”. It is an intended objective as well as a scarce capacity that few Latin-American countries possess.

Tullo Vigevani and Gabriel Cepaluni (2007) have referred to autonomy as a country’s capacity to formulate and implement a foreign policy free from external constraints imposed by great powers, especially the U.S. In their view, any country finds itself on a continuum whose extremes are full autonomy and total dependence. Autonomy is a question of degree, which varies according to the level of dependence.

These authors have identified three ways of achieving autonomy: distance, participation and diversification. In seeking autonomy through distance, a developing country remains aloof from hegemonic powers and international regimes supported by developed countries in order to protect its sovereignty. It also resists a liberal economic agenda so as to carry out an inward-oriented development strategy. By contrast, autonomy through participation entails the acceptance of international liberal norms as well as an active participation in international regimes to influence the rule-making processes. Finally, autonomy through diversification involves the construction of South-South alliances with countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia. By forging new partnerships with non-traditional allies, a developing country intends to strengthen its bargaining position vis-à-vis developed countries in international regimes. The emphasis on diversification is also associated with the interest in promoting a multipolar world.

Monica Hirst and Maria Regina Lima (2014) have stressed the practical meanings of autonomy as a country’s capacity to take initiatives and have room

for maneuver by avoiding alignments with the great powers, mainly the U.S. They have regarded the participation in different international coalitions and in multilateral arrangements as a means to have some leeway by diversifying partnerships. According to them, from the perspective of a peripheral country, autonomy also refers to the preservation of its sovereignty and the promotion of development.

Arlene Tickner (2015) has understood autonomy as a defensive tool employed by developing countries to protect their national sovereignty against interference from stronger states, curb the influence of transnational actors and improve bargaining power at the negotiating table. She has made her point by noting that autonomy is essentially a concern of peripheral states whereas it is hardly an issue for developed countries. For that reason, the IR mainstream debates have not given due attention to autonomy. She has also posited that autonomy differs from power. The former has a defensive nature while the latter relates to the attempt to influence others' actions in one's interests.

We believe that David Baldwin's (2016) conceptual analysis on power provides valuable insights into the study of autonomy. He has criticized the "power-as-resources" approach in favor of the "relational power" approach. In his view, it is mistaken to portray power as a possession or a property of a single actor (persons, states, groups, etc.). What neorealists, such as Waltz, have referred as capabilities (military strength, economic clout, size of population, territory, resource endowment, and so on) does not paint a full picture of power. Rather, power only really exists within an existing or potential relation between actors.

Baldwin (2016) has based his perspective on Robert Dahl's (1957) well-known definition of power: "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do". According to Baldwin, power is both relational and multidimensional. Thus, throughout A's interaction with B, power can augment on one aspect and decline on another. Although pointing out at least eight dimensions of power (scope, domain, weight, base, means, cost, time and place), Baldwin has underlined that the first two are indispensable in any assessment of influence in a specific situation, i.e. the policy-contingency framework.

The scope has to do with the area in which A impacts on B's behavior. The domain pertains to the quantity and relevance of the actors on which A exerts influence. Baldwin has also argued that material power resources gain only relevance in a specific historical-geographical context.

The power analysis traditionally focuses on A's influence over B. Baldwin has indicated that it is possible to explore the other way around. B's response to A's influence may be given in a variety of ways that transcend compliance and

noncompliance. He has qualified the Melian dialogue narrated by Thucydides inasmuch as “the ‘strong’ cannot always do what they want; and the ‘weak’ do not always have to suffer what they must”. Hence, in an asymmetrical relationship, the weaker actor can counteract the influence of the stronger one through different forms. In doing so, the former will exercise its own power.

Most scholars usually equate autonomy to increasing one’s country room for maneuver. Inspired by Baldwin’s conceptual analysis, we advance the argument that autonomy is a specific kind of power wielded by the weak. It constitutes B’s ability to resist, counteract or neutralize A’s influence in a given situation. In that sense, autonomy amounts to the peripheral states’ counterpower in the face of great powers’ influence.

In being a sort of power in an asymmetric relationship between two or more actors, autonomy is not an asset, an attribute or the property of an agent. Nor is it an end in itself detached from the situation in which it is exercised. In principle, a peripheral state seeks autonomy as a defensive instrument. Nevertheless, by struggling to augment its counterpower, this state may end up extending its own influence over other developing countries.

We contend that one should not stick a label on autonomy to avoid restricting and consequently impoverishing the concept. Indeed, there are various ways of exerting autonomy - by diplomatic, economic, symbolic, military means etc. - in a given context. Besides, a country may use simultaneously a diverse set of instruments to secure its autonomy in the face of the great powers’ initiatives.

A consensus exists among scholars that the U.S. is the main point of reference for assessing their countries’ degree of autonomy. As the dominant state in the Western Hemisphere, the U.S. policies may severely constrain other countries’ latitude in that region. Brazil is no exception to that situation inasmuch as its leeway to conduct an autonomous foreign policy hinges on the nature of the relationship between Brasilia and Washington in different spheres, notably diplomatic, economic and technological ones.

However, Brazil does not exert its autonomy only vis-à-vis the U.S. Nor should the quest for autonomy be confused with a kind of anti-Americanism since it does not rule out the possibility of cooperating with the U.S. in some matters. Notwithstanding the American pre-eminence in the Western Hemisphere, Brazil also wields some counterpower over other asymmetric interactions in the international system.

Since it is a sort of power, one faces the same difficulty in estimating the degree of autonomy of any country. Besides, any attempt to gauge it is meaningless without situating the scope and domain in which a developing

country seeks to counter a great power's influence.

Brazil's domestic coalitions and its foreign policy from 2003 to 2010

We analyze the dynamics of Lula's internal politics based on the existence of two distinct coalitions centered on the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) and the Workers' Party (PT). The opposition between a neoliberal-conservative coalition and a social-developmental coalition crystallized during the Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010) administrations. Besides, it reached extreme polarization during Dilma Rousseff administration (2011-2016).

During his two terms in office, Lula's predecessor, former President Cardoso (1995-2002), managed to curb inflation and consolidate democracy, thereby ensuring a relative political and economic stability to Brazil. However, slow growth, high unemployment and external vulnerability to international financial crises tempered these feats. Likewise, from the standpoint of the neoliberal-conservative coalition that supported Cardoso administration, the reduction of Brazil's high social inequality was not the overriding objective.

In 1994 and 1998, Cardoso won the presidential election by building a center-right coalition centered on the PSDB, the Liberal Front Party (PFL) and the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB). The Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) later integrated the PSDB-led governmental coalition, thereby providing the necessary parliamentary support to Cardoso administration.

The center-right coalition represented mainly the interests of the entrepreneurs closely linked to international capital, the large landowners and the upper middle class. Policies such as inflation control, Central Bank independence, liberalization of international capital movements, privatizations, market deregulation and the international alignment with developed nations, especially the United States, were among the neoliberal-conservative coalition's main priorities (Boito and Berringer 2014).

In 2002, in his fourth presidential race, Lula defeated José Serra (PSDB-PMDB's candidate), forging an alliance among PT, the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), the Communist Party of Brazil (PC do B), the Liberal Party (PL) and the National Mobilization Party (PMN). Lula's election victory marked the return of a progressive coalition to power, which had not occurred since the Goulart administration in the 1960s. For the first time in their history, the Brazilian people chose a left-wing candidate as the country's new leader. After more than ten years of neoliberal economic policies, there was a widespread

desire for change.

Unionized workers, organized peasants, the lower middle class, several informal and marginalized workers as well as entrepreneurs from different sectors - construction industry, shipbuilding industry, agribusiness, food processing, etc. - supported the new government. Such social-developmental coalition aimed at fostering development and promoting social inclusion by expanding the internal market for mass consumption through income redistribution and the reduction of inequalities. In order to achieve these goals, the Brazilian state was supposed to play a leading role in the process of economic growth and wealth distribution by focusing on the rise of minimum wage, the expansion of social welfare program, the support of family agriculture, the expansion of federal universities, public housing programs (Boito and Saad-Filho 2016).

Criticisms about Cardoso administration's neoliberal policies have given rise to the formulation of a social-developmental economic approach. Lula administration pursued a contradictory and hybrid economic policy, inasmuch as it combined social-developmentalism with neoliberal measures (Bielschowsky 2012). Even so, from 2003 to 2006, heterodox initiatives aimed at fostering economic growth and reducing social inequality gradually gained ground against orthodox practices, though the latter continued to be applied (Werneck 2014).

From 2004 onwards, Brazil's economy started growing with inflation under control. The surge in commodity prices boosted its exports to China. As a result, impressive current account surpluses and an improvement in the balance of payments took place, which increased Brazil's international reserves. At the same time, social policies aimed at reducing poverty began to bear fruit. Faced with a promising economic picture, Lula administration announced the early payment of Brazil's foreign debt with the IMF in December 2005.

Such positive prospects explain why President Lula has managed to surmount the worst political crisis during his first term in office, thereby securing his re-election in 2006. The so-called Mensalão (big monthly payment) scandal, a votes-for-cash scheme, has tarnished PT's image and put at risk Lula administration. Nevertheless, in enjoying high rates of popular support, President Lula has weathered the political storm by distancing himself from corruption allegations.

Furthermore, the PT began to court the PMDB with a view to ensuring a parliamentary supermajority. That initiative aimed simultaneously to preserve governability and avert an impeachment process. Lula also chose Dilma Rousseff, then Minister of Mines and Energy, to replace José Dirceu as the Chief of Staff Minister. It is worth stressing that the above-mentioned political turmoil did not jeopardize the economy's performance, which contributed to maintaining Lula's popularity (Nobre 2013).

In early 2006, in the wake of the Mensalão scandal, the finance minister Antonio Palocci had to resign amid corruption allegations. While in office, he had strongly advocated the continuation of neoliberal policies. In his place, president Lula chose Guido Mantega who had a more development-oriented approach. He remained the finance minister during Rousseff's first term in office (2011-2014). The appointment of Luciano Coutinho as the President of Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) also contributed to reinforce that economic orientation from 2007 to 2016.

Conversely, President Lula maintained Henrique Meirelles as the Central Bank's president from 2003 to 2010. The former president of BankBoston defended high interest rates. Such monetary policy fulfilled the expectations of the international financial system. Hence, Lula administration pursued a compromise policy that met the interests of different social fractions, especially the wealthiest and the poorest (Bresser Pereira 2014, Singer 2015).

In January 2007, at the beginning of his second term, Lula administration strengthened state planning and increased public spending by launching the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC). That initiative focused on major infrastructure projects in the social, urban, logistics and energy areas. It also included a set of financial incentives to facilitate private sector participation. The elimination of bottlenecks to the country's growth and the reduction of regional inequalities were two of its main objectives. The PAC's investments, the discovery of pre-salt oil in the Brazilian offshore and the investment grade, which was granted by the risk agency Standard & Poor's, in April 2008, heralded that Brazil's economic growth would continue (Jardim and Silva 2015).

However, the worsening of the international financial crisis raised doubts about Brazil's ability to keep on growing. The launch of countercyclical measures by the Lula administration helped mitigate the negative economic effects of that crisis. In the political sphere, the crisis' potential pitfalls served to intensify power struggles within the government between the defenders of neoliberal policies (such as high interest rates and high exchange rates) and advocates of further social-developmental measures. Both Dilma Rousseff and Guido Mantega strongly criticized Henrique Meirelles' decision to keep raising interest rates during the international financial crisis. Ironically, the softening of IMF and World Bank's orthodox prescriptions regarding tight fiscal discipline as well as the Keynesian policies adopted by developed countries favored the defenders of social-developmentalism. They encountered less internal and external resistance to advance their progressive agenda. In that sense, the Brazilian government adopted an expansive fiscal policy by increasing public spending and available credit (Werneck 2014).

Besides the aforementioned countercyclical measures, Lula

administration capitalized BNDES. This way, the development bank was able to provide subsidized loans to a larger number of Brazilian companies in order to encourage their deeper internationalization, especially to South America and Africa, and make them national champions capable of competing with major foreign companies in the sale of products and services (Farias 2017).

By and large, these policies were successful until 2010. Internationally, Brazil was regarded as an emerging market country that paid off its foreign debts, managed to withstand the global financial crisis and would host the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. Domestically, Lula ended his administration enjoying unprecedented high popularity and succeeded in choosing President Dilma Rousseff as his successor (Bresser Pereira 2014).

On Brazil's foreign policy (2003-2010), President Lula resumed an active diplomacy that bore some resemblance to the "Independent Foreign Policy" and the "Responsible Pragmatism" (Alves 2018). According to his Foreign Minister, Celso Amorim, Brazil has adopted an engaged approach to reshape its international standing.

Lula administration has pursued a multidimensional diplomacy marked by simultaneous action at the global, regional and bilateral levels. In this regard, Brazil has paid special attention to south-south relations with other peripheral countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia without disregarding the need to enhance the relationship with traditional northern partners. Indeed, Brazil's rapprochement with other developing nations has served to augment its international recognition, thereby raising developed nations' interests in seeking new partnerships with it. Thus, in strengthening the south-south axis, Brazil has gained more bargaining power on the north-south axis (Silva 2015).

At the global level, Brazil has improved its international profile by forging different international coalitions aimed at increasing the power of joint negotiation in multilateral forums. The IBAS Forum - India, Brazil, South Africa -, the G-20 developing nations and the BRICS - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - stand out as neat examples of political coalitions in which Brazil has participated. These coalitions combine "soft revisionism" with respect to multilateral institutions with constructive proposals to advance international governance. The exercise of political agency through international coalitions has represented a key asset to deal with the great powers (Lima 2010).

At the regional level, like the former Cardoso administration, Lula's diplomacy has deemed South America to be the priority area. From 2003 to 2010, there were vigorous efforts and new initiatives to integrate the subcontinent. In that period, the National Defense Policy and the National Defense Strategy of Brazil (PND and END 2012) were published in 2008 and reaffirmed in 2012. These documents associate the national defense strategy with the development

strategy and with regional integration. South America and Africa are deemed strategic for expanding and consolidating international partnerships.

In December 2004, the South American Community of Nations (CASA) was created encompassing the countries of Mercosur and the Andean Community of Nations. In 2007, the name of CASA was changed to the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). It was formalized by the signing of its Constitutive Treaty in May 2008.

In the same year, under the Brazilian initiative, UNASUR approved the creation of the South American Defense Council (CDS). It is a body for consultation, cooperation and coordination in security matters, which is capable of tackling sensitive issues. It is worth noting that the activities undertaken by the CDS overlapped with a few security practices of the Organization of American States (OAS), which Washington dominates. In reality, the CDS has emulated the OAS in some respects while it has sought to replace it, thereby weakening the inter-American system forged by the United States (Weiffen, Wehner, and Nolte 2013).

From 2003 to 2005, Brazil and the US co-chaired FTAA negotiations seeking opposing goals. Washington aimed at successfully concluding the discussions that had begun in 1994 through the gradual removal of customs barriers. Conversely, taking into account the significant asymmetry in economic weight, Brasília endeavored to block or at least delay a complete agreement. Instead. In 2005, during the Mar del Plata Summit, the 34 American countries failed to reach any agreement, thereby halting negotiations (Pecequillo 2011).

In Colombia, in 2009, the United States signed a military agreement that would allow the set-up of seven American bases. Although no strategic rivalry has existed between Bogotá and Brasília, the military strengthening of Colombia associated with the presence of American troops near the Brazilian border constituted a source of concern to Lula administration. That is why Brazil has brought that subject to Unasur discussion. Yet, that agreement ended up not being implemented because the Colombian Supreme Court of Justice has judged it unconstitutional (Wehner 2015).

Brazil's Domestic Coalitions, Internal Crisis and the Reversal in its Foreign Policy (2011-2018)

Dilma Rousseff (PT) won the 2010 presidential race against José Serra (PSDB). She was re-elected in 2014 defeating Aécio Neves (PSDB). She had Michel Temer (PMDB) as her vice president. Her re-election indicated the possibility of maintaining a progressive coalition in power for sixteen years. Yet,

in August 2016, the President's impeachment interrupted this history.

At the beginning of the administration (2011-2014), Rousseff implemented tight fiscal and monetary policies. She cut public spending to increase the primary surplus and raised interest rates to curb inflation. However, these measures were taken in an international economic landscape marked by uncertainty. The Eurozone financial crisis, the slowdown of the U.S. economic recovery from the 2008 crisis and China's decision to reduce growth pointed to a bleak picture. The third element put an end to the so-called commodity boom, which decreased Brazilian exports to China. As a response to that adverse international situation, Rousseff administration sought to further social-developmentalism (Dweck and Teixeira 2017).

Minister Guido Mantega's "new economic matrix" was geared toward: a) reducing interest rates, b) increasing BNDES support for Brazilian companies, c) fostering an industrial policy focused on innovation, d) reducing companies payroll, e) launching the Investment Program in Logistics (PIL), f) lowering the price of electricity to reduce production costs, g) devaluing Brazilian currency to decrease imports and increase exports of industrialized goods, h) imposing greater control over international capital, i) increasing a few import tariffs and j) encouraging local content in strategic sectors (Singer 2016).

At the beginning of the Rousseff administration, through the replacement of Meirelles by Alexandre Tombini, the Central Bank reassessed the inflation targeting system, thereby toning down the importance attributed to interest as a nearly exclusive tool of monetary policy. The interest rate's decrease added to other measures aimed at promoting investment in industrial production. From August 2011 to April 2013, Rousseff administration managed not only to reduce interest rates from 12.5% to 7.5%, but also to diminish bank spread (Singer 2016). Rentiers harshly criticized such an orientation.

In June 2013, street protests worsened political problems. Initially centered on bus fares, street protests metamorphosed into several diffuse claims. Education and health problems, heavy expenditure on the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics as well as endemic corruption were some of the issues raised by the protesters. It is noteworthy that, from the second half of 2012 onwards, corruption had become a prominent issue because of the extensive media coverage of the Mensalão (big monthly payment) scandal (Santos 2017).

President Dilma reacted to street protests by trying to engage governors and mayors in favor of fiscal responsibility, inflation control, political reform and improvement of public services in the fields of education, health and transportation. She also sought to steer street pressure toward pushing the Congress to approve legislative proposals that were unexamined. Because of congresspersons strong resistance, the federal government made little progress.

Thus, among the initiatives effectively carried out, a reduction of 10 billion reais in the 2013 public budget stood out (Singer 2016).

Due to the uncertain political environment fueled by operation Lava-Jato, entrepreneurs' reluctance to invest in production alongside with fiscal tightening and rising interest rates ended up hindering economic growth in 2014, which was just 0.1 %. Against this backdrop, Dilma Rousseff won the 2014 elections with a three-point lead over her main opponent.

Without accepting its narrow-margin defeat, on October 30, PSDB filed a petition to the Electoral Supreme Court (TSE) requesting a "special audit" to determine whether there was fraud in the election results. Shortly thereafter, in December, PSDB filed a lawsuit to the TSE. It had two main goals, namely, to cancel the registration of Rousseff-Temer's candidacy on account of alleged electoral irregularities and to invest Aécio Neves as Brazil's president. What Santos (2017) has called the "coalition of conservative assault on power" was about to be built.

According to Singer, the main explanation for Rousseff's removal from office lies in a shift that took place within two opposing coalitions. The rentier coalition was led by national and international financial capital and comprised the traditional middle class. In accordance with neoliberal prescriptions, that coalition was interested in maintaining a valued national currency and high interest rates. From a geopolitical perspective, the rentier coalition passively accepted the American leadership. In contrast, the productivist coalition was made up of entrepreneurs and industrial workers who defended economic growth, reindustrialization and income distribution.

By taking into account the "correlation of forces", Lula administration managed to act as an arbiter between those two coalitions with the poorest workers. Conversely, Rousseff administration put an end to that delicate balance. She collided with the "rentier coalition" by altering the interest rate policy, nationalizing strategic sectors and cozying up to industrial workers. The existing overlap between financial and industrial capitals as well as the industrial entrepreneurs' preoccupation with the strengthening of workers' bargaining power have engendered a political realignment. The industrial entrepreneurs left the productivist coalition and joined the rentier one (Singer 2016).

Singer (2006) provides a relevant analytical contribution by presupposing the reaction of a strengthened rentier coalition. However, the idea of arbitration by the government, which assumes a political detachment from the two coalitions to keep them in balance, does not seem compelling. Because of its social-developmental economic orientation, the Lula administration did have the "productivist coalition" as one of its political pillars, in spite of the fact that his government made some concessions to the "rentier coalition". In

contrast, Rousseff administration confronted the latter's interests.

On his part, Wanderley Santos (2017) reckons that a broad and heterogeneous coalition launched the "conservative assault on power". The national congress, the Judiciary, the business community and the mainstream media were the main agents of Rousseff's political demise. They were in tune with transnational groups' interests marked by "American hegemony".

Notwithstanding their different perspectives, all the aforementioned scholars identify the rise of a heterogeneous neoliberal-conservative coalition aimed at reverting the progressive policies adopted since 2003. We contend that a better understanding of the domestic political dynamics that preceded the "conservative assault on power" may be achieved by adding Brazilian foreign policy to the analysis.

A few studies that have assessed Rousseff's foreign policy have highlighted her missteps. Cervo and Lessa (2014) point out the reversal of Brazil's position as an emerging power from 2011 to 2014. From their viewpoint, the lack of new driving ideas on foreign policy, state inefficiency linked to the loss of its inducible capacity as well as the weakening of dialogue between government and society are the major causes of that "relative decline". Yet, they notice the continuity of some international initiatives triggered by Lula administration, though without the same vigor. Similarly, Rubens Ricupero (2017) describes Rousseff's diplomacy as discredited and uncreative. He also emphasizes Rousseff's lack of vocation to and interest in international affairs. On her part, Miriam Saraiva (2016) refers to the frosty relations between the President and the Foreign Minister as well as the existence of adverse domestic and international contexts. Rousseff administration was less willing to lead South American integration by virtue of its overwhelming focus on the BRICS.

In a nutshell, the abovementioned scholars call attention to a paralysis or a retreat regarding an active foreign policy. Rousseff's mismanagement, which is linked to political and economic crises, is deemed as the main cause of that setback. Such studies fail to realize that, in the opposite direction, Brazilian foreign policy displayed greater assertiveness on some issues that clashed with Western powers' agenda, notably the one set by the United States. Brazils attempted to dissipate tensions engendered by the Tehran Declaration so as to enhance diplomatic relations with the U.S. That new course of action represented a small shift with respect to Lula's foreign policy.

In March 2011, Barack Obama's visit to Brasilia paved the way for a rapprochement between the two countries. Obama and Rousseff signed several agreements, thereby fostering cooperation in areas of mutual interest such as trade and investment, technical assistance to third countries, educational exchanges and aviation biofuels. In April 2012, Rousseff gave the next step

aimed at constructing a “United States-Brazil partnership for the 21st century” by visiting Washington. In fact, that bilateral partnership would be consolidated with Rousseff’s state visit to the U.S. in October 2013.

The revelation of NSA’s espionage against Brazil led to indefinite postponement of Rousseff’s trip to Washington. The information that Edward Snowden disclosed was quite serious since it involved the tapping of Rousseff’s telephone as well as the communications of Petrobras’ senior executives. From 2014 onwards, Petrobras happened to be the object of the investigations carried out by Lava-Jato operation. In the absence of apologies from the US government, Rousseff not only criticized espionage at the 68th UN General Assembly, but also presented with Germany a draft resolution against clandestine surveillance programs. At last, Rousseff’s trip to Washington occurred only in June 2015 amid the worsening of Brazil’s domestic crises (Ricupero 2017).

According to National Defense Policy and National Strategy of Defense (2012), the core of a development and defense strategies is the coordination between an independent foreign policy and “a robust defense policy”. As Celso Amorim has written, Brazil’s soft power should be strengthened by hard power. There is the need to reinvigorate Brazilian national defense industry with a view to obtaining technological autonomy. “The Naval Submarine Program (PROSUB), the creation of the Army’s Cyber Defense Center (CDCiber) and the acquisition of new air force combat units (the F-X2 project) stand out as net examples of Brazilian military modernization. It is worth noting that the agreements reached with France (2008) and Sweden (2013) for the development of nuclear-powered submarines and for the acquisition of Gripen NG fighters involve the transfer of military technology.

The implementation of national strategy of defense and an assertive foreign policy was based on the assessment that a decentralization of world power was in progress opening the way for an international multipolar system. That prospect would create opportunities for Brazil to develop and project its influence over international politics. At the same time, it would be marked by uncertainty due to fiercer international competition for natural resources (food, water and energy), which Brazil and its other South-American neighbors have enough and should safeguard (Amorim 2016).

The attention given to BRICS by the Rousseff administration coincided with a greater engagement and convergence of positions among the members of that coalition in international security matters. It also contributed to a greater institutionalization of the partnership in the economic sphere. Even though the BRICS countries do not directly challenge the established international order, the adoption of a concerted position has increasingly antagonized Western interests. This is especially true with regard to the discussions at the UN

Security Council on the Greater Middle East.

In 2011, South Africa, Brazil and India held seats, as non-permanent members, on the UN Security Council along with China and Russia. The simultaneous presence of the five BRICS countries rendered possible greater coordination of their position vis-à-vis the debates on Libya and Syria (HAM 2015).

In March 2012, at the end of the Fourth BRICS Summit, which took place in New Delhi, the five nations expressed concern over a possible Western intervention on Syria. They encouraged the solution of the crisis by peaceful means as well as the respect for “independence, territorial integrity and Syrian sovereignty”. The same stance, at odds with Western interests, continued in the following BRICS summits. In September 2015, Russia intervened militarily in the civil war in favor of Bashar al-Assad administration with a view to allegedly combating terrorism. The other four BRICS countries tacitly supported that geopolitical maneuver, as they did not criticize Russia (HAM, 2015).

It is worth noting that those four BRICS had already supported Russian geopolitical assertiveness in Eurasia. South Africa, Brazil, China and India not only abstained from voting on the General Assembly resolution, which criticized the referendum in Crimea, but also opposed the Australian initiative to exclude Russia’s participation in the G-20 Summit in Brisbane. In doing so, they succeeded in undermining the efforts of the Western powers to isolate Moscow internationally. According to Stuenkel (2015), no Brazilian authority condemned the annexation of Crimea by Russia. Brasília intended to preserve internal cohesion within the BRICS so as to ensure Vladimir Putin’s participation in the 6th BRICS Summit that was hosted by Brazil.

That conference among BRICS’ heads of state took place in July 2014. In the Fortaleza Declaration, the five nations condemned “unilateral military interventions and economic sanctions in violation of international law and universally recognized norms of international relations.” They also expressed “deep concern about the situation in Ukraine” and called for “a comprehensive dialogue, the lessening of tensions in the conflict and the restraint of all actors involved” without mentioning the annexation of the Crimea by Russia (MRE 2014). The Western powers interpreted it as tacit support for Moscow’s actions. In analyzing the relationship between the U.S. and Brazil, Peter Meyer (2016) notes that “bilateral ties have been strained from time to time as the countries’ occasionally divergent national interests and independent foreign policies have led to disagreements”. The U.S. officials have been disappointed by Brazil’s positions on Russia and Venezuela.

The Fortaleza Declaration (MRE 2014) also announced the creation of a new development bank (to finance infrastructure and sustainable development

projects) and the establishment of the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (in order to alleviate problems in the balance of payments of the BRICS states and other developing countries). The creation of both instruments represented the first significant step toward institutionalizing financial cooperation among the BRICS. Hence, the five nations not only indicated the failure of the Bretton Woods' institutions to meet their needs (due to the slow pace of internal reforms in the IMF and the World Bank to enable emerging countries' greater participation), but also they started building parallel and alternative structures to those dominated by the western powers (Stuenkel 2015).

At the 6th BRICS summit, a joint session was also held with Unasur's leaders. It allowed China and Russia to forge closer relations with the South-American countries. Furthermore, in Brasilia, President Xi Jinping met with all CELAC leaders, issuing a joint declaration. It announced the official launch of the China-CELAC Forum and the holding of the first ministerial meeting in Beijing, linked to the promise of large loans. Beijing and Moscow have thus increased their presence in the traditional area of American influence (Fiori 2014).

Brazil's outline of an autonomous "grand strategy" as well as the growing geopolitical weight of the BRICS has augmented the challenge to U.S. hegemony. According to the American 2015 National Military Strategy, the so-called "revisionist states" and "violent extremist organizations" (Al-Qaeda and Islamic State) pose the main threats to the superpower's national security. The "revisionist states" would seek to challenge international norms to alter the existing world order. Although that document only cites China and Russia alongside Iran and North Korea, one can infer that the reformist agenda advocated by the BRICS countries regarding international governance is also inexplicitly deemed as a threat. In this context, there are a few signs that the US has nurtured ties with the Brazilian neoliberal-conservative coalition to thwart Brazil's growing international autonomy (Fernandes 2016).

Moreover, the targets chosen by Lava-Jato operation - Petrobras, BNDES, the main Brazilian construction companies and the Brazilian nuclear submarine program - go beyond the neoliberal-conservative coalition's interest in toppling the government on the pretext of waging a crusade against corruption. The return of neoliberal policies, the weakening of domestic cohesion within the Brazilian society and the end of an independent foreign policy are in line with Western powers' intent to obstruct the rise of the BRICS countries, thereby maintaining the existing international order.

In the aftermath of Rousseff's controversial impeachment, Brazil has undergone a major political setback. In the domestic sphere, the Temer administration (2016-2018) has undermined important social policies. That

government froze public spending on health and education for twenty years, tried to narrow the definition of slave labor to benefit landowners, loosened labor laws reducing safeguards for workers, changed pre-salt regulation to favor foreign companies.

On the international scene, that administration claimed that it would render foreign policy less ideological. Broadly speaking, Brazil placed emphasis on trade diplomacy to the detriment of a geopolitical grand strategy and focused on strengthening the ties with traditional partners: U.S, Europa and Japan. Hence, the Temer administration tried to reinvigorate Mercosur-EU negotiations, which have been dragging on since 1995, without succeeding in finishing them. In May 2017, Brazil also formally applied to become a full member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). However, Temer administration encountered resistance on the part of the US to an enlargement of the OECD that would encompass at once six countries, namely Argentina, Peru, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and Brazil.

In turn, Brazil decreased its engagement in the South-South axis while attempting to preserve the relations with important countries on which depend its foreign currency earnings, notably China. Thus, Temer administration carried on Brazil's participation in the BRICS' meetings. Yet, the former objective of overhauling global governance to advance developing nations' interests gave way to less ambitious economic and financial considerations. Indeed, President Temer has mentioned a "truly universalist" foreign policy in a few speeches (Temer 2018). Nonetheless, in those occasions, a universalist approach only has connoted an interest in increasing trade and investment flows. In Africa, the new government simply continued the trend to scale down Brazil's involvement, which was already visible during Rousseff administration.

At the regional level, the Temer administration soured Brazil's relations with left-wing countries such as Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela. At the same time, it struggled to strengthen ties with Pacific Alliance's nations (Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru). That regional bloc adopted a liberal approach aligned with the U.S. agenda for the Western Hemisphere. By disregarding its former engagement in an autonomous regional integration's project, the Temer administration also contributed to undermine Unasur. In April 2018, Brazil suspended its membership of that regional organization alongside Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru. That misstep further downgraded Brazil's regional status.

Instead of a return to what Cardoso administration controversially named as "autonomy through integration", Temer's foreign policy was a byproduct of a serious domestic turmoil that has demeaned Brazil's role in international affairs. Ironically, in May 2017, the Special Secretariat for Strategic

Affairs of the Brazilian Presidency acknowledged that lack of national dignity by means of a situation report. This document indicated the absence of a "strategic and coherent foreign policy" "that goes beyond the attempt to legitimize the new government and reassure international investors. After all, as the document affirms "foreign policy is not pursued in a vacuum" (Kalout and Degaut 2017).

Final Remarks

During Lula administration, the building of a domestic social-developmental coalition in parallel with the international rise of other countries (mainly China and Russia) opened up opportunities to the full resumption of Brazil's quest for international autonomy through the adoption of an assertive foreign policy.

Brazil's emphasis on domestic policies so as to reduce poverty and social inequality gave greater legitimacy and vigor to horizontal cooperation with South-American and African countries. At the same time, the focus on development and the goal of making the so-called global governance more congruent with the ongoing changes in world power distribution encouraged the rapprochement with BRICS partners. At first, the diversification and deepening of ties with peripheral nations increased Brazil's international recognition, thereby widening its leeway vis-à-vis developed countries, especially with regard to the United States. However, ever since Rousseff administration, that situation was reversed due to acute domestic political-economic crises that led to the president's controversial impeachment.

Throughout Cardoso (1995-2002) and Lula (2003-2010) administrations, a contest between the neoliberal-conservative and social-developmental coalitions was consolidated. It later moved toward intense polarization during Rousseff administration (2011-2016). The progressive coalition centered on PT resumed the leading role played by the state to foster economic growth and social wealth distribution. The implementation of a hybrid economic policy, in which neoliberal measures coexisted with social-development initiatives, allowed the Lula administration to maintain a compromise policy that met the interests of different social segments, especially those of the richest and the poorest.

Rousseff's administration altered that orientation through the "new economic matrix", which sought to deepen the social-developmental dimension and abandon a few neoliberal practices, especially with respect to monetary policy. The end of the compromise policy precipitated the neoliberal-conservative coalition's reaction.

The assessment of the competition between the two antagonistic political coalitions allows only a partial understanding of the “conservative assault on power.” A better comprehension of that event may be achieved by situating Brazil’s foreign policy in the geopolitical landscape.

In South America, the end of Argentina’s automatic alignment with the U.S. and Brazil’s resumption of an autonomous foreign policy enabled the inauguration of a “strategic partnership” between the two neighbors, governed by progressive forces, with a view to boosting regional integration. Despite existing divergences, against the backdrop of an increasing power asymmetry between the two neighbors, Brasília and Buenos Aires converged in strengthening Mercosur. The bilateral understanding laid the foundation for the advent of UNASUR. That regional arrangement, with the focus on the establishment of the South American Defense Council, associated with the failure of FTAA negotiations, have contributed to weakening American influence over Latin America.

Notwithstanding the importance of the Greater Middle East in the midst of the war on terror, the South-American region has not lost its strategic relevance to the superpower. Indeed, unlike the common narrative on the paralysis or retreat of Brazilian foreign policy during the Rouseff administration, we have argued that a few initiatives collided head-on with the Western agenda, notably with the U.S. interests. That situation has unfolded in an increasingly competitive international environment among the great powers.

There are already a few indications that the “conservative assault on power” did not only come out of the liberal-conservative coalition’s deeds. The ties of that coalition with foreign capitals as well as the U.S. counter-offensive to regain its ascendancy over the Western Hemisphere and contain the BRICS countries’ revisionism (under the leadership of China and Russia) indicate that Rouseff’s controversial impeachment happened in a wider geopolitical context.

The increase in Brazil’s international autonomy during Lula administration was followed by the political-economic crises that led to the weakening of that countervailing power in Rouseff’s government. That crisis was marked by its predominantly political origin, which produced a deleterious impact on the developmental drive. In being a kind of peripheral power of a relational nature, which is exercised in a specific historical-geographical context, autonomy is not constant nor can be regarded as a permanent feature of Brazilian diplomacy. Brazil’s ability to resist, neutralize or withstand the influence of great powers, especially the one from the U.S., varies in the course of its history. The achievement of a greater degree of autonomy by Brazilian foreign policy from 2003 to 2014 was a transitory circumstance.

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ABSTRACT

Why has Brazil's international influence subsided? From 2003 to 2014, Brazil fostered its socioeconomic development and pursued an assertive foreign policy that raised its international profile. Besides promoting regional integration, with Mercosur and UNASUR, Brazil played an important role in international coalitions such as the BRICS and the G 20. However, those initiatives have lost momentum from 2015 onwards. This paper aims to explain the decline in Brazil's international influence. We hypothesize that Brazil's politico-economic crisis, caused by domestic power struggles and international reaction to its ascent, has weakened its position as an emerging country. International systemic constraints are important, albeit not enough to account for such a setback. A comprehensive explanation needs to take in consideration both geopolitical factors and domestic power struggles.

KEYWORDS

Brazil; Geopolitics; Brazilian Foreign Policy

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