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THE RISE OF BRAZIL
Concepts and comparisons

Christopher Darnton

As Brazil expands its capabilities, how will it act towards neighboring countries, the United States, and extraregional powers, and how do we know? How valuable are security studies concepts, such as ‘rising powers,’ as templates for analyzing Brazilian foreign relations? This chapter critiques the conventional wisdom about Brazil as a rising power, discusses nine alternative concepts in relation to Brazilian foreign policy, articulates problems with the reference groups in which policy analysts categorize contemporary Brazil, and suggests avenues for future comparative research on Brazilian decision-making and on broader regional and global security issues.

The dominant narrative on Brazil in the new millennium frames the country as a rising power, and assumes that this change of status heralds a period of uncertainty about Brazil’s objectives and actions in foreign affairs. In this view, Brazil, historically a backwater behemoth, has successfully established itself as a continental power and has triumphantly begun to march onto the world stage. While transitioning from a local to a regional to a global player, Brazil has marked its progress by building new bilateral partnerships and new institutions, changing not only the distribution of power but also the channels of interaction on economic and defense issues. Broadly, if the 1980s were years of economic crisis and of increasing regional partnership with Argentina (bookended by the 1991 creation of MERCOSUR), and the 1990s involved economic stability and hemispheric engagement and competition with the United States (concluded by the first South American summit, in Brasília in 2000, which eventually led to the creation of UNASUR), then the 2000s witnessed robust economic growth, the creation of new international (and, importantly, cross-regional) organizations such as IBSA and the BRICS, and regular involvement with countries beyond the Americas (a milestone at decade’s end was the May 2010 Turkey-Iran-Brazil nuclear fuel swap accord). As of 2011, as Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff declared at the United Nations General Assembly, “Brazil is ready to take on its responsibilities as a permanent member” of the UN Security Council (Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão 2013).

That story has several authors. For Juan de Onis (2008), a longtime journalist of inter-American affairs, the image is one of an awakening giant, one with massive and newly discovered offshore petroleum deposits. For Larry Rohter, it is one of “Brazil on the rise” (2010). Two volumes by Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães (1999, 2006), who served as secretary-general (the number two position) in Brazil’s foreign ministry during the Lula administration, likewise
suggest a shift from “five hundred years of periphery” to “Brazilian challenges in the era of giants.” And several prominent North American analysts of Brazilian affairs also identify massive, albeit unfinished, transformations since the 1980s. Lincoln Gordon (2001) argued that Brazil was taking its “second chance” at joining the developed world (the first had come in the late 1950s; Gordon served as U.S. ambassador in Brazil in the 1960s); a decade later, Riordan Roett (2010) observed a “new Brazil,” and Albert Fishlow (2011) portrayed Brazil as “starting over” since the democratic transition of 1985. Such claims resonate powerfully in terms of democracy and citizenship, and are useful in terms of sustainable economic development (although they tend to brush over some of the military regime’s accomplishments), but they are more questionable in the area of foreign policy, where Brazil has arguably displayed remarkable continuities (Darnton 2014).

Contrasting analyses

Descriptions of change produce concerns about uncertainty. If Brazil has recently transformed, such that prior track records are not a valid guide, then how can we know how it is likely to act? From a U.S. foreign policy standpoint, is Brazil going to be a reliable partner, or is it likely to thwart the United States when it has the opportunity? A useful starting point is the security dilemma, a fundamental concept in international relations (IR), in which uncertainty over an antagonist’s intentions, in the context of an anarchic world in which one must provide for one’s own security, frequently leads to interpreting even defensive moves as threatening, provoking reciprocal measures that the antagonist likewise finds hostile, leading to an escalating spiral of insecurity (Jervis 1978). However, it is also possible for actors in an anarchic environment to develop reciprocal cooperation, and even create a spiral of mutual security, if they can avoid letting uncertainty turn into fear and mistrust (Wendt 1992; Axelrod 1984).

Recent Brazilian military developments can be interpreted from either of these standpoints. In particular, Brazil is developing more advanced fighter planes (in cooperation with France) and nuclear submarines (with a range of foreign partners, including France and Russia). In terms of doctrine, Brazil is not only enhancing its emphasis on the Amazon (by proposing a new military base and by pledging unconventional warfare in case of invasion), but also labeling its territorial waters and undersea oil resources the ‘Blue Amazon,’ implying an equally vital security priority and sense of vulnerability (Brazilian Ministry of Defense 2008, 2012). Are these defensive or aggressive measures? What, if anything, do they signal about Brazilian security objectives? To the extent that they indicate a higher likelihood of conflict with the United States, is Brasília taking provocative initiatives, or is it reacting to perceived threats from Washington, such as the reintroduction of the U.S. Fourth Fleet in 2008?

For analysts of Brazilian foreign policy, uncertainty tends to breed an unhelpful dichotomy of optimistic and pessimistic interpretations. For instance, a Council on Foreign Relations task force report (2011) offers a rosy (if somewhat patronizing) view, repeatedly emphasizing Brazil’s newfound maturity. This perspective is consistent with a number of Brazil’s major, recent foreign policy activities that seem to reflect a determination to participate within the existing international system rather than to transform it. Former Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim’s dedication to achieving a permanent seat for Brazil on the UN Security Council, along with his emphasis on Brazil as a “soft-power power,” might underscore status quo intentions (Glasser 2010). Brazil’s involvement in peacekeeping missions, most notably its decade-long leadership of the UN’s MINUSTAH operation in Haiti, and its diplomatic efforts at conflict resolution, such as between Ecuador and Peru (and, abortively, between Israel and the Palestinians), might also reflect a pacific stance (Silva 2003).
Conversely, a 2010 monograph by Hal Brands for the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute repeatedly calls Brazil revisionist, and notes the potential for domestic instability and external conflict, short of war, with neighbors and with the United States (Brands 2010). This perspective seems compatible with a number of Brazil’s recent activities. Brazil has worked closely with a number of what U.S. leaders often consider rogue regimes. Brazil’s participation in UNASUR seemed to bolster former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez against the United States. Brazil’s negotiation of a nuclear deal in Iran, alongside Turkey, may have undermined U.S. policy initiatives in the region. And President Dilma Rousseff’s effective cancellation of a planned state visit to Washington, following the September 2013 disclosure of U.S. National Security Agency espionage in Brazil, compounded this image of U.S.-Brazilian opposition. Despite Brazil’s longstanding emphasis on sovereignty and non-involvement, it is increasingly involved in its neighbors’ political and developmental decisions, strategically wielding development loans and Petrobrás investments. Although the 2013 spirit- ing of a Bolivian senator, convicted of corruption in his country, across the border into Brazil may have been the sole initiative of one junior diplomat, it may well have escalated the concerns of Brazil’s neighbors.

These divergent interpretations are common in security studies conversations about other rising powers, where uncertainty over future behavior produces fraught debates. China offers the most acute example. Arguments about whether China’s rise will be peaceful or violent tend to collapse into positive and negative images, with accompanying stereotypes that are patronizing and oversimplified at best, and at worst actively harmful by over-steering policy responses towards either preventive conflict or complacency. If China is either a panda or a dragon, then the policy response is clear, and proponents of one image or the other dismiss their opponents as dragon slayers or panda huggers. North American conversations about Brazil, thankfully, are somewhat more muted, perhaps in part due to less familiarity with Brazilian fauna, but also because Brazil is a democracy and is not a peer competitor, so the perceived stakes are lower.

Broadly, the pessimistic and optimistic interpretations tend to coincide with realist and liberal perspectives on international relations, respectively. Two arguments hopefully illustrate briefly the central debate. First, John Mearsheimer’s *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* explains that states strive to maximize power, to achieve hegemony; states that lack regional hegemony are necessarily revisionists, while those that achieve it become, at least regionally, satisfied status quo powers (Mearsheimer 2001). Here, the long-run probability of violent confrontation between an existing Great Power and its rising challenger is quite high. Conversely, G. John Ikenberry’s *After Victory* (2001) argues that Great Powers are able to lock in the status quo by establishing an international order with constitutional features and by practicing strategic restraint, reassuring potential future challengers, and obtaining their support for the existing system. In this scenario, the odds of violent clashes between rising and declining powers are much lower. Realism and liberalism each encompass a broad and diverse intellectual terrain; some realists surely see opportunities to accommodate or co-opt rising powers nonviolently, while some liberals would note that shifting domestic preferences and coalitions within a rising power might make it more aggressive, irrespective of relative capabilities and superpower policies. However, the central tendency of each school of thought seems to fit only weakly with Brazilian foreign policy and with U.S.-Brazilian relations. Brazil is democratic and capitalist, but hardly subscribes fully to the U.S. vision of regional and global order. Brazil is the largest and most powerful country in South America, but is territorially satisfied. And the United States is a clear regional hegemon, but its recurrent interventions in the affairs of its neighbors suggest a penchant for revisionism rather than system maintenance.
Assessing capabilities

To assess how well the rising power concept fits the Brazilian case, however, a more straightforward starting point would be the question of capabilities. As Paul Kennedy (1989) explains in one of the seminal works on power transitions, achieving and maintaining resource superiority is the sine qua non for Great Power status. Debates on the conceptualization and measurement of power are extensive in security studies, taking into account new forms of leverage and vulnerability during globalization, the quality of troops and weapons, and the mobilization potential of various types of domestic political regimes, among other factors (see Lobell et al. 2009; Baldwin 1989). These are particularly important points for discussing actual war-fighting potential, and for assessing the ability of countries to use their power for particular policy ends, including through coercion. However, for the descriptive question of rising powers, even crude ‘bean-counting’ metrics of national capabilities, like the size of an economy, population, defense budget, or territory, or the number of troops or tanks or nuclear weapons, offer a valuable first cut (Waltz 1979).

Is Brazil really rising? Since 2011 Brazil’s economic progress seems to have stalled, so even if a rising power conversation seemed attractive in the Lula years, it may have outlived its relevance. Massive protests in 2013, triggered by price increases in bus fares and other staples, subsided, but a new wave of demonstrations emerged the following year against heavy government expenditures for the upcoming World Cup (at the expense of domestic social spending, in the eyes of many). Dilma Rousseff won reelection in the fall of 2014, but the ongoing social unrest signals how thin her support base really is, particularly among the middle class rather than among the beneficiaries of the Bolsa Família welfare program, a deeply popular initiative of Lula’s government (The Economist 2014a, 2014b). Although Brazilian economic growth outpaced market expectations in 2012 and 2013, achieving rates of one per cent and 2.3 per cent, respectively, forecasts had been pessimistic to the point of stagnation (The Economist 2014c, 2014d). Although Brazil is not in recession, the high single-digit growth rates of the Lula years are gone, and with them, much of the rationale for discussing Brazil as a rising power. Moreover, inflation too is higher than the government anticipated, suggesting the potential for further protests and calling into question the sustainability of current growth, particularly as Brazil raises interest rates (The Economist 2014e). Still, Brazil may very well recover from this lull and attempt to restore its previous growth rates.

Even so, a long-term examination of Brazilian capabilities relative to the United States and to its neighbors in South America suggests that the ‘rise’ story has been misleading for some time. Not only is Brazil distant from offering a peer competitor challenge to the United States, but also it is not progressively outdistancing its neighbors. Although Brazil now rates as the sixth-largest economy in the world, such rank-order lists can be misleading. An alternative approach, expressing the ratio of Brazil’s economy to that of the United States, or to the rest of South America, effectively rebuts the notion of rising power or of new hegemony. Brazil’s economy in 2012 was a mere eight per cent of the U.S.’s; although this has nearly doubled since the 1960s (when Brazil stood between 4.3 and 4.6 per cent of the United States), it is actually lower than in the early 1980s on the eve of the Latin American debt crisis, when Brazil reached its historic peak of 8.7 per cent of the United States, in 1980.3 Turning to the question of South American hegemony, Brazil weighed in at 105 per cent of the combined economies of the rest of South America in 2012. Although this is clearly predominant, it had also remained fairly static, hovering in the 111 to 126 per cent range for more than 20 years (1991 to 2010), and Brazil’s ratio in 2012 was actually its lowest since 1974. In fact, Brazil’s economy was more predominant in the late 1980s, in the 130 per cent range, peaking at 140 per cent of the rest...
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of South America in 1990. Brazil hit parity with the rest of the continent during 1973–1974; although it has never relinquished this dominance, it has also not demonstrated a recent shift in capabilities that increasingly outpaces its neighbors (and if the 2010 through 2012 trend continues, Brazil might drop below parity with the rest of the continent within two years).

Defense spending and population figures tell a similar story. Since 1990, Brazil has remained around parity with the rest of South America combined in terms of defense expenditure; in the same time period, Brazil’s defense spending has generally fallen between 2.5 to four per cent of the United States. In terms of population, Brazil is clearly growing in absolute terms, having doubled since 1972 to today’s 200 million inhabitants. Even here, though, growth has been slowing steadily, from more than three per cent a year in the early 1960s to under 0.9 per cent in the early 2010s. Meanwhile, the rest of South America has been growing as well: Brazil’s population in 2012 stood at 97.6 per cent of the figure for the rest of the continent, exactly where it did in 1961, more than half a century earlier. Brazil remained between 100 and 103 per cent for nearly four decades (1967 to 2004), but has since lost even that narrow lead. The underlying point is clear: Over the last three decades, it is very hard to argue that Brazil is leaving South America in the dust, let alone catching up to the United States.

Alternative concepts

If ‘rising power’ is a problematic concept with which to analyze contemporary Brazilian roles in world affairs, how might analysts reframe the conversation? Nine alternatives seem potentially promising. One option would be to discuss Brazil as a middle power (Soares de Lima and Hirst 2006). A virtue of this approach is its focus on relative rank, broadly construed rather than short-term momentum – it remains as relevant during a period of economic stagnation as during boom years. However, middle powers are generally understood in niche and multilateral terms (Canada is the paradigmatic case), which fail to capture the scope of Brazil’s activity and ambition (Cooper 1997). Moreover, the middle power model was used repeatedly with reference to Brazil, both under Getúlio Vargas during the Second World War and during the military regime in the 1970s, so it may be too broad to offer much guidance about the policy of democratic Brazil under the Workers’ Party (the PT, Partido dos Trabalhadores, the party of Lula and Dilma) (Selcher 1981; Fox 1977).

A second alternative is to discuss emergence rather than rise. Analysts in the United States and Brazil, however, mean very different things when they label Brazil ‘emerging.’ Collectively, U.S. policy analysts continue to overlook Brazil, especially regarding security issues; Brazil is more likely to be discussed in Foreign Affairs than in International Security, and the attention will be predominantly economic. Broadly, U.S. analysts see Brazil as a BRIC, or in the 1990s term, an ‘emerging market.’ Thus, a Brookings Institution volume in 2009 not only refers to Brazil as an economic superpower, but does so with a question mark – in limited areas like energy, agriculture, or the scope of a particular Brazilian multinational company, Brazil perhaps fights above its weight class (Brainard and Martinez-Diaz 2009). An emerging market is potentially a source of crises, but not of threats; it is a destination for exports or investments but is not a central actor or an equal partner. Alternatively, South American analysts – for instance, in the pages of Brazil’s leading foreign affairs journal, the Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional – tend not to write in terms of rising powers or of emerging markets, but rather of emerging powers or countries (Schenoni 2012; Santos 2011; Barros-Platiau 2010). And emergence, whether of markets or powers, implies an absence of threat (as compared with ‘rising’); it also suggests nascence and newness, thus enhancing the uncertainty. But what if Brazil has, in many ways, already emerged?
Setting aside the terms of ‘power as capability,’ with its focus on rise and decline and tiered rankings, we might turn our attention to four alternative but neighboring concepts. A third option is hegemony. This is a particularly rich concept, frequently used to incorporate dimensions of influence beyond coercion, and dimensions of power beyond brute capabilities, and with these, an implication of possible resistance from below. Hegemony may be useful, particularly in terms of Brazil’s hemispheric relations, both regarding the United States and regarding South America: Even if the capability ratios of the United States to Brazil to South America remain relatively static, such that rise or decline are unhelpful concepts, the exercise of hegemony may offer more fluctuation and thus more fruitful terrain for analysis. Worthwhile research in this vein includes Sean Burges’s monograph on the subtleties of Brazilian regional leadership and Nancy Lapp’s chapter on Latin American pushback against Brazil’s attempts to exercise that leadership (Burges 2009; Lapp 2012). Attention to hegemony suggests a tiered analysis in which power and influence may vary by issue area and by bilateral relationship, and be different between Brazil and the U.S., and Brazil and its neighbors.

Fourth, drawing from international relations realists like Hans Morgenthau (1948) and Robert Gilpin (1981), analysts might shift their focus from power as such to the relationship between power and prestige, to issues of status and recognition. This relates to issues of satisfaction and revisionism, which in the Latin American context have been primarily addressed on the issue of territory, which for Brazil is misleading. Prestige seems particularly apt to capture elements of Brazil’s defense strategy such as the call for its “deserved spot in the world” (Brazilian Ministry of Defense 2008). It has proven a useful move in discussions of other rising powers, as with China (Deng 2008). However, too much of a shift to prestige risks losing sight of capabilities altogether, and becoming a description of the pageantry of international relations rather than an analysis of its underlying forces.

Fifth, a particularly promising development in security studies that deserves application to Brazil is David Lake’s discussion of international hierarchy, with its consideration of suzerains constrained by the need for legitimate authority, and of secondary states subordinating themselves but simultaneously opening economically and lessening their defense burdens by outsourcing them (Lake 2009). Certainly patron-client relations are resonant within Brazil’s domestic political system, and such images have frequently appeared in studies of U.S.–Latin American relations. Hierarchy is also helpful by asking scholars to rethink their images of the international system, not merely of Brazil’s place within it. However, the model of predominance and acquiescence might fit most of the smaller states of Latin America far better than it does Brazil.

Sixth, we might set aside the coercive or competitive overtones of hegemony, hierarchy, and prestige, by discussing soft power. Focusing on the practices of cultural or public diplomacy would explore Brazil’s ability to attract rather than to compel international influence. This might fit much of Brazil’s African outreach, where both Lusophone and postcolonial ties complement not only trade and investment deals, but also military special forces’ training. And it provides a useful template for discussing Brazil’s efforts to project a strategic image or national brand on global platforms like the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games. However, the spectacle of global sporting events often does not translate into soft-power victories for host countries (Manzenreitor 2010). Global attention could also backfire in the event of protests, violence, or infrastructural problems. North American coverage of the sewage content of Rio de Janeiro’s sailing course presages these difficulties, as does International Olympic Committee Vice President John Coates’s April 2014 discussion of Brazil’s construction progress as “the worst I have experienced” and “not ready in many, many ways” (Romero and Clarey 2014; Barnes 2014). As with hegemony, soft power touches on issues of regional leadership, though

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with less conflictual notes (Destradi 2010; Nabers 2010). However, in much of the Americas, Brazilian attraction is dubious, particularly if the ‘Brazilian model’ of development proves less robust and sustainable than it appeared in the 1990s and 2000s. As Leslie Bethell argues, the identity gap between Brazil and its neighbors is broad and centuries old, post–Cold War diplomatic engagement in South America notwithstanding (Bethell 2010). To the extent that Brazil seems like a “leader without followers” in Latin America, soft power might shed little light on its regional interactions (Malamud 2011). Meanwhile, outside the region, Brazilian construction of new partnerships often appears to follow narrowly material or pragmatic interests, hard to couch in soft-power terms.

Three further options bracket, at least initially, the question of power altogether. A seventh move might be to decouple Brazil’s roles by contexts: Rather than considering Brazil’s rise or power across the board, consider separately Brazil’s relations with the United States, its interactions with Latin America, and its extraregional activities. This approach allows analysts to discuss Brazil as a global player, unencumbered by the need to rate Brazil’s power on some universal scale – creative policies deserve creative analysis. Decoupling is also useful for avoiding the teleological narrative in which the global stage largely supersedes the regional one, let alone stapling that transition to a timeline of either economic or political domestic transitions. However, a decoupling approach risks parochializing even further studies of Brazilian foreign policy – discussion of Brazil in terms of power helps connect it to broader conversations in security studies, while piecemeal analysis of intra–South American relations and Brazilian extraregional diplomacy might be of interest only to specialists. Moreover, unless analysts remained attentive to these other issue areas, they might miss synchronized changes – for instance, are there tradeoffs between Brazilian leadership activity in South America and interactions with the United States, or do these escalate in tandem?

An eighth option turns strictly to Brazilian aspirations and identity rather than its capacity or its perception by others. Brazilian statements, including in the 2012 White Book on National Defense, about a global environment of multipolarity might suggest ambition rather than contemporary assessment (Brazilian Ministry of Defense 2012). Although a future orientation makes sense for defense planners, it is a riskier approach for scholars. Comments on the moving target of any country’s contemporary foreign policy might drift from research and analysis into punditry and speculation. In the particular case of Brazil, though, the ‘country of the future’ label, shopworn through generations of political analysis, underscores both the difficulty of accurate prediction and the desirability of newer approaches. Although identity is closely connected to the prestige framework discussed above, considerations of status claims relative to some objective measure of power or prestige seem more firmly grounded than analyses of ambition or self-perception per se. However, a focusing on Brazilian perspectives, on subjective rather than external assessments, would have the significant virtue of turning researchers’ attentions to primary sources, to Brazilian texts and contexts, rather than shoehorning Brazil into international relations templates derived from 19th-century Europe.

A ninth and final approach trades in the change implicit in discussions of rise or emergence for a focus on continuity. Instead of contemporary Brazil as an unknown quantity, it highlights patterns, recurrent longstanding trends in Brazilian foreign policy behavior. Four themes in particular seem to fit a model of continuity: development, conflict resolution, the U.S.-Brazil relationship (or lack thereof), and the organizational politics of Brazilian foreign policy-making. National economic development has been the paramount goal of Brazilian foreign policy for at least a century – even when coups or presidential handovers produce major policy changes, this bedrock does not change. Development is tightly entwined with national security – Brazil’s current defense strategy calls these issues “intimately linked” and
“inseparable” (Brazilian Ministry of Defense 2008). The quest for development is unlikely to go away once Brazil hits a particular level of per capita GDP, and is thus likely to remain a lodestone in foreign affairs. Brazil has been recurrently committed to conflict resolution in and beyond Latin America, going back to its own territorial disputes in the 19th century; although a standard Brazilian narrative depicts the country as intrinsically peaceful, an alternative view would see Brazil’s mediation and peacekeeping efforts in terms of prestige, as a tool to earn and display influence and status. Regarding the United States, rather than regarding the ebb and flow of cooperation and distancing, a continuity perspective might highlight how the United States and Brazil generally do not see one another as a top priority, and thus tend to make foreign policy almost without regard for the other’s preferences. Thus, U.S. and Brazilian policies towards Latin America – and, increasingly, towards extraregional actors, such as Iran – tend to bounce off of one another, creating unintended complications and frustrations for the U.S.-Brazil relationship. Finally, in terms of the process of policy-making, Itamaraty, Brazil’s foreign ministry, has been a uniquely steady hand in decision-making for much of the country’s independent history, a dominance that extended through periods of both civilian and military rule and which is only now beginning to give way to a greater array of governmental and societal actors, such as congress, individual presidents, public opinion, and the PT (Cason and Power 2009; Danese 1999).

Continuity is a story that fits with several works on specific bilateral relationships and issues in Brazilian foreign policy by sidestepping the question of rising powers (Albuquerque 2003). For instance, on the U.S.-Brazil relationship, both Mônica Hirst and Britta Crandall see long-term patterns, even though they reach different conclusions about the likelihood of cooperation and high-level engagement (Crandall 2011; Hirst 2005). Brazilian leaders and scholars have long touted an underlying postcolonial national identity as a consistent driving force behind foreign policy (Lafer 2000; Rodrigues 1962). The emphasis on autonomy, for instance, is a core component of Brazilian strategy, even though presidents have employed different methods in its pursuit (Vigevani and Cepaluni 2009). Continuity, like the other concepts and reference groups, however, has its drawbacks. As in financial markets or meteorology, the best predictor of tomorrow’s conditions is usually those of today. Reliability has a drawback: Although continuity offers precedent and explanation for seemingly puzzling contemporary events, it is likely to underpredict and misperceive major foreign policy change.

Comparisons and conclusions

All of this attention to concepts and framing is not merely semantic: It matters because choices about concepts imply reference groups and outline universes of comparable cases. This is a fundamental issue in comparative politics and international relations, insofar as these are social sciences rather than solely commentary on current events (George and Bennett 2005; Gerring 2001). Brazil’s very diversity of bilateral outreach and institutional involvement muddies the waters of comparison – should it be lumped in with India and South Africa as a rising or middle power; with the G-77, as a developing country or emerging market; with its South American neighbors, through UNASUR and MERCOSUR, as a regional hegemon? And yet each is a partial view, since Brazil uses each, and could readily divest from any (Flemes 2013). To analyze Brazil in terms of hegemony, hierarchy, or prestige might require more creative comparisons – perhaps with France during the Cold War, for instance. Sorting by regime type or ideology rather than capabilities might tell us little about Brazilian foreign policy; although Brazil under the PT can be classed among the Latin American ‘left turn’ governments, and although this comparison group correctly suggests that sovereignty and autonomy will be core
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Concerns in Brazilian foreign policy, it does little to narrow the range of predicted responses to globalization or of agendas in inter-American affairs (Weyland et al. 2010; Remmer 2012; Castañeda and Morales 2008).

Continuity, as a conceptual framework, suggests a particularly intriguing comparison group: Brazil’s own diplomatic history. A number of diachronic, rather than synchronic and cross-national, comparisons might be addressed. Focusing only on Brazil’s rise since the 1980s debt crisis overlooks several previous Brazilian ‘risings:’ the apex of empire in the 19th century, the heyday of the Barón de Rio Branco as Brazil’s foreign minister in the early 20th, the 1950s–1960s democratic developmentalism of Juscelino Kubitschek and Jânio Quadros, and the height of the bureaucratic-authoritarian Brazilian ‘miracle’ in the early 1970s. This offers not necessarily predictability, but comprehension of likely future Brazilian roles: There is a great deal of precedent and parallel for contemporary Brazilian actions. For instance, Brazil’s push for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council predates the UN itself, and essentially goes back to the origins of the League of Nations at the end of the First World War. If some of Brazil’s recent actions seem perplexing or unprecedented – public diplomacy through the World Cup and Olympics, mediation with Iran, or Dilma Rousseff’s exploitation of a breach with the United States for domestic electoral benefit, for example – they may be neither. Emperor Dom Pedro II and his advisors strove to promote Brazil’s image (and soft power, though the term had not been invented yet) through World’s Fairs, Brazilian diplomats sought to mediate the rift between the United States and Fidel Castro’s Cuba in 1960 and 1961, and Jânio Quadros, as the United States recognized, aimed much of his ‘independent foreign policy’ (with its overtones of neutralism) at domestic audiences.

This discussion concludes by suggesting directions for future research to better integrate analyses of Brazilian foreign relations and of security studies more broadly. First, we need more extensive dialogue between studies of Brazilian foreign policy and those of international relations – theories, concepts, and cases should not proceed apart from one another. Especially, rather than just looking at Brazil through a favored lens, let alone atheoretically, or assembling a volume on rising powers or on Latin American foreign relations and including a Brazil chapter, more structured comparative analysis of Brazil with other relevant cases would be valuable, as would collections on Brazil from a variety of analytical perspectives. The richness of Brazilian foreign policy studies is unfortunately often divorced from broader conversations in security studies and international relations. This is not to say that Brazilianists have been atheoretical. However, many of the concepts and debates and thinkers they explicitly engage – e.g., dependency, hegemony, and levels of analysis in comparative foreign policy – are far from the contemporary mainstream in (again) North American security studies. Where major IR theories are explicitly and centrally incorporated, the focus is usually on particular relationships of Brazil’s (with the United States or Argentina, particularly) rather than on the country’s global role. As this discussion has explained, however, some of the predominant security studies frameworks do not fit Brazil that well, or have been applied casually; thus, both sides have much to do.

Second, we need to transcend the easy national and linguistic parochialism of much foreign affairs scholarship. North American analysts would do well to follow Brazil’s massive literature (mostly in Portuguese) on its foreign policy and on international relations, not only for case studies but also for concepts. Also, surely much of the ink on Brazil’s rise or leadership or hegemony is likely to be spilled in Spanish, and neither analysts in Brazil nor in the United States should overlook these insights.

Third, more should be done to unpack the connections between Brazil’s domestic politics and its foreign policy, examining the roles of individual leadership, the rise of congress,
federalism and regional diversity, social movements around environmental, racial, and other issues, and the politics of inequality, recession, and growth.

Fourth, beyond bilateralism or Brazil in global perspective, more attention should be paid to triangular relationships. For instance, as Brazil reacts to a crisis-stricken, post-Chávez Venezuela, how is it incorporating its relationship with the rest of South America, with its global ambitions and projected image, and with the United States? To what extent was Brazil’s involvement in Iran driven by conflict resolution, by its search for prestige as a global player, or by its relations with the United States?

Fifth, both Brazilian and non-Brazilian scholars alike should scrutinize more intensively and extensively the copious documentation produced by the Brazilian state about its own policy behaviors. From what data should we draw conclusions about Brazilian policy causes, objectives, efforts, and results? For instance, what do Brazil’s UN speeches reveal, and not reveal? These texts are important for Brazil, and they are aimed at too many audiences (internal governmental, historical, domestic popular, Great Powers, developing countries, etc.) to dismiss as deception or cheap talk. And how should we untangle the extensive overlap between primary and secondary sources? That is, much research on Brazilian foreign relations has some connection to the Brazilian government (either authored by current or former diplomats, or published by centers like the Alexandre de Gusmão Foundation [FUNAG] or the Instituto de Pesquisa de Relações Internacionais [IPRI]) and is, not entirely coincidentally, often closely concerned with the processes, institutions, and hagiography of Itamaraty and its leading figures.

These suggestions all have a central argument in common: The rising powers framework is initially attractive, but ultimately impoverished. For a clearer understanding of the roots and ramifications of contemporary Brazilian foreign policy, in connection to a broader security studies research agenda, we need to take into account more complexity than just capabilities, while not losing sight of theory and focused comparison.

Notes

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2 See, for example, Gries (2004: 1–4). Contrast for instance the perspectives on East Asian security in Roy (2013) and Kang (2007). Rhetorically, these labels are actually rather weak taunts, since a greater error would be to apply the wrong strategy to the target – i.e., slaying pandas or hugging dragons.


5 This is true more broadly in inter-American relations. See, for example, Mora and Hey (2003: 1–9).

6 On levels of analysis, see Vigevani and Cepaluni (2013: 265–289).

7 On U.S.-Brazilian relations, see Hurrell (2005: 75–90); on MERCOSUR’s origins, see Solingen (1998), Brooks (2005), and Kupchan (2010).

References


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