**The ‘Graduation Dilemma’ in Foreign Policy: Brazil at a Watershed**

**Introduction, by Ana Margheritis**

Brazil attracted international attention in early 2000s as a promising emerging market, a rising power with increasing international leverage, and a key player (potentially, a leader) in international organisations and blocs. High expectations were set in the largest Latin American country, partly encouraged by the popularity of then president ‘Lula’ da Silva who fostered international activism and long-standing regional and global ambitions. At the same time, as Soares de Lima and Hirst (2006) argue, the efforts to both acquire greater international influence and improve the records on poverty, inequality and political participation have been facets of the same process. International expectations were still very high at the beginning of the current decade. However, the global economic crisis, shortcomings in the multilateral system, the falling of global commodity prices, slow national economic growth, corruption scandals, and social protests during Dilma Rousseff’s interrupted administration (2011-2016) cast serious doubts on those initial very auspicious forecasts (e.g. Roett 2010; Mares and Trinkunas 2016; Burgess 2017). Thus, it is not clear whether Brazil has been able to reconcile domestic practice and international foreign policy discourse and ambitions in difficult times and, more concretely, whether and how, despite domestic instability and contestation, Brazil is currently able to effectively influence international negotiations and global governance mechanisms.

The foreign policy record of the last two decades makes these questions particularly relevant. As Brazil has attempted to rise in global affairs, its foreign policy agenda and policymaking process has become more diversified and complex, thus turning the distinctions between old/new, soft/hard and primary/secondary issues less self-evident; it has also exhibited variations in the foreign policy discourse not necessarily linked to changes in administration (e.g., Lustig 2016) and intense disagreements within Brazilian elites about foreign policy goals. Moreover, in the context of contradicting high expectations at home and abroad, modest economic growth (and negative growth in 2015 and 2016), political crises (including the interruption of an elected mandate due to a controversial presidential impeachment in 2016), and social unrest, the country’s prospects for international projection and, more broadly, Brazil’s presumed leadership capacity are now in question.

The contributions in this special edition of *International Affairs* aim at capturing how global and regional aspirations and actual engagements are being shaped by this highly unstable context. Departing from the foreign policy literature mainly focused on major superpowers and systemic variables, we take note of how specific and long-term features processes have shaped the foreign policymaking in this aspiring power, especially since democratization. These include a) the intricate link between the domestic and the international dimensions of the process of national development and the subsequent shift from a largely inward- to an outward-oriented and global strategy of development; b) the increasing (albeit temporary) recognition of Brazil’s global ambitions by other key players in the international system in the last decade, as well as the ensuing scenario of unmet expectations and c) the volatility of courses of foreign policy action --a factor exacerbated now not only by the 2016 political-institutional crisis, which intensifies uncertainty, but also by the fact that foreign policymaking has to be negotiated with a number of actors outside of the Foreign Ministry on a regular basis.

Building upon the literature on power transition in International Relations, our collaboration led to coining the term “graduation dilemma.” This has helped us to create a thread across selected areas of foreign policy and distinguish our contribution from existing works by emphasizing both Brazil’s long-standing search for a higher status in the international arena and the contested nature of those ambitions and strategies today. It also allows us to conceptualise gaining global leverage as a process rather than an outcome, and to observe it in its fluidity and changing nature across policy areas and various faces of power.

While the power transition literature focuses on distribution of power among nations, hegemonic transitions, and systemic changes in world orders (Nye 1990; Lebow and Valentino 2009, among others), we call attention to the transformation of status, roles, and capacities of an individual nation-state with potential to attain a dominant position and underline the domestic factors that shape its agency. At the same time, in contrast to the assumption in some of the literature on rising powers that takes for granted a set goal and a relatively linear path to a higher status and the capacity to achieve the desired goals, we support cautious arguments about a non-automatic translation of growth into capabilities and greater global influence (e.g., Kahler 2013). We also emphasize the tensions surrounding the definition of the foreign policy agenda and actions in the case of Brazil. Thus, we acknowledge the unpredictable path/s that a watershed moment like the present juncture might generate and we explore in detail the domestic-level variables that might shape foreign policy choices. The emerging picture is likely to be one in which the use of material and rhetoric resources combine in diverse bargaining strategies over time and across policy areas, thus leading to degrees of leverage rather than absolutes.

A distinctive feature of our project is that our research opens the black box of the state to investigate the sources of foreign policy formulation and the vicissitudes of implementation and explores the interplay of domestic and international variables. We aim at making a specific contribution to the understanding of how state bureaucratic politics, and domestic politics more broadly, mediate Brazil’s international ambitions and opportunities and, at the same time, condition its agency (i.e., its chances of “graduating”). Although the interplay of both arenas (i.e., domestic and international) has been extensively explored (see Gourevitch 2002 for an overview), in most studies domestic factors tend to be incorporated as secondary or intervening variables, the study of domestic political systems that do not conform to the pluralist model has been neglected, the role of formal institutions is overestimated, and the impact of instability and critical junctures in democratic settings is missing. Therefore, mainstream foreign policy analysis can hardly account for the case of Brazil and other countries in the Latin American Southern Cone (e.g., Margheritis 2010). In the conceptualization we offer here, in contrast, these points are at the core of the analysis and we pay due attention to both formal and informal institutions shaping the politics of selected foreign policy areas, thus going beyond existing studies which emphasize systemic relative material power and/or take note of only a few formal institutional aspects of the policymaking process (e.g., Amorim Neto and Malamud 2015).

Our work also highlights the lack of consensus about the path to graduation. In other words, there are a plurality of expectations about, and contestation of, the definition of the national interest and how to pursue it. There is also a gap between stated policy goals and implementation. We argue that this needs to be examined in order to assess global capacities. Hence, our contribution is both analytical and practical. At the analytical level, we propose a refinement of foreign policy analysis regarding the interplay of domestic and international variables in highly unstable contexts. At the policy level, we provide practitioners with novel insights that allow them to better cope with the uncertainty that instability brings to foreign policy strategies and negotiations.

Following this brief introduction, this special edition presents a detailed elaboration of the concept of graduation dilemma; it explains its main features and potential applicability, serving as an analytical framework for the studies that follow. To further ground and advance the discussion, we propose to examine Brazil’s increasing activism around selected issues in foreign policy, in which there is still more room for projecting the country’s influence in international affairs despite the apparent slowdown of its global rise. Only four policy areas are examined here: international cooperation in education, international migration, trade and government-business relations, and international peacekeeping. They are part of a broader collaborative research project of scholars in the UK, Brazil, and Europe. This small sample does not allow for generalizations, but it illustrates the recent adaptation of foreign policy techniques to new realities and the search for leverage based on soft power, norm diffusion, and better integration of the domestic and international agendas. The four empirical articles included here also show tensions between discourses and actions and suggest the need to examine the correlation between foreign policy ambitions and capacities to effectively implement policy goals and, therefore, avoid futile generalizations about foreign policy as if it were a whole black box. For the same reason, we deliberately avoid including a final, concluding piece. Instead, these contributions represent the initial steps of a work in progress. We hope readers will engage with the invitation to further investigate these issues and expand the debate.

REFERENCES

Amorim Neto, Octavio and Andrés Malamud. 2015. ‘What Determines Foreign Policy in Latin America? Systemic versus Domestic Factors in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, 1946-2008.’ *Latin American Politics and Society*. DOI: 10.111/j.1548-2456.2015.00286.x.

Burgess, Sean. 2017. *Brazil in the World*. Manchester: University of Manchester Press.

Gourevitch, Peter. 2002. Domestic Politics and International Relations.” In Carlsnaes, Walter, Thomas Risse, and Beth Simmons (eds.) *Handbook of International Relations*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 309-328.

Kahler, Miles. 2013. “Rising powers and global governance: negotiating change in a resilient status quo.” *International Affairs.* 89(3): 711-729. May.

Lebow, Richard N. and Benjamin Valentino. 2009. “Lost in Transition: A Critical Analysis of Power Transition Theory.” *International Relations.* 23(3):389-410. September.

Lustig, Carola M. 2016. “Soft or Hard Power? Discourse Patterns in Brazil’s Foreign Policy Toward South America.” *Latin American Politics and Society* 58(4): 103-125. DOI: 10.1111/laps12004.

Mares, David R. and Harold A. Trinkunas. 2016. *Aspirational Power. Brazil on the Long Road to Global Influence*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Margheritis, Ana. 2010. *Argentina’s Foreign Policy: Domestic Politics and Democracy Promotion in the Americas*. Boulder, CO: FirstForum Press/Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Nye, Joseph S. 1990. “The Changing Nature of World Power.” *Political Science Quarterly*. 105(2): 177-192. Summer.

Roett, Riordan. 2010. *The New Brazil.* Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

Soares de Lima, Maria Regina and Mônica Hirst. 2006. “Brazil as an intermediate state and regional power: action, choice and responsibilities.” *International Affairs.* 82(1): 21-40.