

## **A Tragedy of Middle Power Politics: Traps and Contradictions in Brazil's Quest for Institutional Revisionism**

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### **Abstract**

As a pattern, middle powers tend to invest their political efforts in multilateral institutions, as they do not gather enough power assets to fill a 'great-power' identity. Left to their own resources, it is unlikely that middle powers unilaterally change the status quo. Hence, a high degree of compliance to the existing institutional architecture is expected. Brazil stands out as a theoretically challenging case for two reasons: first, it has insistently pledged for deep reforms over the last two decades, be them at San Francisco (SF) or Bretton Woods (BW) institutional realms. Second, Brazil could not so far make such claims in ways that allow reform proposals (for SF and BW) to become reconcilable. This is basically due to the importance the idea of 'coherence' plays to middle-power discursive strategies. In the absence of coercive mechanisms, moral claims and political integrity are the only aspects middle powers may be charged for. Therefore, reforming international institutions to their own benefit may prove incompatible with the strict maintenance of coherent positions and practices over time. In this paper we attempt to show how Brazil might fall prey to its own contradictions, given its 'country profile' and those incongruities between SF and BW global governance platforms.

### **1. Introduction**

New middle powers (such as Brazil, China and India) have become relevant players in the world stage. In the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis, they displayed particularly impressive credentials – countries with large territories and huge populations, responsible for the major part of the world's GDP growth. As their relevance for international politics increases by leaps and bounds, so does their institutional investment. Not only by building coalitions and organizations of their own – middle powers also show considerable interest in those already available international institutional arrangements which conform the backbone of a post-World War II (WWII) international system, such as the United Nations (UN) and the Bretton Woods institutions (the International Monetary Fund – IMF and the World Bank – WB, not to mention a latecomer World Trade Organization – WTO).

As we approach the Brazilian contribution to a shifting international order in the present article, we are interested in the ambivalent dimensions of the so-called emergence of middle powers. Such rise is marked by preening contradictions – and our analytical investment will proceed as follows. Rising powers are not spontaneously welcome in a world politico-economic architecture devised by decaying powers of old (Europe) and by superpowers defunct (the USSR) and in trouble (the US). ‘San Francisco’ (SF) and ‘Bretton Woods’ (BW) are tokens for the two most important international regimes to sustain the international order whose foundations date back to the aftermath of WWII.

We argue that, under given circumstances, those regimes will unavoidably collide, no matter what states attempt to do in order to overcome such a situation. Brazil well exemplifies this trend by way of their efforts to reaching and keeping the status of emerging power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Facing contradictory logics in different institutions and having no already available alternative, emerging countries may fall prey to a tragedy of their own middle-power context – especially dramatic in the Brazilian case. So, the present article approaches the institutional investment of middle powers in a shifting world order, focusing the Brazilian case after the Cold War – a country renowned for its long-lasting respect for international law and order but still fiercely engaged in voicing its criticisms of the current arrangements as well as the pressing needs for encompassing transformation.

After 2008 Brazil pushed forward politically and economically. No longer relegated to the backseat, Brazil and emerging countries have become driving forces in a changing world order, one that saw old European powers crumble in crippling recession and political stalemate in unification processes, as well as an hesitant and overstretched North America. Brazil took the lead in the WTO negotiations regarding services and agriculture, eventually blossoming into the formation of G-20 (co-lead by India) emphasizing access to markets as well as commodity prices<sup>1</sup>. Middle powers also were prominent players in debates on climate change and sustainable development during the better part of the decade.

One of the noticeable offshoots of the rise of (once) middle powers has been their steady pursuit of international legitimacy by an institutional route. Often considered controversial (especially by neighboring countries), their foreign policies have been, during most of the last two decades, carefully funneled through multilateral mechanisms. The investment in public diplomacy in international fora is considered a pivotal device in the context of a new world order. This renewed institutionalism is fueled by the diffusion of domestic norms to third

partners through multilateral institutions (Ramamurti & Singh 2009: 150). This process allows for the flexibilization of such norms in the passage between levels.

Brazilian support for multilateralism is steady in lip-service and policymaking. Brazil successfully made its transition to post-Cold War globalization according to an ‘inward’ perspective rather than adopting a clear-cut ‘openness’ (Jain 2006: 103). Such inwardness (ranging from the provision of anti-AIDS/HIV pharmaceuticals to basic income programs and fighting poverty) was eventually ‘exported’ to global settings. However, contradictions abound: such flexible, ‘ad hoc’ multilateralism poses a threat to the robustness of international regimes such as SF and BW. More than a passing possibility: ‘...the transition from the waning to the emerging global order is clearly proving tricky’ (Wade 2011: 365); ‘...in the next decade or so, we are likely to see repeated stalemates in global multilateral forums’ (Ibid.) as shown in 2012’s UN-organized Rio+20 conference on sustainable development<sup>ii</sup>.

Brazil (and other emerging countries) is prone to such strategies because it can employ the rhetoric of pluralism against the background of Western-centrism in international institutions. Such pluralism would be not only sounder, but able to accommodate local dynamics (with their contradictions). In this moment, our article stresses that Brazil and emerging countries bear contradictions of their own by adopting such a legitimizing strategy. ‘Pragmatic pluralism’ in the international realm associated with ‘flexible multilateralism’ is also a salient ‘soft power’ device. Sometimes emerging countries employ such strategy not to being mistaken for ‘aggressive rising powers’ (Li 2009: 220). They only seldom confront directly the US, preferring to dissipate tension through more fungible – and fusible (Claude 1956) – wires of international institutions (MacKinnon & Powell 2008: 206). Successful investment in modalities of multilateralism created good neighborhoods where benign interaction (Blank 2010: 35) takes place and builds a new divide setting middle powers and their surroundings apart from and less prone to interventions by Western powers.

The continuous engagement in multilateral institutions allows rising countries to appease the demands of fearful neighbors and also opens a window of opportunity for co-opting the latter (Ibid: 52). Co-opting strategies include strengthening regional institutions (in the Brazilian case, Mercosul and Unasul), pushing for more robust normative frameworks. The same trend pervades South-South cooperative arrangements (for Brazil, in Latin America and Africa). Aid to development, technical cooperation and humanitarian assistance are relevant parts of ‘flexible multilateral’ strategies (Kurlantzick 2007: 155). Brazil employed all those techniques

in an overall framework as it has headed the UN's peace operation MINUSTAH in Haiti since 2004. Apart from legitimacy, emerging countries' claims have resonance because they are displaying ability to provide, up to some level, international public goods sorely needed during crises (Chari 2010: 07).

So, the present article approaches the institutional investment of middle powers in a shifting world order, focusing on the Brazilian case after the Cold War. In the following five sections we develop the Brazilian case in a changing international institution chessboard. The next section ('Middle Power Politics') provides some theoretical reference for our analysis. Section 3 ('Nuts and Bolts of Global Governance') briefly reviews the political agendas and roles played by SF and BW arrangements over history, as well as the logics by which they function. Then, 'Foreign Policy Grand Strategies During and After the Cold War' assesses Brazilian foreign policy grand strategies, especially in the last two decades, to demonstrate how this country incurred controversial and even contradictory behavior to assure its aspirations, as it has recently had acknowledged its prominence in the world. Section 5 ('Evoking the Main Hypothesis') recalls the hypothesis of incompatibility between SF and BW platforms for the purpose of delivering inclusive and efficacious global governance, and besides how Brazil contradicts its own diplomatic tradition on its moves for institutional revisionism. Eventually, the final section considers 'A Tragedy of Middle Power Politics?'

## **2. Middle Power Politics**

The behavior that stems from Brazilian foreign policy in the last couple of decades may be neatly described as *middlepowermanship*, a term that refers to the tendency of middle-powers "to pursue multilateral solutions to international problems, their tendency to embrace compromise positions in international disputes, and their tendency to embrace notions of 'good international citizenship' to guide their diplomacy" (Cooper et al 1993). Robert Keohane, in what is possibly the first scholarly account of middle powers in world politics, defines such countries as *system-affecting* ones, as they 'cannot hope to affect the [international] system acting alone [but] can nevertheless exert significant impact on the system by working through small groups or alliances or through universal or regional international organizations' (1969: 295). In the absence of abundant material capabilities, a country will rely on reputational goods and well-established legal frameworks as a means to

reach the best outcomes in international relations, as well as to protect itself from the outside world – an IR perspective somewhat inspired by Hugo Grotius and his school of thought, known as ‘rationalists’ or ‘Grotians’.

Behind this line of reasoning, there might be a bet on the effective role of regulation played by international regimes, as long as they are believed to matter and influence international behavior by providing ‘selective incentives’ (Olson 1965) for a country to resort to multilateral institutional solutions rather than ‘*ad hoc*’ unilateral policies. By placing emphasis on institutional power instead of military and economic assets, Brazil assumes international institutions to function as proxies to ‘raw power’ disputes. It can work as a formula to borrow international prestige without incurring the risks and costs involved in ‘great-power politics’.

A country like Brazil will manifest strong preferences for multilateral arrangements and collective decision-making processes as it proves an efficient way for burden-sharing and countering hegemonic intentions. There has always been in Brazilian foreign policy a deep sense of mistrust in regard to European colonial powers and, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, the United States (Feldman 2009). To assure Brazil’s political independence and territorial integrity, Brazilian diplomats have often stressed the importance of a coherent multilateral diplomacy, on practical as well as on discursive grounds. In this sense, a peaceful diplomatic orientation could be rendered as ‘niche diplomacy’, a problem-solving approach based on sheer calculation, not an ideologically or morally-driven (Kantian) formula, that applies to controversies that would not be tackled otherwise. To paraphrase a quotation from San Tiago Dantas (a former Minister of External Relations in Brazil), in the absence of exceeding levels of material power, stability of principle becomes the strongest weapon of those militarily weak (Dantas 2011).

Reputational assets have therefore been the cornerstone of Brazilian foreign policy well before the country became a middle power. The shift from a purely diplomatic discourse to a more consistent set of practices, however, has arguably taken place in the last decade. For the first time, Brazil has made use of its credibility and quasi-universal empathy in the context of multilateralism to consistently push its interests forward and maximize ‘soft’ power attributes. In previous attempts at going global, the country was either too feeble and powerless (therefore falling short of having a say in world politics, such as in the case of Brazil’s participation in the League of Nations), or too suspicious of international governance

(therefore shying away from a greater engagement with the United Nations in the 1970s and early 1980s). The last decade saw the country pursue a more active diplomacy in various fields, including in matters of international security, making use of soft power as its primary foreign policy tool (Pereira 2011).

A look at the current Brazilian experience is revealing of the behavior of middle powers. Following the constructivist argument advanced by Alexander Wendt, they are not defined solely by their material capabilities, but rather (and most importantly) by the perceived role they play in global affairs – or their social identities (Wendt 1995). Rather than a straightforward label, *middlepowermanship* presents itself as a constructed concept, embedded in social structures that exist in practices and processes. That is why one must not just look at what countries say or have (in material terms), but at what they do. In the case of middle powers, they have historically placed multilateralism at the top of their agendas, and have usually adopted a cooperative stance toward international regimes and institutions. Brazil's activism in the realms of the WTO, the environmental and non-proliferation regimes, or peacekeeping operations (PKO) are good examples of how these identities ultimately shape behavior in world politics.

Whereas the constructivist approach to middle powers is a positive one, in the sense that it sees their behavior as the product of shared worldviews and identities, a realist understanding of *middlepowermanship* portrays multilateral activism and institutional engagement as a means to downplay the global supremacy of the US. In the backdrop lies a profound dissatisfaction with the unipolar structure of the international system. One may hence interpret the institutional strategies of middle powers as an attempt at balancing against America. If, according to Robert Pape, a direct confrontation with the world's only superpower may prove 'too costly for any individual state and too risky for multiple states operating together' (Pape 2005: 9), then countries may resort to soft-balancing measures, that is, 'actions that do not directly challenge U.S. military preponderance but that use nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral U.S. military policies' (Ibid: 10).

There seems to be a close link between the behavior of middle powers within international institutions – and towards one another – and such attempts at countering America's preponderance. Stephen Walt's definition of soft-balancing describes it as 'the conscious coordination of diplomatic action in order to obtain outcomes contrary to U.S. preferences – outcomes that could not be gained if the balances did not give each other some degree of

mutual support' (Walt 2005: 126). Since this is a broader concept, which encompasses not just U.S. military policies but preferences by and large, it seems particularly useful to explain cooperative efforts between middle powers in nonmilitary arenas, and seems quite evident when linked to multilateral strategies.

But what may lead middle powers to soft balance against the US? In the words of Walt, this strategy can have at least four objectives. First and foremost, states may balance so as to increase their ability to stand up against US pressure – in political, economic, or military terms. Secondly, soft balancing comes at times as a way of improving states' bargaining position in international negotiations, be it related to a discrete issue or to broad institutional arrangements of global governance. Third, balancing may function as a warning to the US that it cannot rely upon the compliance of other countries. Finally, it may also operate as a means to become less dependent on US protection and aid, allowing for some states to chart their own course in world politics (Ibid: 127-129). While all goals seem to make sense when looking at the behavior of middle powers in global affairs, the second one embodies the institutional strategy usually favored by such states, and the fourth one deals with the quest for autonomy – which is also a key aspect of middle power politics in general.

Regardless of the theoretical standpoint one adopts to understand the role middle powers play in international relations, there seems to be a conceptual common ground that may be summarized as follows: (1) historically, middle powers had no special place in regional blocs during the Cold War, but they were closely linked to the process of international organization (Cox 1996: 245); (2) middle powers support the goals of international peace and security because they are ultimately interested in a stable and orderly environment (Flemes 2007: 10); (3) they try to build consensus around multilateral issues, such as non-proliferation or environmental protection, as a means to overcome their lack of material capabilities (Ibid: 11); finally, (4) they base their demands in international institutions on a discourse of global justice and democratic multilateralism (Ibid: 24).

The bottom line of the behavior of middle powers is thus the engagement in global governance. Their diplomatic narratives, especially in recent decades, have been built around the idea of international organization and the regimes that stem from institutional cooperation. Being an inseparable aspect of middle-power politics, it is now time to move to an examination of how global governance mechanisms were conceived of, and how these intermediate states have paved their way into such institutions.

### **3. Nuts and Bolts of Global Governance**

#### *3.1. San Francisco (UN System)*

The adoption of the UN Charter on October 24<sup>th</sup> 1945 gave birth to a complex system of intergovernmental agencies as an attempt to prevent another world war from happening. This system is headed by the United Nations (UN), an international organization (IO) designed to tackle the problems that had led the League of Nations (LON) into utter failure. The UN was founded by 51 member states. A decade later, it had already reached 76 members. The following jump was even more impressive: as an outcome of the decolonization process (which the UN helped catalyze), it could count 144 members in 1975 – almost twice as many participants as in 1955. The expansion went on and on, despite some pressures not to admit a few states as UN members. In its fiftieth anniversary (1995) the UN gathered no less than 185 members. Almost seven decades since its founding, the UN can claim the status of a ‘semi-universal’ membership, totaling 193 members. And what is more, there has never been a UN member permanent withdrawal from the institution. The only case of temporary withdrawal of a member state was Indonesia’s, which after announcing it was leaving the organization on 20 January 1965, returned to the body in 28 September 1966 (UN 2010).

The UN has accomplished the goal of transforming the otherwise reluctant US – a hegemon of the postwar order – into a member state. The UN institutional design benefited from learning with historical experience. Two key factors seem to explain why the UN has become more successful than the LON (1920-1946), especially when it comes to geographic representativeness. The first was the creation of a political body (the UN General Assembly) designed to contemplate all states recognized as such by the international community. This premise of strict equality among states implied express recognition of the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs of other states, besides the application of the ‘one state, one vote’ principle over issues discussed within the scope of the UN General Assembly. This was perhaps the most important institutional innovation represented by the advent of the so-called *San Francisco Organization*.

The second decisive element for UN survival and increase of global coverage over time seems to be the composition of its Security Council (UNSC), the body directly entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining peace and security in the world. Instead of restricting its membership to Europeans (along the lines of the LON after 1933, and before that, the Holy Alliance from 1815 to 1825), the new Council proved able to contemplate by way of its

mechanism of permanent representation three continents (America, Europe, and Asia) and after all did not neglect Africa and Oceania, although on a non-permanent basis. Furthermore, UN goals as stated by the Moscow Declaration (1943) envisaged a generalist (subject-wise) and quasi-universal (membership-wise) IO, conceived to embracing all ‘peace-loving nations’ in the world (Lopes 2012). In addition to institutional improvements and the steep rise of UN member states in recent history, Nagendra Singh (2003) notes at the UN Charter an attempt to purge it [the UN] from all ethnocentrism that marked the LON’s experience. The UN Charter brought provisions that would mitigate this trait, such as the principles of ‘peoples’ decolonization’ and ‘political independence with territorial integrity of member states.’ Those changes in UN legal texts and political practices were guided by the need to expand the concept of ‘international community’ in order to attract more states to remain under the UN institutional umbrella.

At the time of the UN foundation, Brazil had been seriously considered to take a permanent seat at the UNSC, because of its relevant participation in WWII as an official US ally since 1942, and as a member of *the United Nations* (the war alliance, not the formal organization) (Garcia 2012). Brazil’s participation in war was primarily naval, although it did send a regiment to the Western Front. The navy and air force have had a role in the Battle of the Atlantic after mid-1942, but more importantly, Brazil contributed with an infantry division that entered combat on the Italian Front in 1944. Notwithstanding, by the time the world was being reconstructed in the aftermath of war, Brazil did not reap what it had allegedly sown, what can be told in light of the failure of its diplomatic campaign to grab a seat at the UNSC even now, more than six decades after the decisions made in San Francisco (Vargas 2009). Unsurprisingly, that moment of Brazilian diplomatic history (the 1940s) is currently known as the ‘*unrewarded alignment*’ (Moura 1982).

Briefly speaking, when the UN was still being thought of, namely at the high-level conferences that happened before the one in San Francisco, a regionalistic approach toward UNSC membership gained momentum as the proposal of granting Brazil a permanent seat at the Council has been openly supported by U.S. President F.D. Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull (Garcia 2012). By 1944, it was not clear yet which would be the new ‘guardians’ of the emerging world order – the US, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union... *Who else?* If a regionalistic criterion were to have conquered hearts and minds, Brazil would have probably been included as a UNSC founder and permanent seater, inasmuch as it was the most important South American ally of the U.S. in 1945 (not to mention that Argentina

was raising concerns due to its proximity with the Axis countries in and after WWII, and should be balanced and even contained by Brasília).

However, the prospects that Brazil would serve as a regional watchdog and unconditional ally to the US provoked negative reactions both in the UK and USSR diplomatic personnel. That move was interpreted as an American maneuver to double its voting weight at the UNSC, as Brazil was expected to replicate American positions. It is arguable that the UK – a decaying empire then – feared being overshadowed by an emerging South American country, and the USSR did not want the US to have majority control of the votes in the Council. In the end, a regionalistic approach was replaced by the argument in favor of having great powers in the lead, because they would theoretically be better equipped (by military and economic rankings) to bear the burden of maintaining peace and security around the world. The US delegation let it go. No sooner than June 1945 had the UNSC defined its permanent membership: the countries to take the five seats were great powers (US, Soviet Union) and ‘quasi’ or ‘had-been’ powers (China, France, UK). The regional formula was first rejected then abandoned (Garcia 2012; Vargas 2009). Veto power, an instrument whose legal status and scope was not fully settled in the UN early years, soon became a practical reality. Brazil, in spite of almost having become the sixth permanent member at the UNSC foundation, did not and probably will not get the slot any time soon, given its regionally-grounded middle-power profile.

### *3.2. Bretton Woods (GATT/WTO, IMF and the World Bank)*

The WTO is a legitimate heir of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), an international regime that was formalized on 30 October 1947, in Geneva, when 23 countries have signed a treaty on tariffs and trade which came into force in the following year. The growth in number of member states was rampant – at the end of the 3rd round of negotiations in 1951, the agreement had already 38 accessions. In 1967, after the Kennedy Round, 20 years after the establishment of GATT, there were 62 states taking part in talks on international trade liberalization. Just about a decade later, in the end of Tokyo Round (1979), 102 formal members had joined the regime. The Uruguay Round, well known for hosting the act of creation of WTO, had at its end 128 members. And today, already under the aegis of the WTO, one can count 159 full members and approximately three dozen other states claiming their ‘tickets’ to enter the institution (Hoekman and Mavroidis 2007, WTO 2013).

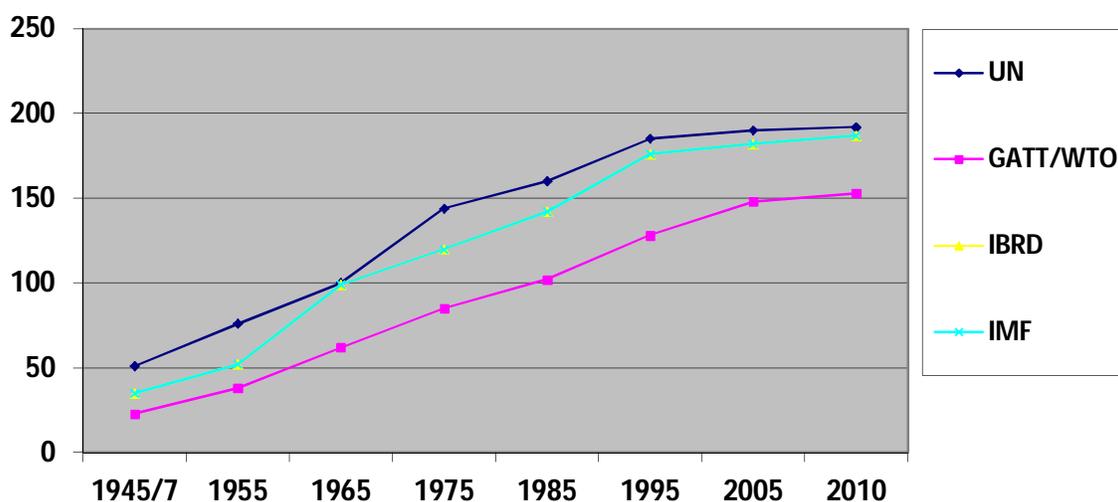
Founded on December 27, 1945 – as institutional developments of the Bretton Woods Conference (July 22, 1944) – IMF and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development-IBRD (from 1960 on, the main organ of the World Bank Group) held 35 members at the foundation. Due to a ‘joint membership rule’ (one state could not take part in only one of the banks, but in the two of them), the membership of both IOs has evolved in parallel, despite their differences in terms of scope and political strategies (Woods 2006; Pereira 2010). By 1965 some 100 countries had been admitted as members of those multilateral banks. At the end of the Cold War, a new intense flux of admissions, mostly of Eastern European countries, made the number of members skyrocket to 170. Today, 68 years after their entry into force, the IMF and IBRD gather 187 states, not to mention those states which, although not being formal members yet, take part in some processes the two institutions happen to carry out (IMF 2013; World Bank 2013; Vreeland 2007).

According to Ruggie (1982), the GATT was one of the pillars for the BW institutional tripod (alongside the IBRD and the IMF), whose implicit goal was to instill liberal contents in international economic relations after WWII. The US and Western European countries (the USSR did not join IMF and the WB when they were founded) sponsored the creation of IOs whose mandate involved liberalizing trade and finances and preventing serious balance-of-payment crises in major debtor states, thereby setting the levers of governance for a powerful economic governance machine. The concept of ‘embedded liberalism’ (Ibid.) relies both on an abstract element (the wide acceptance of ‘liberal virtues’ in Western countries) and the institutional structures of coercion (mainly represented by the BW institutional tripod). Two other functions of that institutional arrangement would be to spur international trade flows and assure that WWII debts would get paid one day, given that military victors coincided with economic creditors (Nasar 2012).

By the time Bretton Woods Conference was held in the US, Brazil was still an agrarian country trying to make its way into modernity. In fact, it was a highly indebted nation whose economy was reliant on primary-sector activities and commodity exports after all. Under the aegis of ECLAC-biased ‘developmentalist’ economic thought (which meant an option to prioritize internal market dynamics and the so-called import-substitution orientation instead of becoming an export-led economy), South American countries aspired to break the ‘center/periphery’ structural ties and confront economic *status quo* – seen as quite unfavorable to the poorest.

In the aftermath of WWII, Brazil was much closer to qualifying as an international receiver of donations and a candidate for loans than as a country with interests at stake in the global financial architecture. Contrary to what would happen in San Francisco in 1945, in the economic realm the Brazilian government used to position itself as an underdog with no consistent bid or role to play but to follow the capitalist paymasters (of course, with the US taking the lead). Apart from vested interests from a few industrials, bankers, economists, and diplomats (but hardly from incumbent politicians), Brazilian civil society could not properly realize what was going on in Bretton Woods, nor in Havana or Geneva (Farias 2012). Such peripheral participation in drawing the lines of a global economic governance scheme – which eventually proved to be a most powerful economic leverage tool – is a precondition to fully grasping how Brazil became under-represented and marginalized within the ambit of BW institutions over the decades. Yet to make things worse, Brazil (and Latin America as a whole) has never been contemplated by a Marshall Plan or the like, what certainly help explain why the expression ‘unrewarded alignment’ so well translates the Brazilian foreign policy for the postwar period.

**CHART 1: Comparative evolution of membership in UN, GATT/WTO, IMF and IBRD (1945-2010)**



Source: UN (2013), WTO (2013), IMF (2013), World Bank (2013).

#### **4. Foreign Policy Grand Strategies During and After the Cold War**

Brazilian foreign policy has undergone deep change in the last two decades. After the Cold War, Brazil is allegedly combining its prudent pacifist orientation with a more proactive behavior in world affairs. Under Presidents Cardoso (1995-2002) and Lula da Silva (2003-2010), Brazil has adopted a more prominent political profile, taking the lead of many initiatives regarding security and economic agendas, both in regional and world scales. Under many different aspects the country fits into status-quo middle-power diplomatic style.

Brazil has faced structural reforms in the 1990s, what transformed the country from a Latin American economic laggard into one of the most promising emerging markets in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Social policies recently implemented have spurred internal market growth, raising the levels of consumption and attracting additional foreign investment. Once an industrial latecomer, Brazil has now a sophisticated industrial park, not to mention its very much developed financial and banking sectors. Highly mechanized agriculture is now responsible for Brazilian enormous balance-of-trade surpluses.

From the 1990s on, there has been a brand-new emphasis on the processes of regional integration (with an undeclared but still noticeable quest for South American leadership) (Burgess 2008). Besides, Brazil has become one of the leading actors in contesting hegemonic patterns of political authority within international institutions such as the WTO, the IMF and the UNSC.

When Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the Workers' Party won the presidential race in November 2002, many sectors of the Brazilian society expected an unprepared president leading a left-wing government (Vizentini 2011) in difficult times, both at home and abroad. Domestically, inflation was on the rise, economic growth was minimal, and President Cardoso was living his 'lame duck' days, with feeble political support and a deadlocked agenda (Couto and Abrucio 2003). Externally, the launching of the War on Terror in the wake of the 9/11 attacks had diverted the global agenda away from trade and development issues, which were the backbone of Brazil's foreign policy (Barbosa 2002). Moreover, the dramatically continuous downturn of the Argentine economy was worrisome for Brazilian interests, inasmuch as it put regional integration into jeopardy (Carranza 2003).

Foreign policy has therefore been used to creatively tackle some of the setbacks of the early 2000s. Combined with orthodox economic policies, it has helped boost Brazil's foreign trade

and investments and ultimately overcome mistrust towards the former metal worker and union leader. Moreover, in association with ambitious social programs and showing an unprecedented activism, diplomacy has been used to take Brazil to a whole new level in the world stage. ‘Change’ was, at least in foreign policy matters, the tone of the new administration (Vigevani and Cepaluni 2007). While Almeida (2004: 162) underlines that diplomacy is ‘the strand of government activity that better reflects the old proposals and the traditional guidelines of the Workers’ Party’ at the outset of Lula’s first term, Lima and Hirst (2006) add that ‘the inclusion of the social agenda as a major topic of foreign affairs’ was an important innovation that also reflected this unique political approach.

If it is true that some of the principles that guided President Lula’s foreign relations had already been evoked by his predecessor Cardoso some years before, they assumed a new face under the Workers’ Party government, with a whole new conceptual emphasis (Almeida 2004). The idea of diplomatic activism, transcending the rhetoric and symbolism behind Brazil’s reputation abroad and within international institutions, was introduced by foreign minister Celso Amorim, according to whom the country would not ‘shy away from an engaged protagonism, whenever there is need to defend the national interest and the values that inspire us’ (Amorim 2011a: 14).

Far more striking, however, was the weight given to the aim of making the international system ‘effectively democratic’, so that the country’s foreign relations could be used to improve the quality of life of the Brazilian people. The goal of promoting development through diplomacy was not new at all, and neither was the will to transform the system of states. Very similar versions of this discourse could be found in the ‘independent foreign policy’ of the late 1960s or in the ‘responsible pragmatism’ of the mid-1970s (Gonçalves 2011). Strategies were nonetheless different. First of all, it was necessary to ‘strengthen the elements of multipolarity of the international system’, towards which the forging of an alliance with emerging countries, as well as with African nations, was paramount. Secondly, it was indispensable to make South America – the administration’s declared priority – ‘politically stable, socially just and economically prosperous’ (Ibid: 15). Finally, it was crucial to ‘[r]estore confidence in the United Nations’, a goal for which Brazilian foreign policy would ‘defend the enlargement of the Security Council with the inclusion of developing countries among its permanent members, so as to reinforce its legitimacy and representativeness’ (Ibid: 16).

But bringing democracy to the international system also involved making foreign policy more transparent, in consonance with popular expectations. This passage is particularly telling: ‘Foreign policy is not just a responsibility of Itamaraty, or even of the government. It involves the society as a whole. In order to define the national interest in every concrete situation, I will reinforce coordination with other governmental branches and with all social sectors – workers, businesspeople, intellectuals – as well as with entities of the civil society’ (Ibid: 13).

In sum, we may posit that the new government’s aspiration was to drive the country towards a more prominent international role, so that it could become a ‘global player’ in world affairs. To achieve this, President Lula adopted a strategy of ‘autonomy through diversification’, through which the country would adhere to ‘international norms and principles by means of South-South alliances, including regional alliances, and through agreements with non-traditional partners (China, Asia-Pacific, Africa, Eastern Europe, Middle East, etc.), trying to reduce asymmetries in external relations with powerful countries’ (Vigevani and Cepaluni 2007: 1313). While this strategy did not preclude the one that had prevailed the decade before – the so-called ‘autonomy through participation’, oriented by values and towards the participation in international (liberal) regimes (cf. Vigevani, Oliveira and Cintra 2003) – the predominantly ‘Grotian’ approach to world politics was replaced by a more ‘realist’ one. It meant that economic pragmatism and political nationalism began playing a greater role than the Western and liberal values which had triumphed immediately after the Cold War. Such realism could be observed in at least three situations over the Lula administration: the forging of strong alliances in the developing world, especially with middle powers, such as the IBSA Forum (Oliveira, Onuki and Oliveira 2006; Vieira and Alden 2011) or the BRICS initiative (Flemes 2010); the proactive role at the Doha Round of the WTO, using the G20 coalition as a bargaining platform (Carvalho 2010) to further the country’s economic interests; and the strategic relationship with developed nations, most notably with the US, which reached unprecedented levels of importance and maturity (Pecequilo 2010).

The first situation represents what is commonly known as ‘South-South diplomacy’. It has a deep connection with previous attempts of Brazilian foreign policy at garnering political influence and support among ‘non-traditional’ partners in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Under Lula, South-South cooperation was taken to a whole new level, furthered by an intense presidential diplomacy. The President himself has paid no less than 31 official visits to African countries, and has been to nine Middle-Eastern nations in his eight years in office (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2010). In Africa, with a rhetoric based on an alleged ‘moral debt’

Brazil carried with the continent, Itamaraty decided to focus on regional development, on initiatives of bilateral or regional cooperation, and on Brazilian direct investments (both private and public) (Saraiva 2010). Portuguese-speaking countries, such as Angola, Mozambique, and Cape Verde, received special treatment for cultural but mainly strategic reasons. South Africa, on its part, has become a privileged partner in terms of technological, economic and political cooperation. The trilateral partnership between South Africa, Brazil and India, the IBSA initiative, was able to coordinate policies in strategic areas, such as trade and security, and was acknowledged by Western powers as an important bloc of regional leadership (Vieira and Alden 2011).

In the Middle East, Brazil has shown a two-pronged strategy. With countries such as Syria, Libya, and Iran, there was a clear intention to boost the political and economic potential they had to offer. Politically, they were understood as key partners – not only in terms of raising Brazil's geopolitical stakes in the Middle East, but also considering eventual support to a permanent seat in the UNSC. Economically, they were formidable emerging markets and a natural destination for Brazilian exports (Amorim 2011b). The second part of the strategy had to do with the long-standing regional conflicts and tensions. President Lula expressed many times his will to do his part in helping advance the deadlocked Israeli-Palestinian peace process, as it became clear in his trip to Middle East in March 2010. A couple months later, the President and Foreign Minister Amorim went to Tehran to broker, together with Turkey, a nuclear deal with Iran. While Brasilia and Ankara considered the agreement 'a potential breakthrough', the initiative was not well received worldwide, insofar as it frustrated a new round of sanctions against Iran at the UNSC (Vieira de Jesus 2011).

When it comes to China and Russia (especially to the former), Brazil has adopted a pragmatic discourse, founded on the prospects for increasing bilateral trade and on the political relevance of the emerging powers. Indeed, trade with China rose sharply during the Lula years, and the Chinese had become Brazil's most important trade partner by the end of the decade (MDIC 2011). This was made possible mostly due to the recognition of the People's Republic as a market economy in 2004. In political terms, due to its lack of material capabilities, Itamaraty has decided to invest in weak institutional strategies such as the BRIC group – now BRICS, with the inclusion of South Africa in late 2010 – with the goal of reducing the maneuvering room of American foreign policy in global affairs. This soft balancing strategy was aimed at increasing, 'if only by a margin, the degree of multipolarity in the world', as Celso Amorim put it (Hurrell 2008).

If IBSA and BRICS are the political fronts of this strategy (Lima 2010), both financial and trade G20 groups represent, at the multilateral level, the economic side of Brazil's rise (Oliveira 2005). The absence of permanent allies has even led Brazilian scholars and diplomats to devise a whole new concept that describes the country's behavior abroad: the building of *coalitions of variable geometry*. While such groups have first appeared on the early WTO negotiations, they have grown in number and importance, crossing issue-areas and institutional boundaries. The refusal to form broad coalitions, on the other hand, has been called a strategy of 'minilateralism' and historically opposes the huge political alignments assembled at the height of the North-South dialogue of the 1970s, such as the G77. Even though there are already several studies that shed light on the Brazilian experience, one may find quite similar patterns of forming small coalitions among other middle powers, at both regional and multilateral spheres (Flemes 2007).

## **5. Evoking the Main Hypothesis**

Let us recall the main hypothesis of this article: member states will pursue control over 'global common goods' inside IOs in uncoordinated fashion. As a consequence, states will get into discursive and practical contradictions if they attempt to gain actual influence over decision-making processes both at SF and BW major IOs. Contradictions are troubling for those states that rely heavily on reputational goods. There might be obstacles for countries such as Brazil in reaching discursive and practical coherence, as long as realist-biased SF and liberal-driven BW platforms profoundly diverge in their dynamics and pose diverse normative constraints. The comparative table below (Table 1) describes such trend over the last decades.

**TABLE 1: Comparative evolution of Brazilian foreign policy on SF and BW-related issues**

<b>BRAZILIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD...</b>	<b>DURING THE COLD WAR</b>	<b>AFTER THE COLD WAR</b>
<i>South America</i>	A regional power (alongside with Argentina).	The most important country in the region (still not acknowledged as a world power though).
<i>International security issues (in general)</i>	Prudent passive, pro-peace orientation.	Peaceful diplomacy now combines with a more proactive stance; disposition for burden-sharing (measured by increasing military expenditure and doctrinal contributions on R2P).
<i>UN peace operations</i>	Since the early 1950s, Brazil has been collaborating with the UN – strictly under Chapter VI of the UN Charter.	MINUSTAH (Haiti) represents a turning point, as long as it was Brazil's first time acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.
<i>United Nations Security Council reform</i>	As a UNSC constant collaborator with little at stake in security affairs, there was no consistent campaigning for reform.	Pushing for a reform that should contemplate emerging countries from different regions of the world (G4 + 2 African countries).
<i>International economy issues (in general)</i>	A big peripheral country with small participation in world trade and financial flows.	An emerging market, increasingly connected with global markets.
<i>IMF and the World Bank</i>	A debtor, and constant borrower to both multilateral banks.	A lender to the IMF; Brazil is uncomfortable with the IMF/WB quota system and the developing countries' meager share.
<i>GATT/WTO</i>	Not an important country in decision-making procedures at all.	After WTO Doha Round of Negotiations, one of the four main parties for decision-making (alongside with India, EU, and the US).
<i>WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism</i>	N/A	One of the most frequent users of that system, both as complainant and respondent.
<i>Bretton Woods institutions' reform</i>	Not an issue under consideration.	Brazil fiercely advocates for a reform that should reflect contemporary polycentrism in world economy.

Source: The Authors.

### 5.1. *Brazil toward San Francisco (Security Issues)*

Brazil is no longer the ‘gentle giant’ it used to be. There has been considerable increase in military expenditure during the last 20 years and a mounting interest for international politics among Brazilian presidents ever since Cardoso’s coming into power. But there are important nuances in this position. President Rousseff has recently reinforced Brazil’s commitment to the idea of ‘Responsibility while Protecting (RwP)’ rather than endorsing ‘Responsibility to Protect (R2P)’ doctrine (also known as ‘Ban Ki-moon doctrine’). Given that Brazilian foreign policy has always relied upon the long-standing principles of non-intervention and state sovereignty, it has underlined that the use of force on the grounds of humanitarian intervention undermine the very rationale of the UN system, since the UN Charter has not foreseen these actions as an exception that allows the use of force.

After the development of the ‘R2P doctrine’ after the report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) was published and, chiefly, through its adoption by the 2005 World Summit and Resolution 60/1 of the UN General Assembly, Brazil has endeavored to limit its scope. It has also stressed the prevalence of non-coercive and diplomatic measures (R2P’s second pillar) and, thus, has drawn attention to the subsidiary and last-resource character of military intervention (R2P’s third pillar).

Brazil has pointed out, moreover, that the use of force based on R2P must be discharged in accordance with international humanitarian law, human rights law, and the rules regarding the use of force (*jus ad bellum*), since these actions should not worsen the conflicts and do harm to the civilian population. Consequently, the Brazilian reasoning has led to the development of the concept of RwP, which aims to show the importance of complying with a rather strict legal framework during these operations.

Brazil has set forth, likewise, the importance of reform in the structure of the UNSC so as to incorporate, as permanent members, developing states from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia. Pursuant to the Brazilian position, the role of the UNSC in the R2P issue is essential, inasmuch as it must authorize all actions and ensure accountability of those to whom authority is granted to resort to force in cases that they breach international Law.

Besides, participating in the UN PKO in Haiti represents a shift in Brazilian foreign policy since it indicates that, although the principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention still play a pivotal role in its foreign policy, Brazil has perceived that these international rules must

be interpreted in a manner consistent with the idea of ‘non-indifference.’ (Amorim 2010; Idem 2005). This notion might be defined, from a Brazilian perspective, as the willingness to provide assistance, mainly in terms of diplomacy, when required, and when a State deems it pertinent, so as to settle a political or social crisis.

All in all, it means Brazil will neither simply bandwagon the efforts of traditional oligarchic world powers (US, UK, France, Russia, China) nor emulate the positions taken by emerging military powers (Turkey, South Africa, India etc.). Its position will be carefully crafted so as to sound authoritative and nationalistic rather than merely guided by the balance-of-power logic. Claims are that Brazil will avoid at all cost the label of ‘regional leader’ inasmuch as it can be wrongly taken for nurturing sub-imperialistic intentions towards its neighbors (Borges 2008). However, speeches often made by governmental officials emphasize Brazilian ‘natural candidacy’ to seizing a seat in the event of the UNSC expansion/reform. At a slow pace, Brazil is engaging in issues/regions that did not otherwise belong to its top foreign policy priorities (Central America and the Caribbean, Middle East etc.).

Overall, Brazil displays a prudent, pacifist diplomacy, reliant on the idea of ‘consensual hegemony’ over South America, with a grain of light revisionism toward international security institutions. Its low military potentials combine with a persistent bid for UNSC reform (even if it comes with no veto power), as long as it should contemplate Brazil. One could also cite as an important aspect of Brazilian foreign policy nowadays its half-hearted advocacy for human rights (especially after Cardoso’s government).

### *5.2. Brazil toward Bretton Woods (Economic Issues)*

In the wake of the 1990s, the BW system was in high demand. In the year the Maastricht Treaty turned the European communities into a European Union, the IMF and the WB started fostering transition from real socialism to utopian liberalism in post-Wall Iron Curtain region. Those organs were also responsible for husbanding the aftermath of Latin American’s 1980s crash (after the 1987 Brady Plan), including Brazil, which defaulted not only once, but twice during the decade. BW’ organs even indulged in post-conflict reconstruction (what ‘An Agenda for Peace’ tentatively called ‘peacebuilding’) elsewhere (Gama 2009). By 1994 GATT’s Uruguay round gave way to a WTO undreamed of since WWII (1948’s International Trade Organization succumbed to Cold War vicissitudes). The newborn IO would from its

inception bear sanctioning power on member states. That was an IO, therefore, ‘with teeth,’ somehow closer to the UNSC than to loose arrangements such as GATT.

The WTO’s position gradually eroded as a result of the massive anti-globalization protest activity surrounding its Ministerial Conference at the Washington State Convention and Trade Center in Seattle, Washington, in December 1999. UNCTAD X, the tenth session of the Conference held in Bangkok in February 2000, proved a good opportunity to make a conceptual contribution to the ‘post-Seattle scenario’ and the re-establishment of the developing countries’ confidence in the multilateral trading system. UNCTAD’s contribution eventually helped pave the way for launching a new WTO round of negotiations in Doha in November 2001, whose specific goal was to address the issues of developing countries in a so-called Development Agenda for Trade Negotiations. However, circumstances had dramatically changed as a result of the terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September. While politics and economics were mutually reinforcing, trade barriers were being rebuilt. Wars were fought in Afghanistan and Iraq and dangerous confrontations took place around the globe, almost all of them involving the US and its Western allies. It is against the background of this shift in international security and its strong impact on international trade and development opportunities that one can accurately apprehend the case of Brazil.

Talks on a ‘new global financial architecture’ have spread from the 2000s on, especially after the events that led to the ongoing financial crisis in Europe and the US. They have drawn Brazil’s attention and fueled its ambitions to revising the world order in a way it would benefit from its economic coming of age. After all, in a scenario where old powerhouses failed to deliver prosperity and a glimmer of hope, the rising powers – BRICS *inter alia* – have filled this gap, allowing the economy not to stall, and then claiming their institutional rewards (e.g., a revision of the IMF quota system that would acknowledge developing countries’ growing importance for the world economy). Brazil, once a borrower, suddenly became a lender to the IMF, during the second presidential mandate of Lula da Silva. That comes wrapped in a new discourse that celebrates the virtues of ‘democratization’ and ‘pluralization’ among the nations, not to mention the Brazilian government’s stance for developmental economics, making the country a ‘state capitalism’ ideologue according to some critics (cf. *The Economist*, “The rise of state capitalism”, 21/01/2012).

This call for revisionism on Bretton Woods’ apparatuses has its most concrete manifestation inside the WTO, at the level of the Dispute Settlement Mechanism. This is the place where

Brazil and many developing countries (like India and Argentina) voice out their concerns and reclaim their rights, whenever a country doesn't play by the rules of international commerce. Brazil is a major user of WTO Dispute Settlement system and an arbitration champion, both as complainant and respondent (see Figure 1). Informally, Brazil is a political leader in trade negotiations – heading, alongside with China and India, the recently founded G-20 (a group of states with convergent interests in world commerce). In addition, it can be stated that Brazil, India, and China have replaced Japan and Canada as the most important developing states to prevent a stalemate in WTO Doha Round. Together with the US and the European Union, they are the world trade regime's centerpieces today. Besides, Brazil's expertise on WTO issues has more than once accredited Brazilian candidates to run for office at WTO. The latest bet is Ambassador Roberto Azevedo, a Brazilian diplomat whose knowledge of WTO bureaucracy and world trade are believed to make him a good bet to succeed Pascal Lamy.

**FIGURE 1: Cases involving Brazil at the WTO Dispute Settlement System**



Source: WTO (official website). Access on 24.02.2013.

## 6. Concluding Remarks: ‘A Tragedy of Middle Power Politics?’

As emphasized in the few previous sections, *middle powers* will find it difficult to reconcile their foreign policy strategies toward both at SF and BW global governance apparatuses. This is neither due to a lack of expertise on any of those realms nor to the continuous resistance on the part of those powers of old responsible for the current institutional framework of international relations. Rather, middle powers in general – and Brazil in special – fall prey to their rise in a multifaceted international system.

The first apparent reason for that is middle powers relative lack of material capabilities (a realist assumption), what will then turn them much more reliant on reputational goods and discursive techniques (where ‘coherence’ plays a major role in terms of speech and practice) to efficiently pursue its international goals. Brazil’s relentless push for reform and pluralism in international institutions often clashes with its continuous dependence on a recognized identity as a reliable, moderate partner in current institutional machineries. After the Cold War, what used to be seen as a coherent trajectory by a status-quo middle power becomes a skewed affair. Incoherence as such is much less dramatic, in realist terms, for great powers.

Second, there’s the *institutional bias factor*, that is, different governance platforms such as BW and SF will induce different – sometimes contradictory – approaches to international politics. The rise of Brazil and emerging countries impacts on current institutional structures – but with divergent, often clashing, outcomes. Pluralism has different appeals for the UN system and the Bretton Woods organizations. Multilateralism in security issues and in economic issues are often conducive to incompatible policies. By keeping high stakes in both fields all at once, Brazil incurs *attrition costs*.

Third, the label ‘foreign policy’ usually encompasses a broad set of branches related to one state’s international public policies and official statements – ranging from security and military to economic and environmental agendas. It is hard for great and middle powers alike to find a *masterplan* that fits all – or the majority – of interests at stake in any given time. Comparatively, in a realist sense, middle powers face the task with (much) less resources than great ones. Such constraints raise pressures even on sophisticated diplomatic machineries.

Fourth and last, by virtue of the need to balance efficiency and legitimacy in their foreign policies, middle-power states are led to bear at the same time aristocratic/restrictive *and* democratic/liberalizing premises (the reliance on one or the other will vary according to the

forum or the issue at stake). One can call it ‘doublethink’ or ‘forum shopping.’ Be that as it may, it is quite probable that, while attempting to exert control or influence over decision making about relevant international issues, states will not enunciate coherent positions over time or across themes. Once again, by contrast with great powers, middle powers as Brazil will be much more sensitive to such effects.

An important concept often employed by liberal scholars to convey a situation of ‘collective-action problem’ within the context of international regimes is that of ‘the tragedy of the commons.’ (Hardin 1968; Drezner 2010) By the oft-cited concept it is meant that, because we live after all in an anarchic global society, coordination arrangements will inevitably fail in delivering the ‘global common goods’ we are so much in need, bringing about tragic conflict as the only possible outcome.

The *problematique* we shed light on in the article is not exactly analogous to the one we mentioned above, however it can be thought of as a ‘vertical’ version of it. In other words, the tragedy of the commons is best understood as the unintended consequences triggered by poor coordination *among* states, driving them into collision route. The question we look through here is how the lack of coordination *inside* (or *between* two diplomatic agendas) of a state – namely Brazil – can be detrimental to its *own* campaigns for ascension in international ‘institutional rankings.’

Brazil currently strives to build consensus among the parties to grab a seat for itself in the eventual reform/enlargement of the UNSC. To achieve it, Brazil commits with a sort of ‘great-power’ agenda by increasing its military budget and taking part in humanitarian missions all around the world (what includes the leadership of a UN PKO in Haiti for the first time in its history, not to mention the increasing interest in Middle Eastern affairs). Nevertheless, when it comes to financial and commercial matters, Brazil is the first one to evoke the values of democratization and/or liberalization of world politics.

In this sense, institutions constitute a strategic choice for Brazil, accommodating the pursuit of its interests in an often hostile environment which it aspires to decisively influence. As we focus on Brazil, there are side-effects associated with coping with institutions. Such contradictions abound in the guise of a long-lasting, traditional respect for the rules of the game by the part of Brazilian diplomacy (either in emergent presidential diplomacy or in the centuries-old fine-tuned expertise machinery of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Itamaraty) – which made Brazil an early entrant in the great majority of current international institutions –

countered by a relentless pursuit/advocacy of ‘change in terms of equality’ manifested in world forums, based on Brazil’s ‘natural’ credentials to world prominence. Brazil seems poised to a larger share of the pie – but with tragic undertones.

Brazil is an exemplary case of *the tragedy of middle power politics within international institutions*, as long as it cannot deliver a coherent discourse/behavior in foreign policy (something it will be charged for) because it falls prey of its own contradictions – which are seemingly inevitable, given Brazil’s profile in IR and, particularly, those steep contradictions between SF and BW platforms for global governance. On the other hand, it doesn’t gather enough power assets to fill a ‘great-power’ identity and, therefore, to renounce to following the norms and rules defined by the existing global governance platforms in the world today.

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<sup>i</sup> A sensitive issue in the wake of the 2008-2009 crisis in economic and food security terms.

<sup>ii</sup> Additionally, exporting domestic norms is a complex operation; the management of cultural resources becomes pivotal, as “inside-outing” dynamics involve translation, adaptation which may feedback in contradictory terms on collective identities (Pieterse & Rehbein 2009, 211).