

The importance of presidential leadership for Brazilian foreign policy

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ABSTRACT

The conventional wisdom in Brazil is that foreign policy is a policy of state and, as such, not part of the daily political debate. The result is an understanding that foreign policy is largely driven by the foreign ministry, with the president generally only taking a role when needed to advance a particular initiative through presidential diplomacy. We challenge these assumptions, arguing that the engagement and authority of the president are the essential factors in bringing about not only substantive strategic change in Brazilian foreign policy, but also alterations in the policy process that have democratized foreign policy and moved it from a policy of state to another area of public policy. To do this, we draw on and deepen Sergio Danese's theory of presidential diplomacy and map out major strategic changes in post-authoritarian Brazil's foreign policy. We find that the major changes that have taken place were initiated by the truncated Fernando Collor presidency and then deepened and amplified by the highly internationally engaged presidencies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Lula. By contrast, the presidencies of Itamar Franco and Dilma Rousseff emerge as instances of inertial continuity lacking in dynamism and innovation.

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If you pay careful attention to Brazilian presidential elections, you might find some oblique mention of foreign policy by one of the candidates. In the 2014 election, for example, foreign policy came up just once across the five candidate debates, and then only in the context of a 15-second quip about the flow of contraband from Paraguay. For an outsider, this sustained lack of dialogue about a normally important policy area for the presidential candidates of a would-be world power can seem bizarre. Within Brazil, the absence of discussion about foreign policy during an election is normal. Most of the political class, to say nothing of the wider population, believes foreign policy is best left to the apolitical professionals in the foreign ministry, colloquially known as Itamaraty, and not be subject to the vagaries stemming from the rough and tumble of partisan politics.

Presidents have historically left foreign policy formulation to the diplomatic bureaucracy, which in turn has resulted in a remarkable level of stability, professionalism and consistency that has further reinforced Itamaraty, as the foreign ministry is known, claims that their area

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of public policy be treated differently. The existing theorizing on presidential diplomacy focuses on the president as hyper-diplomat charged with using the gravitas of their office to achieve a foreign relations outcome that might otherwise be challenging. Usually cast as an actor directed and deployed by Itamaraty, the president is not seen as a policy originator or innovator. Faced with relative geographic isolation and proportionally small trade volumes, political leaders have felt almost no pressure to substantively engage with foreign policy (Mares and Trinkunas 2016; Daudelin 2010). Moreover, the foreign ministry offers little in the way of pork to make it an attractive reward for Brazil's model of coalitional presidential politics (Ames 1995). Put succinctly, the dominant argument is that foreign policy has become a policy of state entrusted to a technocracy in much the same vein as the literature on central bank independence, an area where direct presidential involvement is more likely to do harm than good. The argument we make here directly challenges this mythology.

Drawing on evidence across the five presidents who occupied the Planalto Palace between 1990 and 2015, we argue that presidential political leadership is essential for the enactment of innovation in Brazilian foreign policy. In keeping with the five faces of presidentialism outlined in the introduction to this special issue, the overarching theme and basis for much of the writing on presidential diplomacy clearly fit with the fifth, namely the 'president as face to the outside world' (opening paper to this special issue). Our argument pushes the analysis further to argue that the second face is also at play in critical junctures where the president as 'Mayor' of the Esplanada acts decisively to bring about major redirections in Brazil's foreign policy. The ability to do this is reliant on the president's engagement with foreign affairs as well as their individual capacity to command and seduce the denizens of Itamaraty. Conversely, when there is a lack of strong political engagement, we see stagnation in terms of strategic innovation and foreign policy creativity, leading to the adoption of status quo or defensive positions by Itamaraty consonant with the existing foreign policy habits. To be clear, we are not discussing innovation in the practice of diplomacy, the formulation of tactics for a particular issue or even coordination of the different elements in the larger strategic approach to Brazilian foreign policy. Instead, we focus on high-level policy direction that forces Itamaraty to act and change. Moreover, we do not argue that the presidency necessarily came up with the innovation independently, but that it is clear, direct and sustained presidential engagement that drives change and innovation in Brazilian foreign policy.

The spectre of Rio Branco?

In keeping with a burgeoning body of recent scholarship, we accept that foreign policy is simply another area of public policy, albeit one that brings its own set of constraints and limitations (Belém Lopes 2013a, 2015; Cason and Power 2009; Faria 2012). That this debate has even been necessary comes down to two factors, one historical and the other contextual.

The traditions, structures and self-perceptions of modern Brazilian diplomacy can be traced back to the precedents set by the Baron of Rio Branco, José Maria da Silva Paranhos Junior, at the turn of the twentieth century. For Rio Branco, a central problem facing Brazil's foreign policy was the highly partisan politicization of all aspects of the state, which precluded the long-term view needed for effective diplomatic practice. He consequently bluntly refused to take up the post of foreign minister unless he was permitted to

professionalize the diplomatic service and remove it from the chaos of the daily political fracas. President-elect Rodrigues Alves and his successors accepted Rio Branco's terms, setting the groundwork for the traditions that continue until this day (Cheibub 1984, 1989).

The contextual factor revolves around Brazil's remote, agreed borders and relative geographic isolation, which in combination with a US security umbrella, have left the country remarkably free of existential threats. The global economy has also been of lesser obvious importance with exports sitting at around 11% of GDP, taking international market considerations away from the immediate attention of many Brazilians. International affairs consequently are believed to have relatively little direct impact on the immediate life of many Brazilians, which in turn generates comparably little pressure for action or attention on the country's elected officials.

Beyond presidential diplomacy

Substantial changes in Brazil's foreign policy direction are relatively rare, and when they do take place, we argue, it is through concrete and sustained presidential engagement. This position stands somewhat in contrast to other scholarship on presidential diplomacy that questions the extent to which any president is a key driver in the foreign policy process. Guilhon Albuquerque (1997) doubts whether highly visible presidential activity is the same as substantial engagement with policy formulation. Falcão Preto (2006) asks if it is not simply the case that the president is following a script set at Itamaraty. Indeed, Cerqueira (2005) argues that Itamaraty used Cardoso's presidential diplomacy as a device for building domestic and intra-Esplanada linkages and influence. Whether any of this was ever effective is directly questioned by Silva (2008), who points out that the dynamics of presidential diplomacy generated tensions between the presidency and bureaucracy, resulting in a new set of challenges for the clear pursuit of foreign relations. While these critical appraisals of presidential diplomacy have merit, they are focused on the tactical level and overlook our main concern, namely the centrality of presidential authority as inciter and driver of major strategic change in Brazilian foreign policy.

The idea of presidential diplomacy is not new. In his 1999 book, the future Itamaraty Secretary General Sergio Danese (2015–2016) explored the changes he experienced working directly for Cardoso in the 1990s, and argued that presidential diplomacy had become a central facet in Brazilian foreign policy. For Danese, Cardoso as president was the propulsive and catalytic force behind a coherent Brazilian foreign policy seeking to advance the country's developmental priorities: '[Cardoso's] foreign minister [Luiz Felipe] Lampreia used the discourse of foreign policy to introduce presidential diplomacy as an organizational device for diplomatic action, strategic planning, and external interaction for the whole government' (1999, 31). Presidential diplomacy is consequently seen as present when the president takes a direct, personal, active and sustained engagement in the conceptualization and execution of foreign policy. It differs from the standard presidential engagement in foreign policy where diplomacy is left to the prevailing institutional norms on the Esplanada and the leader's engagement is limited to the minimum required by the Constitution. The dominant characteristics of presidential diplomacy are thus,

the personal direction of foreign affairs by the president in a manner that goes beyond the mere routine duties attributed *ex officio* to the president or, in the case of a parliamentary regime, to the head of state and/or head of government. (Danese 1999, 51)

This view is consistent with the idea of president as the ‘face’ of Brazil to the outside world.

A central element of Danese’s theory sees presidential diplomacy vary in intensity to match the requirements of a given situation, reducing the president to a diplomatic asset strategically deployed to advance specific foreign policy ambitions (Danese 1999, 70). Effectiveness depends on a combination of presidential interest, versatility, innate diplomatic ability, knowledge of the area, sense of timing and appreciation of the appropriate level of urgency for a given issue. A critical component of all of these factors is an understanding of how the external dimension impacts domestic policy questions (Danese 1999, 90). For Itamaraty, presidential diplomacy was something of a novelty given the country’s history of political disinterest in foreign policy. Under Danese’s model, the president appears focused on convening decision-making groups, advancing specific initiatives and making clear policy decisions that extend beyond the normal authority of internationally oriented ministries such as the foreign ministry, defence or international trade. A central benefit it brings to the bureaucratic process is clear policy direction as well as grounding the political risk and accountability for it in the office of the presidency. Presidential diplomacy is consequently a tool that must be wielded carefully because it is exceptionally difficult for a government to retain credibility while back peddling from a clear policy announcement from the national leader (Danese 1999, 70).

The argument we are making about the presidency and foreign policy runs somewhat deeper in institutional terms and perhaps has a tighter link back to the factors that inspired Danese’s book. Presidential diplomacy can be reduced to deploying a president otherwise disinterested in foreign policy in order to have a diplomatic impact. As per Danese’s observations from the Cardoso era, strong presidential leadership and engagement obviously have a substantial impact on what goes on with Brazilian foreign policy. We will stretch this proposition further to argue that while presidential engagement is useful for innovative and incisive foreign policy, it need not be ever-present. What is essential is active commitment and engagement of the authority of the president, which can be concretely delegated through an empowered and explicitly supported foreign minister or other ministers across the Esplanada, evoking the ‘president as mayor’ face. We concentrate on instances where political force was applied to the diplomatic apparatus to cause a change in direction or impart lasting inertia to a new idea or substantive policy direction that is sustained absent new direct pressure from the national leadership.

Fernando Collor de Melo (1990–1992)

Despite the problems Collor faced in his short-lived presidency, he did have a clear view of his role in the Brazilian political landscape. Collor’s impact on Brazilian foreign policy is found in how he adapted and prepared the national economy for expanded international exposure. As an economic liberalizer, he represented a rupture of the inward-looking national-developmental consensus established during military dictatorship, setting the groundwork for a macroeconomic alignment with the Washington Consensus and substantial opening of Brazil’s trade and regional integration policy. The foreign policy trajectory launched by the Collor thus focused on three main lines: (i) adapting Brazil to the ‘new world order’; (ii) rebuilding the relationship with the USA; and (iii) an effort to de-characterize Brazil as a Third World country (Hirst and Pinheiro 1995; Casarões 2014a, 2014b, 2015).

Although Collor's idea of leveraging external relations to achieve national development objectives was not new, it did become a major feature in his foreign policy and at times resulted in him almost taking personal charge over the issue area (Batista 1993). As our argument suggests, Itamaraty was critical for the implementation of foreign policy, but the strategic direction and initiative during the Collor years were increasingly found in the Planalto Presidential Palace. The changes Collor brought were not driven by a need to satisfy domestic constituencies or shore up arrangements made during the democratic transition, but rather represented the implementation of ideas that had been in the planning stage within Itamaraty for a considerable time but lacked the necessary political capital to overcome internal diplomatic resistance and actually be implemented as the policy of state (Casarões 2011, 138). The significant aspect here was the investment of presidential political capital and prestige in serious foreign policy strategic changes, driving through a significantly liberalized foreign policy view and new approaches to regional and international insertion quietly and stubbornly resisted by bureaucratic actors at Itamaraty and across the Esplanada.

Celso Lafer, Collor's second foreign minister and later foreign minister for Cardoso, was driven by 'a mix between tradition and innovation', which saw him codify the concrete presidential command to open and liberalize Brazil. Shaped as a pyramid, Lafer's translation of Collor's economically oriented vision was based on *parcerias operacionais* (operational partnerships), *nichos de oportunidade* (niches of opportunity), *adaptação criativa* (creative adaptation) and *visão de futuro* (a view to the future). The new policy matrix made it clear that Brazilian firms would have to learn to compete in the global market place, with the regional level serving as an incubator. Although much of this agenda had support within Itamaraty, the subregional integration process with Argentina seemed trapped in almost circular negotiations anchored on a more nationalist view of trade policy. Resolution of this bureaucratic impasse came when Collor and Menem simply instructed their respective foreign ministries to wrap the talks up and be ready for a 1991 treaty signing at a presidential summit where they intended to announce the formation of Mercosur (Cason 2000, 208; Hage 2004, Chapters 3 and 4).

On a political front, the last two concepts guiding Lafer – creative adaptation and a view to the future – were deployed as specific devices for dealing with the uncertainty of what appeared to be the end of the Cold War-era bipolar global system, pushing Brazilian heavily towards multilateralism and responsible engagement. This approach was to prove central to the 1992 Rio environmental conference, which explicitly sought to build Brazil's international credibility. The problem was that just as Collor overestimated his ability to push through the domestic changes he wanted without a strong congressional coalition, he also wrongly assumed that his personal will could override the founding assumptions of the international system and open space for peripheral countries such as Brazil to shift global debates (Mares and Trinkunas 2016). Collor's truncated presidency aside, the point for this article is that he did wield presidential authority to launch a major strategic direction change in Brazilian foreign policy.

Itamar Franco (1992–1994)

Few works address foreign policy during the Franco presidency (Canani 2004; Gremaud, Vasconcello, and Toneto 2014). Yet, his two years proved crucial for consolidating Collor's strategic changes. Under Franco, Congress approved the Marrakesh Agreement founding

the World Trade Organization, a strategic partnership was signed with China, the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) project was greatly advanced, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty was institutionalized and Mercosul's Ouro Preto Protocol was signed. With the exception of Mercosul, most of these achievements carried little risk or required serious resource commitments from Brazil, highlighting that major change and innovation require direct presidential presence and authority. Absent real attention from the Planalto Palace, the default was to continue the existing direction. The foreign policy track followed by Franco was thus one of continuity, what might be referred to as foreign policy by inertia (Chagas Bastos 2015). Given the scale of the domestic challenges facing Franco, this is perhaps not surprising and is consistent with his internally oriented, non-conflictive profile.

Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002)

Presidential engagement with foreign policy returned as a major factor with Fernando Henrique Cardoso's inauguration on 1 January 1995. Prior to starting a political career in the early 1980s, the fluently quadrilingual Cardoso had already established himself as a leading international intellectual in the fields of development, authoritarianism and democratization, building a deep network of political and scholarly friendships across Latin America, the USA and Western Europe (Goertzel 1999). Cardoso's international vision was further deepened in 1992 when he served as Itamar's first foreign minister before moving to the finance ministry and launching the Real Plan that rescued the Brazilian economy and gained an intimate view of how the international might support or derail domestic policy (Prado 2005, 152–160). One lesson that flowed from the Real Plan was that at least acquiescence from the US Treasury and IMF was crucial for success. Unfortunately, it was clear that Brazilian policy-makers had little credibility in global financial markets. Perhaps worse was the widespread perception that not just Brazil, but also the entirety of Latin America was a land of economic basket cases and authoritarian regimes. This lack of credibility was seen by Cardoso as a serious challenge when he was sworn in as president, threatening continuation of his economic stabilization and regeneration programme. Particularly worrying was the impact it might have on the foreign direct investment flows that were critical for servicing the national debt as well as attracting the managerial and technical expertise needed to regenerate wide range of industrial sectors (Fleury and Fleury 2011; Rocha 2002).

Cardoso's concern was that it was impossible for Brazil to achieve its developmental ambitions without an active insertion into the international system (Cardoso 2006, Chapter 10). This generated a series of requisites that went against long-established diplomatic tradition, beginning with a need to firmly establish Brazil as a constructive member of international society with full buy-in. Although there had been a conscious attempt to demonstrate this with the 1992 Rio de Janeiro UN Earth Summit, environmental policy offered limited opportunity to bolster Brazil's reputation (Lago 2006; Mares and Trinkunas 2016; Viola 2004). A bigger symbolic act was the 1996 accession to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). This decision ran against the traditional sovereigntist principles that cast the NPT as an unjust restriction on autonomy made egregious by the nuclear powers' failure to take meaningful steps to disarm. Although there was some support for the decision across the Esplanada, it was Cardoso who pushed it

through (Lampreia 2014), evoking the ‘mayor face’ of the presidency to overcome still-substantial congressional and bureaucratic opposition to the move (Cardoso 2016, 209–210; author interviews, Brasília, May 2010).

Borrowing from the work of a key Itamaraty advisor, Gelson Fonseca, Cardoso summarized the shift captured by the signature of the NPT as a move from ‘autonomy through distance’ to ‘autonomy by engagement’. While the NPT accession carried a psychological weight, a series of South America-oriented policy moves brought deeper changes to policy direction. As part of the autonomy through distance approach to vouchsafing sovereignty, Brazilian foreign policy had traditionally been reluctant to get deeply engaged with regional management issues (Fonseca 2004). Under Cardoso this stance was replaced with a very active and engaged leadership role, albeit one undertaken in an extremely quiet, understated manner (Burgess 2009). The need for this change was made apparent early in 1995 when Ecuador and Peru resumed hostilities in their long-standing border conflict. The threat explained by Lampreia (2010, 156) was an international failure to distinguish Brazil from ‘Latin America’, meaning this now hot border dispute ‘was potentially negative for our image and, therefore, also our credibility’. Effort was consequently quickly devoted to getting a ceasefire and then brokering a lasting peace agreement, which was duly signed in 1998. Rather than subscribing to the minimal requirements as a guarantor of the 1942 treaty that ended the last round of hostilities, Brazil went further and inserted itself directly between the combatants with a decision to lead the peace talks and quietly impose a solution ending the dispute (Lampreia 2010; Cardoso 2006, 637–640).

The shift in tone Cardoso brought to Brazilian foreign policy was subtle, but deeply significant. For decades, Brazil had shied away from taking on any sense of identifiable leadership role, particularly one that would actively push national priorities out on to the rest of the continent. His assessment after building international support for the Real Plan in the early 1990s and drawing on his academic background researching what we now call globalization made it clear to him that Brazil needed to improve its ability to protect its interests in the face of growing external pressures. The solution he introduced was to quietly build Brazil’s leadership role in South America, using it as leverage to increase his country’s international voice by managing the region. In terms of foreign policy strategy, this resulted in another major presidentially driven Brazil’s shift to a South American orientation (Burgess 2009). Although the South American concentration was an idea developed within Itamaraty (Amorim 2003), diplomatic tradition dictated that the path to prosperity was through the USA and Western European markets, not the more chaotic continental context that saw political bickering continuously frustrate efforts to expand Mercosul. Seeking a new line of attack, Cardoso shifted to an explicitly technocratic approach focused on creating growth conditions through the development of continental infrastructure networks.

While it subsequently became the backbone of Brazil’s pan-Southern foreign policy, the late 1990s’ shift to South America met with tremendous resistance when first put forward by Cardoso. At its heart was a plan to expand the national development plan predicated on infrastructure corridors, *Avança Brasil*, out to a continental scale. This put ministries such as Planning and Transportation at the centre of the policy planning process. Deeply entrenched concern at Itamaraty was magnified when it became clear that the process would be limited to South America and thus exclude important hemispheric partners such as Mexico, which expressed some anxiety about the plans. As Cardoso’s second

foreign minister Celso Lafer recalls, direct presidential authority eventually had to be exercised and Itamaraty commanded to make the process go ahead (author interview 2007). For Cardoso, the logic leading to the shift towards the Brasília Summit and a renewed South American emphasis had long been clear, as reflected in his 15 December 1997 diary entry: ‘I continue to think that we must give more emphasis to trade with South America ... Yes, we sell commodities to Europe, but our industrial products go to South America’ (Cardoso 2016, 430). The issue in the wider foreign policy community was that bureaucratic attention remained focused on traditional developed country markets even though Brazilian firms were increasingly exploiting opportunities across the global South. Cardoso changed this.

Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva (2003–2010)

The Cardoso innovation of placing more focus on South America and regional leadership faced bureaucratic resistance, but not excessive amounts. In part, this was not only because his direction fit with the idea of *Brasil grandeza*, but also because he had been adopted by Itamaraty as a kindred spirit. There was also a clear sense that South American engagement was part of a strategy to amplify engagement with Western Europe and the USA. When the subsequent leftist Luiz Ignacio Lula de Silva presidency effectively doubled down on Cardoso’s bet by explicitly pushing enhanced engagement with the global South – particularly Africa and South America – the negative reaction was public and strident, critiquing the move as a dangerous ideologization of Brazilian foreign policy (e.g. Almeida 2014; Barbosa 2014; Barbosa 2011, Chapter 7). Right-wing establishment media hammered this point, too, jumping upon critical comments made by retiring ambassador to the US Roberto Abdenur as proof that Lula’s Workers Party was becoming a threat to the national interest (Cabral 2007).

Lula’s very personal engagement was an essential part not just of the decision to have Brazil take a very active and engaged approach to Africa and the global South, but also in the implementation of the policy by using his personal presence as a central driver to build and entrench new bilateral linkages (Stolte 2015). While this aspect of presidentially driven change in Brazil’s foreign policy has been widely discussed, perhaps the deeper innovation was in how Lula drove alterations in how foreign policy was formulated and implemented, at least partially democratizing what had hitherto been the very oligarchic policy area discussed above.

The rise of agro-industrial exports that began in the late 1990s created a major shift in where Brazilian business was focusing its attention, resulting in pressure on diplomats to give more attention to politically unfashionable parts of the world outside the Elizabeth Arden circuit. Major civil engineering firms added to the pressure by pointing out how much business they could win in Africa and Latin America. The result was an enforced innovation in the foreign policy field that in many respects was focused more on process and thematic concentration than a real international political realignment against the North. This was all reflected in Lula’s revision of the foreign policy decision-making table-seating chart. While the Planalto Palace always had overwhelming influence on foreign policy if the president chose to exercise it, the advisory staff was generally drawn from the professionals at Itamaraty. This changed dramatically when Lula appointed Marco Aurelio Garcia as his foreign policy advisor and effectively

charged him with running Brazil's intra-South American foreign relations. Direct presidential input into Itamaraty staffing decisions also appeared to take place with the decision to appoint career diplomat and staunch nationalist Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães to the number two foreign ministry post. Normally, this position required that the occupant served in an ambassadorial role, which Guimarães had not. The result was a series of moves that appeared to run against the grain of common diplomatic sense and underpinned the charge that foreign policy had been polluted with leftist partisan politics.

A string of foreign policy decisions appeared to bolster the case made by Lula's foreign policy critics. For example, under the Workers' Party, Brazil appeared to step back from the forceful advocacy of democratic strengthening in the region, at times seeming to support its weakening by remaining quiet as the space for political discourses was curtailed in countries like Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela. Equally worrying for critics was the restrained tone Lula took to the 2006 nationalization of Petrobras natural gas assets in Bolivia, working to slowly negotiate a resolution rather than forthrightly attacking La Paz for its intemperance. Lost in these analyses was an examination of the commercial considerations, particularly the size of the contracts being won by Brazilian construction companies and the importance of these markets for Brazil's industrial exports (Borges 2017). In this respect, the Petrobras case is perhaps most marked. As former Bolivian president Carlos Mesa (2011) noted, the costs were largely symbolic, as the additional revenue Bolivia won from the affair represented a very small proportion of the income generated by Petrobras.

The restrained approach in these cases likely pointed to the conceptual shift and structural changes in policy-making brought by Lula. On a conceptual level, foreign policy was pushed away from the concentration on issues of 'high' politics that normally concerned Itamaraty. Marcos Jank, an agricultural economist at the University of São Paulo and the Inter-American Development Bank as well as founder of the Institute for International Trade Negotiations (ICONE) think tank in São Paulo, did not mince words when addressing the shortcomings he saw with Itamaraty at the end of the Cardoso era: 'Brazil's diplomats have enormous "know-how" in geopolitical questions, but little experience in conducting trade negotiations' (quoted in Osse and Cardoso 2002). The crucial point Jank was making was not that diplomats were incapable of conducting negotiations or representing the country's commercial interests, but rather that the institutional mindset was geared to high-level questions like autonomy preservation and sovereignty and not some of the more Manichean and strategic commercial considerations crucial to Brazil's growing list of multinationals. In this vein, Jank later went on to directly question Itamaraty's technical capacity to engage in the economic modelling necessary to be an effective voice for Brazilian interests in the modern international trade context (Jank 2003).

Two key Lula appointments were Luiz Fernando Furlan – former head of the food multinational Sadia – to the ministry of development and international trade (MDIC), and Roberto Rodrigues – an agricultural engineer who would later run the agricultural trade unit at the São Paulo Federation of Industrial Enterprises – to the ministry of agriculture. These two brought a direct communication channel between the increasingly important agro-industrial sector and the highest levels of policy-making. They were also instrumental in changing how foreign trade policy was made, most notably by bringing Marcos Jank

and his agricultural trade policy think tank ICONE directly into the process as technical experts (Hopewell 2013). Drawing on its tradition of reinvention, Itamaraty developed a cadre of officials capable of commissioning and using the sort of technocratic work produced by Jank's team. Lines of dialogue were also opened up and new pan-Esplanada consultation mechanisms were established (Cason and Power 2009), although this did not stop officials at the agriculture ministry complaining bitterly about Itamaraty's deaf ears during research interviews conducted in 2007. Where matters did change substantially was in the growing awareness in other ministries that international engagement was possible without the intermediation of Itamaraty (Pinheiro and Milani 2012). Indeed, a number of foreign diplomats interviewed in 2010 were clear that often it was easier to get things done if Itamaraty could be left out of the loop. More anecdotally, by the end of the Lula era, the tenor of research interviews with Brazilian diplomats had changed remarkably, taking on a far deeper element of dialogue, something that was partly reflected in the surge of media coverage on foreign policy and widespread engagement with international issues by growing segments of Brazilian business and society. While this seed was planted during the Cardoso years, we argue that it was the direct engagement and innovation of the Lula presidency that allowed a broadening of interest in foreign policy and a further democratization of the process behind this area of public policy, leaving it better able to be responsive to the changing national interests.

Dilma Rousseff (2011–2014)

There is a widespread consensus in both the academic and policy literature that Dilma was not interested in foreign policy. The sorts of sweeping innovations and new directions seen during the Cardoso and Lula years were noticeably absent during Dilma's tenure. While there were tentative signs she would continue some of Lula's institutional innovations by moving the Brazilian Agency for Cooperation from Itamaraty to MDIC to establish a commercially focused Africa engagement unit, in the end nothing came of the plan. Similarly, Dilma's second foreign minister Luiz Alberto Figueiredo launched what looked set to be a comprehensive and publicly engaged review of Brazilian foreign policy (Oliveira 2014). Yet, despite holding the public seminars as of writing this article, the White Book draft, if there was one, appeared to be safely buried in a filing cabinet (Almeida 2016). More telling were the massive budget cuts imposed upon Itamaraty during the Dilma years, which eventually led to a situation where Brazil was not only having trouble paying its public servants posted abroad, but also missing major payments to important international organizations such as the UN and FAO.

To be fair, Dilma took office just as the commodity boom was coming to an end. The national political environment had also changed dramatically. Where Lula da Silva shrugged off a major corruption scandal in the middle of his presidency and left office with stratospheric levels of popularity (87% in 2010) and enormous international prestige, Rousseff almost immediately faced a rebellion in the governmental support coalition when she refused to vocally support the seven inherited ministers who resigned during her first two years under clouds of corruption allegations. She also singularly failed to engage in the coalition-building and management activities central to getting government business through a fractured congress (Iglecias 2014). With her attention almost wholly occupied by domestic challenges, Dilma did little in terms of foreign policy during her first term

other than allow inertial drift to carry foreign policy forward. Nevertheless, what attention she gave to foreign policy issues paled next to the consolidation approach that marked the Itamar presidency, creating an impression of almost pure inertial foreign policy (Chagas Bastos 2015). As a number of business actors and diplomats interviewed in Africa and Brazil observed, it was taking an increasing amount of effort to get Dilma to continue engagement with the continent.

Dilma's approach to foreign policy thus appeared to largely be one of simply fulfilling the constitutional requirements and allowing Itamaraty to continue as it was. Little attention was given to innovating or suggesting new policy directions. Indeed, she frequently seemed to express contempt for Brazil's diplomats and a lack of understanding of what they did and why it might be useful for advancing her domestic policy agenda (Belém Lopes 2013b). What resulted was a series of mishandled international episodes that left many observers wondering if there was anyone at the helm in Brasília. After just three foreign ministers during the Cardoso and Lula years, a number that likely would have been two had Lampreia not had retirement plans, Brazil was moved on to its third foreign minister in just four years when Dilma took the 1 January 2015 office to start her second term. In terms of our larger argument, Dilma, the internationally disengaged domestically oriented technocratic president, highlights our point that innovation and dynamism in Brazilian foreign policy require sustained and substantial attention from the Planalto Palace.

Conclusion

This article has focused on the role and impact of the president in Brazilian foreign policy. By comparing the five presidents from 1989 to 2014, we have made the argument that direct presidential engagement and authority are central for change and innovation in Brazilian foreign policy. Tellingly, our comparison has also shown that these changes can occur not only in the realm of policy direction, but also in the process underlying the formulation and implementation of policy. Perhaps most telling in this respect are the major changes in direction and process brought in by the Cardoso and Lula presidencies. This combined 16-year period resulted not just in a turn to the South and a major broadening of the Esplanada and societal actors involved in foreign policy, but also in the Itamaraty conception of where attention should be focused. Over the course of this critical period, the idea that the dream of a *Brasil grandeza*, the country of the future, necessitated close alignment with Northern centres of power was largely set aside. A different route was mapped out and implemented, one that grew from engagement with the South and, more tellingly for the traditional foreign policy focus on the war and peace issues of high security, was grounded in attention to seemingly 'low' political issues such as trade, development, and the environment.

We also suggest that there is an interesting corollary to our argument that major change and innovation in foreign policy require a steady supply of the bureaucratic oxygen of direct presidential attention and authority. Absent serious engagement from the Planalto Palace, Brazilian foreign policy continues to drift in whatever direction it was already following. While we have not unpacked this aspect of the argument in depth, the very need for Collor to push Itamaraty in a new direction and then sustained attempts by Itamaraty to continue driving Brazil's foreign policy in a South-South direction during the Dilma

years despite distinct presidential disinterest add further weight to our argument. It also points to an underlying aspect of government bureaucracy that is often overlooked by scholars and analysts working with Brazilian foreign policy: bureaucracies are inherently conservative, resistant to change, and unlikely to be the source driving change and innovation. In a democratic context, this is entirely appropriate if we accept the view that the bureaucracy is there to implement the direction given by politically accountable ministers and the president. But, given the traditional isolation of Brazilian foreign policy from the cut and thrust of daily politics – the area’s almost accepted status as a ‘policy of state’ – this implication is important for understanding why Brazil has seemed so poorly able to respond to a host of recent challenges such as the stuttering state of the important trade bloc Mercosul. The implication for future research is that scholars should spend more time examining the public policy and political process underlying Brazilian foreign policy, placing particular attention on why other political and bureaucratic actors continue to overlook this increasingly important area. After all, although we have demonstrated that the president is currently the essential driver of change and innovation in Brazilian foreign policy, ultimately, the president is responsive to pressures from the legislature and society. As it stands, we are unlikely to see further innovation and change in Brazil’s foreign policy, particularly given the state of economic and political crisis that was facing the country as this paper was completed.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributors

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