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## The Role of Emerging Powers in International System: A Case Study of Brazil

**Abstract:** Brazil has come in for a lot of criticism for some of the positions it has taken in response to what has been called a period of ‘permanent crisis’ in world politics. European leaders in particular have shown themselves to be perplexed about what they consider to be contradictory positions in response to two crises in particular: the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the Israeli war in Gaza in response to the Hamas terrorist attacks on 7 October 2023. Yet, the Brazilian response to these crises should not have come as a surprise. Using the conceptual frameworks of Complexity and Human Systems Dynamics, as well as complexity mapping as an illustrative model, this paper argues that the Brazilian positions to these crises are both predictable and internally coherent. What is lacking is mutual knowledge and understanding of these positions. Increasing such understanding is critical as a way of working together more effectively stopping the waste of political capital on issues over which outsiders have little to no influence.

**Keywords:** *Emerging Powers, International System, Liberal International Order, Brazil, Global South*

### Introduction

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine since February 2022 has torn apart some basic assumptions about the international political system as we know it since the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. The most basic of these is the prohibition of force for territorial conquest. The ongoing war in the Gaza Strip in response to the Hamas terrorist attack in Israel of 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023 have further eroded the belief in the sustainability and resilience of said system in the face of actors determined to either ignore, or actively destroy it.

This has put a number of emerging powers in a difficult position. For Brazil, these wars put two, potentially, conflicting foreign policy principles to the test: on the one hand, its

belief in multilateralism as a way of resolving conflicts peacefully and, on the other, the non-interference in the affairs of other sovereign states.

Critically, to many political leaders outside Brazil, particularly in the European Union, the tensions between these two principles are not sustainable. Brazil, according to this argument, will have to take clearer positions.

Using the conceptual framework of Complexity, this paper will argue that, whilst Brazilian ambiguity in response to potentially epoch-defining conflicts may be frustrating to many, they should not be surprising and one should not expect significant change. In fact, the Brazilian posture has been broadly consistent with precedent. What is needed is a better understanding of the underpinnings of Brazilian foreign policy so that political capital is not spent trying to change something over which most outside actors have little influence.

### **Context: Brazil and its foreign policy – some change, but much continuity**

Historically, Brazilian foreign policy has been marked by a significant degree of continuity based on three broad objectives: First, the desire for autonomy (Saraiva, 2014). Fonseca (1998, p. 368) defines this concept as ‘a desire to influence the open agenda with values that translate diplomatic tradition and capacity to see the international order with one’s own eyes and fresh perspectives.’ Together with this search for autonomy has come a particular attachment to the idea of sovereignty. Spurred also by the experience of colonialism and the huge influence of *one* country – the United States – Brazilian foreign policy has been marked by a respect for sovereignty and the non-interference in the affairs of other countries (Altemani & Lesser, 2009).

A second key objective has been the use of foreign policy as a tool for national development. Lafer (2001, p. 108) describes this as ‘the objective par excellence of [Brazilian] foreign policy, [...] a public policy devoted to translating domestic necessities into external possibilities [thereby] reducing the power asymmetries that were responsible for South American vulnerability’ (Lafer, 2001, p. 81).

A third objective has been the desire for recognition. Lima (2005, p. 6) argues that ‘this aspiration turns into foreign policy’s very reason for [being]’, tracing it back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when Brazil joined multiple international agreements and organizations. The fear of being marginalized manifested itself even more strongly at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Brazil made a point of participating in the Hague conference of 1907 and the Paris peace conference of 1919 in the aftermath of World War I. On both of occasions, the country argued for the equality of states and against the distinction between ‘great’ and ‘other’ powers (Lafer, 2001, p. 68-74).

These three objectives have been noticeable by their durability. Yet, over time, they have been interpreted quite differently, depending on the government in power, the particular

issue at stake, as well as both the strategic context and particular circumstances. Equally, what they mean for policy-making has varied over time.

To illustrate this point, it is instructive to look at the evolution of the meaning of 'autonomy'. During the Cold War, autonomy meant the country keeping its distance from, and therefore keeping out of, the superpower disputes (Keller, 2013). Only with the end of Brazil's military dictatorship in 1985 and the end of the Cold War in 1989/90 did Brazil begin to adopt a posture of 'autonomy through participation' (Fonseca Jr., 1998, p. 374). In doing so, Brazil also started to promote specific values, such as democracy, 'a positive attitude in relation to human rights, social justice, search for peace [and] non-proliferation' (Fonseca Jr, 1998, p. 374). These were seen as crucial preconditions to be able to participate fully within the international system in a post-Cold War world which witnessed the expansion of democracy and the supposed 'victory' of the liberal capitalist order.

These strategic considerations were taken one step further by the governments of Presidents Cardoso and Lula in his first two terms. Both not only wanted Brazil to actively participate in the international political system but integrate with it. This phase of 'autonomy through integration' has been seen as the high point of Brazilian activism in foreign policy, which manifested itself in a renewed push for reform of the UN Security Council, active political engagement with Africa and the broadly defined 'global south', the push for the creation of new, and the deepening of old, international mechanisms of cooperation, such as the G20 or the BRICS grouping of developing countries (de Almeida, 2009). Brazil, then, became an active promoter of multilateralism, international cooperation and regional integration (Gratius & Saraiva, M, p. 2013) and one of most consistent advocates of a profound reform of the multilateral system in order to make it more representative (Sweig, 2010).

The most significant change to come out of this new posture was Brazil's relationship with its own region, South America. Brazil led a series of initiatives, creating an 'alphabet soup' of regional – and sub-regional organizations with a wide range of responsibilities across an array of policy areas (Glickhouse, 2012). The creation of organizations such as MERCOSUL was a reflection of Brazil's desire to promote the region as well as manifest its own leadership aspirations and credentials (Rothkopf, 2012). It was also a reflection of an emerging consensus across the political spectrum about the kind of economic and political model to follow. This consensus centred on a belief in free trade and the benefits of opening Brazil up to the wider world. In the region this meant a move away from 'closed' towards 'open' regionalism and a belief in the utility of regionalism as a tool for advancing particular national interests. This consensus benefited greatly from the geopolitical stability of South America (Malamud, 2010).

Yet, the beginning of the global economic crisis of 2008, followed by Brazil's worst recessions since records began, meant that this activism collapsed. Both of Lula's immediate successors – Dilma and Temer – were buffeted by severe domestic crises, with Dilma suffering massive public protests and, ultimately, impeachment which brought Temer to power. These crises not only forced both to focus their energies mostly on domestic issues,

but also led to a process of profound domestic political polarization, culminating in the election of Far-Right nationalist President Jair Bolsonaro in 2018.

These developments had several consequences for Brazilian foreign policy: First, they led to a deliberate scaling back of Brazilian diplomatic activity, reflected in the closing of embassies and consular representations across the globe, as well as other cut-backs at the Foreign Ministry, Itamaraty (Stuenkel, 2016). Whilst these could be explained at the time by both budgetary pressures, as well as the relative lack of interest in foreign affairs on the part of both Dilma and Temer, this disengagement was both promoted and accelerated as a deliberate change of foreign policy strategy under Bolsonaro.

An avid follower of then-US President Donald Trump and his ‘America First’ strategy, Bolsonaro tried to implement something similar in Brazil, initially led by Foreign Minister, Ernesto Araujo, who, despite being a long-standing diplomat, publicly rejected virtually all the basic tenants of foreign policy traditionally promoted by his own ministry (Lehmann, 2019).

Yet, Bolsonaro followed through on hardly any of his promises with regards to foreign policy. He did not take Brazil out of the Paris Climate Accord. He did not move the Brazilian embassy in Israel to Jerusalem but, by opening a commercial office in the city, managed to upset both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority (Lehmann, 2019).

In many ways, then, Bolsonaro’s term was marked by what one might call incoherence: an often-striking change of *posture* and *rhetoric* but a lot of continuity in terms of *actions*. Ironically, this way, Bolsonaro underscored some long-standing criticism of Brazilian foreign policy-making, which as Hurrell (2008) or Gardini (2015) argued, has suffered from ambiguities and strategic confusion.

Critically, though, the sources of this perceived incoherence and ambiguity have often been poorly understood outside Brazil. To address this lack of (often mutual) understanding we will turn to the conceptual framework of Complexity, arguing that this framework will allow for a better understanding of the Brazilian position and, as such, better chances of constructive engagement with it.

## Introducing Complex Adaptive Systems

What will be argued now is that some of this confusion is the result of a misunderstanding of the different strategic contexts and particular circumstances between Brazil and Europe and the way through which these differences are expressed in both political and practical terms. These differences are complex and often not soluble. Yet, many policy-makers define these issues, and policy-differences between Brazil and others, as complicated. As Edwards (2002, p. 17) points out, with complicated problems ‘it is possible to work out solutions and implement them.’ There is a belief that, having identified an unsatisfactory situation *a*, the application of the ‘right’ policy *b* would, with enough effort and sufficient resources, lead to a satisfactory outcome *c* which could then be maintained into the future for as

long as possible. The identified problem would therefore be 'solved'. Geyer (2003) or Geyer and Rihani (2010) identify this type of approach to problem-solving as common in public policy, terming it 'Newtonian' or 'linear', the idea being that political leaders can control both policies and outcomes.

Yet, this is a misunderstanding of what foreign policy actually is. As understood here, foreign policy is not complicated but a complex pattern of conditions, with the following characteristics:

- The presence within the system of a large number of elements
- These elements interact in a rich manner, that is, any element in the system is influenced by, and influences, a large number of other elements
- These interactions are often non-linear
- There are multiple short feedback loops in the interactions
- The openness of the system and its elements to their environment
- These systems operate in a state far from equilibrium
- These systems have a history
- The elements of the system are ignorant of the behaviour of the system as a whole

(adapted from Geyer & Rihani, 2010)

Eoyang (2010, p. 466) has defined problems with such characteristics as complex-adaptive, 'a collection of semi-autonomous agents with the freedom to act in unpredictable ways and whose interactions over time and space generate system-wide patterns.' As Edwards (2002, p. 17) observed, such patterns 'have remarkable resilience in the face of efforts to change them.' This is partly due to the fact that the system's agents 'are constantly changing, as are the relationships between and amongst them' (Eoyang & Holladay 2013, p. 16-17). There is significant *interdependence* between agents within a system as well as the individual agents and the system as a whole. The system self-organizes, a process by which the internal interactions between agents and conditions of a system generate system-wide patterns (Eoyang, 2001).

Geyer (2003) argues that such systems are, therefore, marked by elements of order, elements of complexity and elements of disorder and unpredictability. These elements interact in, at best, partially predictable and partially reducible ways.

International Relations are actually full of orderly elements. For instance, voting outcomes in international organizations are highly predictable. Yet, the *reasons* each country votes the way it does within the confines of these organizations often differ. There is, hence, what Geyer calls 'mechanical complexity'. As institutions, countries and people interact, these interactions become more complex in what we shall call here 'organic complexity'. As an example, one can think about the interaction between national governments in the confines of the U.N. Security Council. One may also look at the interaction between the Office of a President, a Foreign Ministry and that country's national congress. Critically, the people who participate in these interactions are all able to *interpret* what they, and others,

are doing differently, leading to ‘conscious complexity’. In doing so, they will be influenced, amongst other things, by their own values, life-experiences, the cultures of the institutions they are working for etc. Taken together, it is unsurprising that the long-term outcomes of policies are unknowable.

Geyer illustrates these elements applied to social and political processes through a model he calls ‘Complexity mapping’, in which the phenomena outlined above are illustrated as follows:

Figure 1. The range of phenomena in foreign policy-making

Disorder	Conscious complexity	Organic complexity	Mechanical complexity	Order
<----->				
Time				
Examples				
Long-term policy outcomes; detailed long-term development of foreign policy and/or the international system.	Norms, language, narrative interpretation	Interaction between different actors and different institutions during policy-making and over time	Particular preferences of particular politicians; particular circumstances; particular reasons for particular votes at a particular time	Basic policy preferences and principles; Voting outcomes in international institutions etc.

This model has since been applied to explain a wide range of social and political issues, ranging from European integration to the provision of health services to the US response in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (Lehmann, 2011; Geyer & Rihani, 2010) and which will be used here to illustrate the phenomena of Brazilian foreign policy in broad terms, before being applied to the two specific case studies.

## **Brazilian foreign policy as a Complex Adaptive System**

With the above in mind, it should come as no surprise that basic agreement about the basic parameters of Brazilian foreign policy has not meant no change. Different Presidents and/or Foreign Ministers may prioritize one of these basic principles over others. They may give more credence to one policy area over another. For instance, President Cardoso was far more interested in using foreign policy as a tool for economic development than Lula, whose foreign policy was more explicitly normative than that of his predecessor (Altemani & Lessa, 2008).

The persistence of these guiding principles across time and different Presidents with different ideological persuasions has a lot to do with organic complexity, the role of, and interaction between, different actors and institutions within, and during, the foreign policy process. In their totality they constitute a considerable block against radical change for two reasons: Firstly, many of these institutions, such as the Foreign Ministry, Itamaraty, value continuity as a basic principle underpinning foreign policy (Cervo & Bueno, 2015). Second, the interplay between these various institutions and actors makes radical foreign policy change politically difficult and slow. Whilst recent decades have seen increasing 'presidentialism' in foreign policy-making in Brazil this did not lead to significant changes in foreign policy since there has been a considerable amount of agreement between Presidents about the general orientation and strategic objectives of Brazilian foreign policy (Cheibub et al., 2011).

In this sense, the Presidency of Jair Bolsonaro represents an exception: He did, as shown, advocate for radical change in foreign policy. He, at least rhetorically, disowned some of these principles whilst continuing to adhere to quite a few others, such as non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Equally, he faced heavy resistance domestically to some policy proposals that would have demolished some of these principles (for instance, neutrality in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict had the move of the embassy to Jerusalem gone ahead). So, organic complexity and conscious complexity interact here in interdependent ways that significantly influence policy-making.

In a strategic sense, Lula's third term in office has been an attempt to return 'to normal' after what he would see as the exception of the Bolsonaro Presidency. However, that also has proved elusive: circumstances have changed and it is not possible to 'return' to where one 'left off', a point which has been key to much of the analysis of Lula's foreign policy since January 2023. Whilst the overall aims seem to be persistent, and in line with Brazilian foreign policy tradition, the particular circumstances have changed significantly (Stuenkel, 2023a).

In short, one can illustrate the range of phenomena in Brazilian foreign policy-making as follows:

Figure 2. The range of phenomena in Brazilian foreign policy

Disorder	Conscious complexity	Organic complexity	Mechanical complexity	Order
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Time

Examples

Detailed long-term development of Brazilian foreign policy	Different norms and values by different actors across time and space and their impact on foreign policy	Interaction between different actors and different institutions during policy-making and over time	Particular events or circumstances. The role of preferences of particular office holders	Basic agreement on the principles of Brazilian foreign policy
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Having outlined the basic principles of Brazilian foreign policy and analyzed them through a Complexity framework, we can now turn to the two case studies to see what this means in practice.

### Case study I: Brazilian foreign policy in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia is interesting since it spans two very different Presidents (Bolsonaro and Lula) with two very different foreign policy visions. As such, analyzing Brazilian policy in relation to the war in Ukraine should give us a very good idea about elements of continuity and change in Brazilian foreign policy at large.

When Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine began Brazil was a temporary member of the UN Security Council. Speaking in the UN Security Council on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2022 Brazil’s permanent representative at the UN, Ronaldo Costa Filho, argued that

[i]t is our duty, both in the Council and in the General Assembly, to stop and reverse this escalation. We need to engage in serious negotiations, in good faith, that could allow the restoration of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, security guarantees for Ukraine and Russia, and strategic stability in Europe.’ (Costa Filho, 2022).

Subsequently, Brazil voted in favor of UN General Assembly Resolution of 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2022, which demanded that that ‘Russia immediately end its military operations in Ukraine’ (UNGA, 2022a). Yet, the country abstained from the vote on Russia’s suspension from the UN Human Rights Council in April 2022 (UNGA, 2022b), arguing that isolating Russia would not help bring about an end to the war, the principal Brazilian policy objective.



At regional level, Brazil also abstained from the vote which suspended Russia's status as a permanent observer at the Organization of American States (OAS, 2022). Interestingly, during the debate, the main concern for many of those who abstained was of practical nature, several states expressing concern about how a suspension would impact the provision of fertilizers, of which Russia was one of the main providers (Marcondes & Silva, 2023).

Within the confines of international organizations, very little changed once Lula returned to the Presidency in January 2023. Brazil voted in favor of a Resolution in February of that year which called for an immediate end to the war in Ukraine, including a demand 'that the Russian Federation immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders' (UNGA, 2023a). At the same time, the resolution demanded that, to end the conflict, member states should 'redouble support for diplomatic efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine, consistent with the Charter' (UNGA, 2023a).

The similarities between the personal pronouncements by Bolsonaro and Lula are also interesting. Bolosnaro's first pronouncements stressed both Brazilian neutrality and the need to avoid negative consequences for Brazil's economy. He did not wish for deteriorating relations with Russia since Brazil imported a large quantity of fertilizers from the country. Whilst he consistently reiterated his desire that there be peace as quickly as possible, he stressed that a more direct involvement of Brazil in the conflict was simply not in the country's interest (Carvalho, 2024).

Lula, similarly, stressed the need not to get involved directly in the war. Brazil would not take sides even though Lula did emphatically condemn the invasion, arguing that Russia committed 'the classic mistake of invading another country's sovereign territory.' His overriding policy objective was for the war to end as quickly as possible (Carvalho, 2024).

Where Lula differed markedly from Bolsonaro was in his determination to have Brazil involved actively in the diplomatic efforts to end the war. To this end, he made a number of proposals, including the possibility of territorial concessions by Ukraine, arguing that 'perhaps' one could discuss the status of Crimea, as well as the installation of a permanent 'group of interlocutors' to talk to Russia and Ukraine to 'negotiate peace' (Marcondes & Silva, 2023).

With this in mind, it is worth looking at the complexity map again, this time applied specifically to the Brazilian position regarding the war in Ukraine.

Figure 3. The range of phenomena in Brazilian policy towards the war in Ukraine

Disorder	Conscious complexity	Organic complexity	Mechanical complexity	Order
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Time

Examples

Outcome of Ukrainian war and post-war order	Different normative underpinnings of policy from one President to another	Different Presidents. Different interactions in international forums. Statements etc.	Different emphasis as to <i>why</i> end of war and neutrality is important	Basic agreement on the neutrality of Brazil in the war Aim of ending the war quickly
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Two things are striking about the above: Firstly, the remarkable consistency of Brazil's position across two *very* different governments. The basic principles of Brazilian foreign policy are clearly in evidence. The only significant change from one government to another has been the justification and what this basic posture is meant to achieve. Bolsonaro emphasized economic aspects whilst, for Lula, the focus was more on inserting Brazil 'into the conversation' and re-establishing the country as a partner on the international stage (Fabbro, 2023).

The second critical point is the absence of any long-term plans for a post-war order. Some have argued that Brazil's position on Ukraine should be understood within the context of its desire to reform the international institutional security order (Stuenkel 2023b). Yet very little has been said by either President in this respect when talking about Ukraine. The focus has been very narrowly on 'ending the war', with little thought given to what this would *mean* strategically.

Part of this is down to particular circumstances. Unlike for Europe, the war in Ukraine does not have *immediate* consequences for Brazil, in terms of refugee flows, energy prices or direct danger of military overspill. Yet, part is also down to what was discussed above: a lack of long-term planning and, instead, a focus on dealing reactively with the direct consequences of particular crises.

With this in mind, we now turn to the second case-study, the war between Israel and Hams in the Gaza strip since October 2023.

## Case study II: The Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza

The terrorist attacks on Israel by Hamas on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023 were the single most-deadly attack on Israeli territory since the foundation of the state in 1948 (Byman *et al.* 20023). On the day they occurred, the Brazilian government condemned the attacks, with Lula stating that he ‘repudiates terrorism’ and was ‘shocked’ by the attacks (Morreira & Petró, 2024).

Over time, and with the Israeli military response in Gaza ongoing, Brazil’s policy began to focus on two issues: First, the attempts to evacuate Brazilian citizens from Gaza and, more broadly, seek a humanitarian ceasefire, and, second, condemnation of Israel for the scale and nature of its response, with attempts to shift the debate towards the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict which includes the establishment of a Palestinian state, a long-standing Brazilian policy objective (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2014).

With regards to the first issue, the government invested a lot of time and effort into evacuating Brazilian citizens from the Gaza strip in the early phase of Israel’s military response and had some success in doing so (Viapiana, 2023).

Within the framework of international institutions, Brazil acted in ways that one would have expected. The country supported the General Assembly Resolution from October 2023, which called for an ‘immediate and sustained’ truce for humanitarian purposes, as well as the cessation of any attacks against Israeli and Palestinian civilians (UNGA, 2023b). This call was repeated in a resolution adopted on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2023 (UNGA, 2023c), with Brazil once again voting in favor.

Yet, it was with regards to the second issue that Brazil’s political position became more difficult internationally and here the public pronouncements of President Lula served as a key ‘lightening rod’. Lula condemned Israel’s *conduct* of the war in Gaza, comparing it first to the Holocaust perpetrated by the German Nazi regime against Jews between 1933 and 1945 and then to ‘genocide’ (Agência Brasil, 2023). This led to a diplomatic spat with Israel, the country declaring the Brazilian President a ‘persona non grata’ in response (Berman, 2024). In February 2024, Brazil recalled its ambassador to Israel in protest at the conduct of the war (Folha de São Paulo, 2024).

Just like on Ukraine, Lula’s government repeatedly sought diplomatic means to end the war, using its presidency of the UN Security Council as a platform. On 11<sup>th</sup> October, the President’s office stated that Brazil, ‘as president of the UN Security Council, will join the efforts to bring the conflict to an immediate and definitive end’ (Planalto, 2023). In February 2024, Lula argued that ‘the resumption of peace negotiations [between Israel and the Palestinians] is a universal cause’ (Planalto, 2024). Analysts of Brazilian foreign policy argued that, in pushing for a diplomatic, as well as a two-state, solution to the war, Lula followed in the ‘spirit of constructive dialogue and the longstanding Brazilian position supporting a two-state solution’ (Kruchin, 2023).

Figure 4. The range of phenomena in Brazilian policy towards the war in Gaza

Disorder	Conscious complexity	Organic complexity	Mechanical complexity	Order
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Time

Examples

Outcome of Gaza war and the establishment of a Palestinian state	Normative underpinnings of policy	Different political audiences	Different degrees of focus on different aspects of the war	Condemnation of terrorist attacks; support for a two-state solution and diplomatic means for ending the war
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Once again, the basic tenants of the Brazilian response should not have come as any surprise. As shown, there is long-standing agreement on the necessity of a two-state solution. What *was* different was the President in power (Lula) and the political party he belongs to.

The importance of Lula in power can be seen in the language used to articulate what is long-standing Brazilian policy. Lula often talks more stridently, and less diplomatically, about issues of importance to him, as seen in his comments about ‘genocide’ in Gaza. This, in terms of Brazil’s influence at this particular time and on this particular issue, had an impact, especially given the make-up of the Israeli government with whom Lula is interacting, it being the most right-wing government in the country’s history (Berg, 2022). Here, the fact that Lula is the leader of the Brazilian Workers Party – which has a long history of pro-Palestinian activism – is also important. Put simply, whilst Lula’s choice of language may not have been ‘diplomatic’, it was entirely consistent both with Lula’s long-standing style and in tune with the domestic audience to which he has historically belonged (Poder 360, 2023). Equally, the normative underpinning of the policy might have been stronger under Lula and his Worker’s Party, but it is unlikely the overall policy would have been radically different under, say, a Bolsonaro presidency. The *parameters* of Brazilian Middle East policy in general – and the Palestinian question in particular – are well set and long-standing. Within this context, Brazilian diplomacy did what it *could*, which was essentially evacuating Brazilians from Gaza.

Yet, there is one striking difference between the Brazilian response to the war in Ukraine and the one in Gaza. Unlike in the case of Ukraine, the Brazilian government has a very clear view about what should come in the place of war: the establishment of a Palestinian state which should, in territorial terms, include Gaza. Yet, just like in the case of Ukraine, there is very little by way of a strategy to achieve this goal. Apart from some vague statements about ‘negotiations’ and ‘international efforts’ to achieve this outcome, there is next

to nothing about how to create, and sustain, the conditions necessary to bring it about (Planalto, 2024).

Yet, once again, such a lack of longer-term strategy is, perhaps, understandable bearing in mind two factors: Firstly, just like in the case of Ukraine, the war in Gaza has little immediate impact on Brazil. The day-to-day life of Brazilians does not change as a consequence of the war. Equally, the question of Israeli security– or Palestinian statehood– is simply not a matter of priority for a large enough section of the population to influence Brazilian policy-makers one way or the other (Guimarães& Fernandes, 2024). Secondly, despite some grand statements about the need for a diplomatic solution, Brazilian governments – and particularly Brazilian governments of the left – have effectively no influence over Israeli governments, and particularly the current one, which is ideologically the polar-opposite of the Lula government. As such, much of what Brazil says or does in response to the war in Gaza goes into a huge void. It is ‘noise’, something that can be irritating but which does not make a material difference.

We can now turn to the question of what this all means in terms of understanding Brazilian foreign policy.

### **Understanding continuity and change in Brazilian foreign policy in an era of permanent crisis**

Brazil’s foreign policy has often been criticized, both in Europe and beyond as contradictory (The Economist, 2019). Whilst there was hope that, with the re-election of Lula for a third term, Brazil may get a ‘normal’ foreign policy again, one year in Stuenkel (2024) contended that the new government’s policy was one of ‘normalization and friction’.

Yet, as I hope to have shown, Brazilian foreign policy has been characterized by a remarkable degree of continuity which has endured *despite* severe crises impacting the world and *despite* enormous political upheaval in Brazil itself which brought to power an ‘anti-system’ candidate in 2018 whose aim was to upend the country’s foreign political consensus. He in turn was replaced by a President, Lula, who, both ideologically and in terms of personality, could not be more different to his predecessor.

As shown, the key to this continuity are long-standing patterns of conditions which have underpinned Brazilian foreign policy for literally decades and longer. These underpinnings have, so far, proved to be far stronger than any one political leader, even if and when that leader tried to change them. Add to this the particularities of each crisis (the war in Ukraine, for instance, does not have a direct impact on Brazil, but a diplomatic crisis with Russia would have a direct impact on the country and the war in Gaza began whilst the leader of a party with a long history of support for the Palestinian cause was in power) and the posture of Brazil in relation to these two crises should not have come as a surprise to anybody.

This, then, suggests that one of the main problems faced by non-Brazilian diplomats and political leaders is a lack of understanding of the patterns of conditions underpinning Brazilian foreign policy, both long-term and short-term. The consequence of this lack of knowledge is that enormous amounts of time, diplomatic and political capital are being spent in the forlorn attempt to change positions that many outside actors have no chance of changing. In simple terms, what, to outsiders, may appear to be contradictions in Brazilian foreign policy are, to Brazilian diplomats and politicians, perfectly reasonable, and coherent, decisions to take.

From a European point of view this leads to some uncomfortable truths: The amount of space the EU and its member states have to decisively influence Brazilian foreign policy is severely limited. With regards to Ukraine, for instance, Brazil will not ‘take sides’. Rather, what one might be able to get Brazil to agree to is to play some kind of mediating role in a future peace process. With regards to Gaza, it may be possible to have Brazil assume some kind of humanitarian role in a ceasefire scenario.

In order to be able to engage with Brazil on such terms, however, it is imperative that European diplomats do more to *get to know and learn* about the fundamentals of Brazilian foreign policy. In practical terms this should mean, amongst other things, a much clearer and consistent attempt to foster and maintain long-standing expertise within the EU Delegation in Brazil. It should mean much closer cooperation with Brazilian specialists on Brazilian foreign policy, be they academics, think-tanks or former and current diplomats. It should mean a much more realistic view of the *scope* of influence the EU actually has in a country which is proud of both its diplomatic tradition of non-interference.

In short, there is an urgent need to learn about, and accept, limits of action and influence and to be clear-eyed about what that means in practice. There is an urgent need to see what an outside actor can and cannot do.

## Conclusions

In this paper I have sought to explain Brazil’s response to two ongoing international crises – the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and the war in Gaza – utilizing the conceptual framework of Complexity. With the help of complexity mapping, I have shown that the Brazilian response to these crises was very consistent and informed by long-standing and enduring principles of Brazilian foreign policy. These, in turn, li

This leads to two areas where further research is urgently needed. One, it needs to be asked what these limits of influence mean in practice for outside actors like the European Union? What can they do and not do when it comes to Brazil? Second, what are the patterns of conditions that stop organizations like the EU from becoming ‘learning organizations’ that, de facto, can adapt in their diplomacy and their policy-actions to the particularities of a country like Brazil?

I hope to have shown that these issues must be addressed urgently. There is too much going on to waste time addressing easily avoidable problems which are the consequences of a simple lack of knowledge and/or interest.

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