How to Stay a Leader Without Followers: Brazil's Foreign Policy Under Lula III

Sean Burges

Abstract: The paper argues that the Brazil of Lula III remains a leader without followers and, through examining leadership theories and mini case studies on activities highlighted by Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira, that Brazil has failed to provide tangible leadership benefits and adopt principled stances for collective advancement. It recommends a comprehensive national dialogue to integrate international considerations into Brazilian domestic priorities and underscores the absence of a clear, overarching strategy as a hindrance to effective international engagement. Ultimately, the paper highlights the need for Brazil to reevaluate its foreign policy approach if it is to have a leadership position in global and regional affairs.

Keywords: Brazilian foreign policy; leadership; Lula; diplomacy.

Como se manter um líder sem seguidores: a política externa do Brasil sob Lula III

Resumo: O artigo argumenta que o Brasil de Lula III continua a ser um líder sem seguidores e, através da análise das teorias de liderança e de miniestudos de caso sobre as atividades destacadas pelo ministro das Relações Exteriores, Mauro Vieira, que o Brasil não conseguiu proporcionar benefícios de liderança tangíveis e adotar posições de princípio para o avanço coletivo. Recomenda um diálogo nacional abrangente para integrar considerações internacionais nas prioridades domésticas brasileiras e sublinha a ausência de uma estratégia clara e abrangente como um obstáculo ao envolvimento internacional efetivo. Em última análise, o documento destaca a necessidade de o Brasil reavaliar a sua abordagem de política externa, se quiser ter uma posição de liderança nos assuntos globais e regionais.

Palavras-Chave: política externa brasileira; liderança; Lula; diplomacia.

In a 2011 article reflecting on the foreign policy of the first two Lula Presidencies, Andrés Malamud (2011) chose the apocryphal title "A Leader Without Followers." Malamud's point was not that Brazil lacked the capacity to convene meetings of leaders across the Global South or was unable to claim a seat at key global governance tables run by the Global North. Rather, he was arguing that the relatively easy phase of Brazilian leadership had ended. While coordinating and leading a coherent, forward-looking position for South American and other developing countries in a forum such as the World Trade Organization had been a massive change at the outset of Lula's tenure, by 2010 many formerly quiet countries had learned the lesson from Brazil and were beginning to speak up and organize joint stances too. With self-perceptions of agency in regional and global systems–*autoestima,* in Lula's own parlance–on the rise across the Global South by 2008, a change was needed for Brazilian leadership to progress, one that would require the provision of concrete leadership goods and the taking of principled positions for the collective that might at times discomfort individual partners (Burges 2015). As Malamud noted in his article, Lula's foreign policy was singularly failing to do this.

The high-level argument in this paper is that the first year of Lula III suggests Brazil remains a leader without followers and, absent a major strategic shift, this situation will not change. This, in turn, points to the need for a nationwide discussion about how the international fit into Brazilian domestic priorities, including answers to a key question: what do regional and international leadership mean when it comes to planning and implementing Brazilian foreign policy? Policy-makers are not helped on this front by the U.S.-dominated international relations literature. As management scholars point out, popular conceptions of what makes a good leader do not align with what actually creates success. The act of leading perforce requires getting others to do something they might not initially prioritize, but this is not the same thing as coercing compliance. Leadership also does not mean an absence of competition or debate. Rather than being a source of confrontation, leadership is about competition to provide a better value proposition on a material and ethical basis such that potential partner countries choose to follow.

Despite the seemingly entrenched conflation of coercion and leadership in popular conceptions of foreign policy, the two ideas are quite distinct and will be set out in the first section of this paper. Emphasis will be placed upon

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the ability to provide real value to potential followers, which is where Brazil is failing badly. The findings from the conceptual discussion of leadership will then be used in subsequent sections to briefly interrogate the foreign policy goals and successes claimed by the Lula III administration as detailed by Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira (2023b; 2024; Winter 2023). In each of the examples discussed in the paper, the common theme is one of movement towards leadership with an accompanying repeat of the Lula I and Lula II unwillingness to carry through on the required action. As Buarque (2024) has pointed out with reference to the first PT (Workers' Party) era, this tentativeness damages Brazil's reputation and reliability as a leading actor on the world stage and ultimately undermines the status ambitions of the Lula III Presidency. It also highlights the lack of a clear, overarching strategy behind Brazil's external engagements, what Mares and Trinkunas (2016) would label the absence of a grand strategy.

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For Brazil to devote considerable political and economic capital to taking concrete action and positions of leadership in regional and world affairs carries significant implications for the country. It specifically requires that Brazil acts and commits fungible political and economic resources to leading others in pursuit of its priorities. The paper thus concludes by recommending that Vieira or a joint commission of the two Congressional Foreign Affairs committees convene a modern version of the foreign policy consultation exercise that led to the 1993 document *Reflexões Sobre a Política Externa Brasileira* (IPRI 1993), which ultimately provided the framework for over a decade of successful international engagement. The findings should be published as a *Brazilian Foreign Policy White Paper* to drive a wider national debate rather than burying it as Vieira did with the findings from the 2014 consultation

process initiated by his predecessor Luiz Alberto Figueiredo Machado. Muddling through with an ideologically nostalgic world view as Lula and Amorim have been doing over the last year is not a responsible path forward.

LEADERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The standard view in the international relations literature is that leadership is about the exercise of power. Most accounts and interpretations emphasize the capacity and willingness of dominant actors to either make others comply or to possess such overwhelming power that the costs of challenging leadership is too high to bear. Coercion, implied or explicit, is the name of the game and the underlying theme is one of the stronger imposing its goals and priorities on the weaker (Lemke 2010). The irony in the literature is that this constant refrain of forced compliance overlooks the centrality of public goods provision in giving leading States in the international system legitimacy across time (Kindleberger 1981; Strange 2015). Drawing on this oversight allows us to put a useful twist on the hegemonic decline literature and view the problem identified by scholars such as Gilpin (1981) as being not so much one of 'imperial overreach' but rather a failing capacity to co-opt others into self-interestedly supporting the hegemon's system (Gilpin 1987). More specifically, the leadership of the dominant State collapses because it is not providing critical, concrete leadership goods to its followers.

Irrespective of the historical era or contextual situation, actively forcing others to follow a medium- to long-term leadership plan is expensive and requires a continuous display and outlay of overt, often oppressive power. Machiavelli classically warns of this with his advice that the Prince gets the nasty, coercive aspect of consolidating rule over quickly so that it might fade from memory and thus allow a more cost-effective form of governance to emerge. James MacGregor Burns (2010: 11) offers greater clarity in his discussion of political leadership when he warns us to "recognize the limited reach of 'total' or 'coercive' power. We must see power–and leadership–not as things but as relationships." Nabers (2010) echoes this, pointing out that leadership and power are not the same thing even if they are often confused or conflated in the international relations literature. Indeed, if we turn to recent historical research on the intellectual antecedents of liberal democracy in Amerindian societies, it becomes clear that the sort of power commonly discussed in international relations is not necessary. Instead, the key characteristic is the ability to build a consensus and coordinate disparate actors into a collective to provide a common beneficial outcome (Graeber & Wengrow 2021, 37-77). This translates directly to the origins of the contemporary International Liberal Order as well as

conceptions of soft power (Nye 2005) married with a willingness to underwrite the operation of the system; although the U.S. had the preponderance of power at the end of World War Two, it got its way designing the post-War order by offering a system explicitly intended to provide benefits to all and was also willing to cover substantial portions of the cost of running it.

For a country with limited disposable hard power resources such as Brazil, the implications from the insights outlined above are crucial. An ability to present ideas and organize action around common positions is a central component of effective leadership. Indeed, this is precisely what Brazil under both Cardoso and Lula did so successfully from 1995-2010. Whether we call it 'consensual hegemony' (Burges et al. 2016), 'intermediate power' (Soares de Lima and Hirst 2006), or 'entrepreneurial power' (de Sá Guimarães 2017; de Sá Guimarães & de Almeida 2018), the power and resultant leadership stemmed from an ability to conceptualize, explain, and get subscription to a project offering meaningful benefit for the encompassed actors.

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A focus on the importance of inclusion and accommodation in effective leadership is repeatedly emphasized by Burns (2010, 18) in a manner that points us in a useful direction for considering Brazilian foreign policy: "Leadership shares with power the central function of achieving purpose… Leaders do not obliterate followers' motives though they may arouse certain motives and ignore others." While Burns' guidance is obvious after just a short period of reflection, it is the antithesis of what popular conceptions leadership in management and, by seeming cross fertilization, politics seem to prioritize; a good leader is confident, forceful,

brings others into line, brooks no opposition (Chamorro-Premuzic 2019). As business studies scholars are increasingly emphasizing, characteristics that are sometimes attributed to a "feminist" approach to leadership make for far more effective leaders: less hierarchy, an emphasis on cooperation, collaboration, and the enhancement of mutual self-worth (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt 2001, 783; Chamorro-Premuzic 2019). The ambitions and desires of the leader are certainly not sidelined; rather, the approach is to achieve them by advancing the team, not just the individual in charge. If we look back over Brazilian foreign policy during the first two Lula Presidencies, this is precisely the model we find in play (Amorim 2011; Brands 2012; Burges 2017; Rolland & Lessa 2010a; 2010b), albeit with one important missing element.

Turning back to the example of the U.S. and formation of the international liberal order, one critical unstated aspect from Burns remains. By its very nature, the position of leader, if it is pursued effectively, implies that the actor in question will ultimately take a decision and commit resources to back that position. With skill and a little bit of luck these decisions will be widely accepted and largely uncontroversial, but on occasion they will not. One way of characterizing Brazilian foreign policy offered by officials from other governments, often informally, is that Brazil does not want to take decisions or invest meaningful capital in case the actions become controversial–for example, see the Responsibility While Protecting (RWP) discussion in Harig and Kenkel (2017). This becomes frustrating for partners who have invested energy in engaging with Brazil and have bought into the larger strategy only to see it stymied by short-term tactical paranoia and fiscal stinginess.

Burns' (2010, 4) analysis is again very helpful for unravelling the frustration with Brazil as leader during the first PT era, offering a distinction between two basic types of leadership: the transactional and the transformative. The mindset of foreign policy planners and practitioners in Brasília often appears slanted heavily towards the transactional, focusing on how one thing gets exchanged for another. Yet, the reality behind Brazil's stated foreign policy ambitions, and particularly those of the Lula III Presidency, is transformative leadership. Indeed, a transformative leadership agenda offers considerably more scope for action because, by its very nature, it focuses on advancing mutually agreed goals and satisfying the higher-level needs of those encompassed by the project. In other words, a transformational leader is followed because it is taking the followers somewhere they want to go and helping them get there, not just offering a one-time pay off. It is also a path chosen by the leader, and it thus becomes the leader's responsibility to commit the necessary resources to open the trail if others are to be led down it.

The warning that Burns (2010, 34-40) offers for would-be leaders at a national level is that universal affection is not possible. This is particularly the

case with transformative leadership. Decisions are going to be made that upset some actors, but this need not undermine the legitimacy of the leader. Rather, what matters for retaining legitimacy and followership is how the leader uses management of the inevitable conflict and dissensus to "make conscious what lies unconscious among followers." Conflict, when it is unavoidable, is not something to be shunned, but rather embraced as an event to be exploited to further advance the larger project legitimizing the leadership. Again, managing conflict and maintaining leadership also implies the commitment of resources, be they political or economic, to maintain followership.

The implication of this discussion of leadership for Brazilian foreign policy-makers is not that Brazil should adopt a more belligerent, callous, intemperate approach to relations with neighbouring and extra-regional countries. (...) Rather, the proposition is that Brazil should at least reconsider where the boundaries are with respect to the country's willingness to act as the financial and political anchor for its central foreign policy initiatives.

The implication of this discussion of leadership for Brazilian foreign policy-makers is not that Brazil should adopt a more belligerent, callous, intemperate approach to relations with neighbouring and extra-regional countries. Efforts in this direction would likely send most of Itamaraty, the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, into anaphylactic shock and simply would not work. Rather, the proposition is that Brazil should at least reconsider where the boundaries are with respect to the country's willingness to act as the financial and political anchor for its central foreign policy initiatives. As the survey of three key policy areas in the first year of Lula III highlights, an unwillingness to commit political and economic capital to advancing the transformative leadership plan suggests that assertion of Brazilian regional and global leadership will amount to little more than a presidential vanity project with little payoff for the country as a whole.

LEADERSHIP AND THE LULA III FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA

In his *discurso de posse*, or inauguration speech, Vieira (2023a) bluntly stated "Brasil está de volta [Brazil is back]." He continued on to declare that "the main

task of foreign policy in the face of this [post-Bolsonaro Presidency] situation will be to reinsert Brazil in its region and in the world, as corresponds to our values and interests. This will require intense use of our diplomatic capacities and a strong revival of presidential diplomacy." After the four-year interregnum of the Jair Bolsonaro Presidency many of Brazil's long-standing partners and interlocutors were looking forward to a more traditional foreign policy. Indeed, reengagement with the region and world has not proven particularly problematic or challenging on a *prima facie* level. Simply following the norms of diplomacy and seeking out dialogue were enough to rejoin world and regional affairs after the bombast of Bolsonaro and his first Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo.

In 2023 Lula clearly demonstrated that he still knows how to address an international audience. What remained unclear was Lula's awareness that the international scene has changed substantially since 2010, putting increasing stress on the resource commitment and position taking aspects of leadership discussed above. The values Lula professed to advance on behalf of Brazil–democracy, environmental protection, and peace and security–all matter tremendously. The issue is that when Lula's Brazil was presented with challenges on these files, he failed; Lula mouthed the right words, but the requisite supporting action was sorely missing. All of this creates a summative situation that undermines Brazil's standing in regional and world politics and strongly suggests the Lula III foreign policy is failing.

Democracy Promotion

Lula began his official duties of returning Brazil to the world at the January 2023 Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) meeting hosted by Argentina, evoking what we might call the "magic" of the 2008 founding meeting of the group in Costa do Sauípe, Bahia: "[it was] the first time that we, the heads of State and government of Latin America and the Caribbean, met without any foreign tutelage" (Folha Press 2023). The rest of his speech proceeded to cite well-known global challenges such as the environment, health pandemics, and energy security. The same pattern was repeated in the final declaration, the *Declaración de Buenos Aires*, which recognized and affirmed much, but committed no one to concrete action except for St Vincent and the Grenadines, who were charged with CELAC's rotating Presidency for the next year.

As Colombian President Gustavo Petro noted of the CELAC meeting: "*Hablamos mucho de unirnos, pero hacemos poco para hacerlo*"–we talk a lot about uniting, but do little to do it (Página 12 2023). Even in areas where some substantive symbolic action might have been expected, there was a notable silence from the meeting as

a whole and Brazil in particular. The topic of democratic breaks and deficits in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela was avoided and the simmering institutional crisis in Peru was side-stepped. Rather than using the meeting as a platform to emphasize the importance of democracy and inclusion in the region–ostensibly two priority issues for Brazil–Lula chose to meet with Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro on the margins of the Summit.

The question of democracy in the Americas became a telling point for the sort of leadership Lula was offering the region in 2023. Post-Cold War Brazil had a strong tradition of acting quite forcefully to protect and advance democracy in the hemisphere with principled messaging often being delivered directly to reluctant recipients (Burges & Daudelin 2007; Stuenkel 2013). Indeed, regional and hemispheric summits have frequently proven key instances in the preservation of democratic forms in the region–i.e., the Organization of American States (OAS) General Assembly in 2000 leading to Alberto Fujimori's resignation in Peru; the Rio Group Summit in 2002 and pressure against anti-Hugo Chávez putschists; the 2005 OAS General Assembly and the fall of the Carlos Mesa Presidency in Bolivia; and the 2012 Mercosur Summit and reaction against Fernando Lugo's cynical impeachment in Paraguay. None of these pro-democracy precedents appeared to be in play at the 2023 Brasília South American Leaders' Summit, when Lula not only looked past ongoing institutional shenanigans being committed by Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela, but also counselled his Venezuelan counterpart to "build your narrative [...] so that we can win once and for all, and Venezuela can return to being a sovereign country, where only its people, through the free vote, can say who will govern the country" (Della Coletta & Machado 2023).

The comfort provided by Lula to Maduro was not well-received by their contemporaries. Where Leaders' Summits are usually staid affairs of political politeness, Lula was promptly contradicted in his own capital by fellow leftist President Gabriel Boric of Chile, who pointed to the collapse of democracy in Venezuela: "It's not a narrative construction, it's a reality." Uruguay's conservative president Luis Lacalle added that the world was "trying to mediate so that democracy is full in Venuezela, that they have human rights, that there are no political prisoners. The worst thing we can do is block out the sun" (Paraguassu & Boadle 2023a). The impression from the meeting was that ideological alignment mattered more to Lula than the advancement of core progressive values, surrendering a major position of moral authority his government could have wielded in the wake of the unsuccessful January 8th attacks on Brazil's democratic institutions.

Where's the Beef?

In addition to backsliding on Brazil's long-standing commitment to democracy, the May Summit of South American Leaders in Brasília saw a return of the habit of promising without paying. Three policy propositions for rebuilding something like the Union of South American Nations (UNASUL), that collapsed during the Bolsonaro years, stand out. The first was the idea of reducing dependence on extra-regional currencies for trade. In itself this is a great idea and would tremendously reduce transaction costs for intra-continental commerce. It is also a mechanism already in place via the Reciprocal Payments and Credits Agreement of the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) treaty, even if it was previously used by Celso Amorim in 2008 as an instrument to keep recalcitrant counterparts in line (Chade 2008).

Lula's second and third policy propositions no doubt also sounded familiar to his counterparts. First was the idea of building a regional energy market, which would also require extensive construction of infrastructural connections. While not an unreasonable idea, it is also not even remotely original and historically has played a major role in tightly binding Bolivia and Paraguay to Brazil (Pinto 2009; Holanda 2001). Moreover, the theme of building energy infrastructure was a central element of Lula's and the PT's first period in power, anchoring the *empreiteiras* (civil engineering multinationals such as Odebrecht) to the Brazilian government and unleashing a wave of corruption across the continent that continues to plague governments. How to finance this infrastructure dream? Greater cooperation between national development banks was Lula's answer. This again was a reprise of the PSDB[1]/PT theme of leveraging smaller investments via institutions such as the Brazilian National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) to gain large, foreign paid contracts for Brazilian firms.

The twist that Lula put on his 2023 interpretation of the Brazilian infrastructure integration model was that it would allow coordinated action to tackle climate change. Indeed, the theme of combating climate change and protecting the environment was positioned as a critical foreign policy priority for Lula III. To this end, Lula built upon a triumphant symbolic attendance at the COP27 Conference in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, by convening a meeting of Amazonian nations in August 2024. Yet, as the Amazon nations conference progressed, it became clear that the historical challenges of Brazilian leadership remained, namely calls for action were not being matched by provision of the requisite resources.

1. Brazilian Social Democracy Party, which was the party of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2001).

On one level, Lula did provide an invaluable service by using the August 2023 *de facto* relaunch of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty to remind the world that over thirty million people live in the region and that simply turning the forest into an eco-preserve is not an option. He even committed a further R$ 600 million in funding to help Brazilian municipalities cope with deforestation and fires. Additional commitments included officially demarcating the lands of two indigenous peoples (Resende & Gabriel 2023). Furthermore, efforts from the outset of the Lula III Presidency successfully focused on greatly reducing the rate of deforestation. While all these measures did serve Lula's and Brazil's international reputation well, the inward direction of the spending of economic and political capital should not be overlooked, particularly given the extent to which it cemented his support with key PT electoral constituencies.

The Summit meeting of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty convened by Lula was ostensibly an excellent time for Lula to showcase Brazilian leadership on tropical forests and climate change. Not only was it the first meeting of the grouping in fourteen years, but it also featured participation from other major tropical forest countries: Indonesia, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and France (French Guiana). In this vein, the Declaration of Belém is a useful compilation of desires for future action on protecting and sustainably developing the Amazon. Yet, across the forty-three pages of the Declaration, almost no reference is made to how this will happen other than by convening vaguely worded working groups. More specifically, no mention is made of funding mechanisms other than reference to the responsibilities of the industrialized world to support this work. Indeed, the joint Communiqué from the participants pointed fingers and created an excuse for inaction, with paragraph four detailing the financial failures of the industrialized world to combat poverty and provide new and additional resources to developing countries to help manage climate change (MRE 2023a).

Prior to the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Summit, Lula expressed optimism that the meeting would result in a common policy for the Amazon and the preservation of tropical forests (Paraguassu 2023a). Some outlines for policy discussion were set, but specifics were almost non-existent as were commitments for the signatories to keep. Columnist Celso Ming (2023) was damning in his assessment of the meeting, noting that there was a total failure to talk about energy transitions to renewables and what might be done in terms of strategic investment and diversification. Perhaps worse than Ming's critiques and the clear absence of resource commitment from Lula to anchor the ongoing activities in the Declaration of Belém was the rejection by Brazil and the other participants of a Colombian proposal that the members call for a phasing out of all fossil fuels (Amaral 2023). Compounding Lula's failure

to provide the resources necessary to breathe life into his Amazonian leadership agenda was an astonishing collapse in principled leadership on the region and climate change through his advocacy for permits allowing Petrobras to drill for oil in the Amazonian basin (France24 2023).

The Security Agenda

Security policy is perhaps the area where Brazil faces the most challenges acting as a regional and global leader. Beyond the domestic security questions linked to a serious narcotrafficking gang problem, Brazil simply lacks major force projection capabilities. Adopting a principled stance to international and regional security questions is consequently a critical aspect of any sort of leadership that Brazilian Presidents might wish to accrue for their country. On this front it is extremely hard to argue that the Lula III Presidency is anything but a failure, seemingly stuck in a conceptual trap of its own making between ideology and foreign policy principle.

The overwhelming international security crisis when Lula accepted the presidential sash in January 2023 was the Russian invasion of the Ukraine. Brazilian foreign policy tradition would seem to present a very clear path forward: by long-standing tradition, Brazil is against one State intervening in the affairs of another, particularly in the form of armed invasion and occupation (Kenkel & Cunliffe 2016). Yet, in the months after he took office, Lula appeared to be condoning the Russian narrative and subsequent actions, suggesting that Ukraine should cede its claim on Crimea in exchange for a Russian withdrawal from other territories. Overlooking the principles of collective security underpinning the UN and international law, Lula continued in the same meeting to criticize the U.S. and Europe for supporting Ukraine in its efforts to repel Putin's invasion (Waltenberg 2023). Lula doubled down on this position later in the month during a trip to Portugal, where he tried to position Brazil as a peace broker between the two East European nations, again calling on the U.S. and Europe to stop supplying Ukraine with munitions, with the admonition: "If you are not making peace, you are contributing to war" (Al Jazeera 2023).

Responses to Lula's initial position on Ukraine were less than favourable. Particularly irksome was the blatant self-serving contradiction in the Brazilian position. Russia is both an important market for Brazilian agricultural producers and a critical supplier of fertilizer inputs for the agro-industrial complex. Moreover, Russia is one of the BRICS countries, a grouping Lula repeatedly tried to lever to his country's advantage in the 2000s (Stuenkel 2023). For foreign observers the concern was the rapidity with which Lula seemed to abandon the principle of non-intervention in

favor of commercial and political prerogatives rather than simply staying quiet on the issue. More confusing still was the extent to which a reflexive anti-American ideological position amongst Lula's foreign policy coterie appeared to trump Brazil's very vocal claims to pan-Southern solidarity at the expense of Ukraine.

It is the ideological dimension of Lula's approach to security issues that continued to emerge as problematic for ambitions of regional, pan-Southern, and global leadership. As Nicolas Maduro's position became increasingly embattled in the runup to national elections scheduled for 2024, the Venezuelan President turned to the classic tactic of diversionary war by staging a national referendum and then summarily claiming two-thirds of neighbouring Guyana as part of his country. By the end of 2023 Venezuela was starting to mass troops along its Eastern border. In response, Lula's foreign policy team repeatedly reminded the Maduro government that an invasion would be a violation of international law and that he should stand down and negotiate. Tellingly, Brazil did not send a stream of high-ranking defence officials to Guyana for solidarity consultations to signal the need for peace to Maduro; this space was left open for the U.S. Similarly, concrete action by Lula was limited to repositioning military units in the North to prevent Venezuela from using Brazilian infrastructure as an inland route to loop around the dense jungle of the Essequibo region (O Globo 2023a). The idea of conducting joint jungle warfare training exercises with Guyana as pretext to create a physical presence along the border contested by Venezuela appeared to receive no consideration from Lula's chief foreign policy advisor and former Foreign Affairs and Defence Minister, Celso Amorim. Such symbolic actions were left to the U.S. and Great Britain, in the form of joint air operations and visits to Guyana by warships.

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In keeping with Brazilian diplomatic tradition, Amorim repeatedly suggested that any solution to the conflict between Venezuela and Guyana should be brokered within the region. To this end he engaged in a series of trips to Caracas in an attempt to reduce tensions. Yet the issue for Brazil appeared to remain one of credibility– an earlier unwillingness to critique Maduro's anti-democratic excesses, with Lula going so far as to provide public counsel on how to repackage them, combined with a generalized lacklustre response to Venezuela's bluster. As Amorim noted in mid-December 2023, "What I fear most, to tell the truth, is that you create precedents even for establishing foreign bases and troops in the region" (O Globo 2023a). Despite the vehemence with which Brazil often demands respect for sovereignty and non-intervention, the official response to the referendum staged by Maduro was succinctly put by Ambassador Gisela Maria Figueiredo, secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean at Itamaraty: "From Brazil's point of view, the referendum is an internal matter for Venezuela" (AFP 2023). The response from Guyana to this breakdown in the consistency and reliability of Brazilian leadership was to publicly muse about inviting the U.S. to open a military base on its territory (O Globo 2023b). Exploring how an alternative to such an initiative might be supported by Brazil, and tied into the Amazon basin program trumpeted by Lula just months earlier, appeared to be a non-starter in Brasília, much less Georgetown.

A third security scenario combined lack of imaginative leadership with an unwillingness to deliberately commit resources to establish leadership, namely the Israeli invasion of Gaza after Hamas perpetrated a horrific act of terrorism on an unprecedented scale. Any possibility of Brazilian leadership or even positive contribution to resolving the crisis evaporated as this paper was being completed– there simply is no excuse for or walking back of the ludicrous hyperbole comparing the criminal acts of the Israeli government in Gaza to the Holocaust (NBC News 2024). Yet, as the rotating President of the UN Security Council when the crisis erupted, Brazil did have an opportunity to exercise leadership and make a serious contribution to peace and security in the region. Rather than simply organizing a UNSC resolution condemning Israeli aggression–an initiative any failing first year international relations student could tell you would be vetoed–there might have been an opportunity to repeat something similar to Lester B. Pearson's response to the Suez Crisis in 1956.

Faced with the prospect of a superpower war in the Middle East after Israel invaded Egypt, at the prompting of France and Britain when Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, Pearson deployed the same diplomatic skills for which Brazil is known to organize the first United Nations Peacekeeping intervention force (Anderson 2015). Pearson's intervention, which won him the Nobel Peace Prize, was

about as welcome with the great powers as a Brazil-organized IBSA intervention force would have been in the immediate aftermath of Israel's October 2023 counter strike into Gaza. The Suez peacekeeping initiative was also seen as being as impossible as a direct intervention in Palestine today, but it nevertheless worked thanks to leadership from a position of strong principle and physical commitment. Arguably Canada rode the legacy of this action for the next fifty years, and continues to do so. In many ways, the legacy-minded side of Lula has appeared in search of a similar leadership opportunity throughout the first year of his third term, but, when presented with such an occasion in the Middle East and in South America, he neither took the decisions nor committed the resources necessary to achieve it.

CONCLUSION

The policy-focused conclusion that comes from the analysis in this paper is that Brazil has the aptitudes for and traditions of being a transformative leader, but currently lacks a clear plan for where it wants to take its followers. Unsurprisingly, absent a clear plan, policy-makers are unwilling to commit resources to travel down an ill-defined pathway. For their part, partner countries are willing to politely listen, but reluctant to wholeheartedly commit or even take Brazil particularly seriously. Put simply, Lula needs a foreign policy plan backed by decisions and resources, not a simple announcement that "Brazil is back."

During the first Lula Presidency, Brazil became a central player in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and used this to build support for the rapid growth of the country's agro-industrial sector, which in turn drove a major economic surge across the nation. Similar events took place during the Cardoso years, with an activist regional foreign policy being used to transform attitudes towards Brazil and thus provide significant support to the economic stabilization and restructuring plans that set the foundation for the first PT era. Both foreign policies were driven by detailed and careful foreign policy planning with major levels of extra-Itamaraty consultation. Lula I & II stemmed from an infusion of new thinking and ideas from industry, largely via the think tank Icone (Cason & Power 2009); Cardoso's policies came from a deep public consultation exercise that resulted in a *de facto* Livro Branco, *Reflexões Sobre a Política Externa Brasileira* (IPRI 1993)[2]. A return to this tradition is sorely needed.

As the discussion above makes clear, Brazil has not lost its ability to convene meetings of key partners. What is currently missing is a clear sense of what Brazil is offering with its transformative leadership model, which in turn requires a clear

2. Reflections on the Brazilian Foreign Policy.

domestic understanding of where the international system fits into the pursuit of domestic priorities. Although this paper bemoans the Lula government's unwillingness to back its foreign policy initiatives with concrete resources, in all fairness a reluctance to take decisive action should come as no surprise. It is very difficult for a responsible government to decide where and how to spend resources when there is no clear sense of why these expenditures are being made and how they fit into the larger governmental agenda.

Events of 2023 in the Brazilian foreign policy have made it clear that sorting out the answer to the question of how foreign policy fits into a plan forward for Brazil is beyond the current foreign policy team, almost certainly because Amorim, Vieira, and colleagues simply lack the time amidst the constant stream of short-term transactional questions they must address. This paper consequently closes with a policy proposal, namely that Brazil conduct a repeat of the nationwide consultations that led to the 1994 *Reflexões sobre a Política Externa Brasileira*. In 1992 Cardoso ordered Itamaraty to hold the consultations, but a failed repeat in 2012 suggests that perhaps this is not the wisest use of Foreign Ministry resources. An alternative would be a joint commission run by the *Câmara dos Deputados* (House of Representatives) and Senate foreign relations committees. Irrespective of which institution runs the process, a failure to work through a clear strategic agenda for Brazilian foreign policy will doom Brazil to a future of being a self-appointed leader with no followers.

Brazil has the aptitudes for and traditions of being a transformative leader, but currently lacks a clear plan for where it wants to take its followers. Unsurprisingly, absent a clear plan, policy-makers are unwilling to commit resources to travel down an ill-defined pathway. For their part, partner countries are willing to politely listen, but reluctant to wholeheartedly commit or even take Brazil particularly seriously. Put simply, Lula needs a foreign policy plan backed by decisions and resources, not a simple announcement that "Brazil is back."

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