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Diverse images, reverse strategies: Brazilian foreign ministers' perceptions and the Brazil-Argentina rapprochement (1974–1985)

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Abstract

After a period of rivalry and cooperation, the Brazil-Argentina relationship experienced a remarkable improvement between the governments of Ernesto Geisel (1974–1979) and João Figueiredo (1979–1985). We analyze one of the aspects that caused this improvement: the impact of images and perceptions of Argentina carried by Brazilian foreign ministers Antônio Azeredo da Silveira and Ramiro Saraiva Guerreiro.

Keywords: Brazil-Argentina relations; Brazilian foreign policy; Ernesto Geisel; Foreign policy analysis; João Figueiredo; Responsible pragmatism.

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Introduction

During the twentieth century, a mix of cooperation attempts and rivalry perceptions coexisted in the Brazil-Argentina relationship. Brazilian diplomats adopted “official cordiality” (*cordialidade oficial*) as the standard strategy to deal with Argentine demands. That was the case until its decline and substitution for a skeptical strategy, in Ernesto Geisel’s government (1974–1979), and the posterior rise of a new cooperative stance in João Figueiredo’s presidency (Spektor 2002). The exploration of the Plate River Basin’s hydroelectric potential was the main bilateral topic of discussion during that process. Considering this, this article wants to answer the following question: From Geisel to Figueiredo’s government, what was the chancellors’ relevance in triggering the shifts in Brazilian policy toward Argentina?

This study points to the role of the different images and perceptions that chancellors Azeredo da Silveira (1974–1979) and

Saraiva Guerreiro (1979–1985) held about Argentina, and how these affected their strategies to deal with the country. The Brazilian official documents indicate that while Silveira was skeptical about the potential of a bilateral rapprochement, Guerreiro was more optimistic about that possibility. Both made such inferences considering the background of the bilateral relationship and their previous experiences with Argentine policymakers. Considering this, we will use the images and perceptions literature in foreign policy analysis (FPA).

Some hypotheses have been considered to such rapprochement. One of them is the “democratic” hypothesis, which points to the re-democratization of both countries and its role in downgrading the rivalry while fostering the potential for cooperation (Remmer 1998). However, rapprochement process started in 1979, when both countries still were under military rule. The “systemic” hypothesis suggests that the growing costs of maintaining distrust in an unfavorable environment stimulated the new Brazilian stance towards Argentina (Saint-Pierre et al. 2007). This study agrees that these costs were an important variable, but resources alone do not drive policies – they influence the policymakers’ judgment of their states’ foreign policy possibilities.

Some studies focused on the domestic causes for rapprochement. Schenoni (2018) points to a change in Argentine social coalitions that favored cooperation with Brazil but focused on the Argentine side. Resende-Santos (2002) claims that the rapprochement was the “external” dimension of the domestic re-democratization process, as the *détente* abroad would serve to strengthen *abertura* at home. However, there are no such mentions in Brazilian documents regarding Brazil-Argentina relations¹. Darnton (2014) argues that the combination of the economic crisis, the countersubversion activities, and mounting pressures from the United States on human rights abuses paved the way for the rapprochement. All these components coexisted during Geisel’s government as well and were not sufficient to change Silveira’s policy. Therefore, it does not explain why signals sent by Oscar Camilión² favoring rapprochement were welcomed by Geisel, but not by Silveira, who “eluded in careful manner” (Darnton 2014, 100).

Andrea Oelsner (2014) analyzes the Brazil-Argentina rapprochement using the concept of “international friendship,” composed of mutual trust and symbolic interaction, and reflected in public expressions of positive emotions. However, the stimulus for such rapprochement comes from an “initial stage,” which is when material and strategic incentives lay the basis for a “second stage,” when actions fostering friendship bonds emerge. The first stage comprises the 1979–1985 period, and the second stage began in 1985 (Oelsner 2014). Accordingly, this study complements Oelsner’s approach—it indicates how the Brazilian chancellors’ strategies led to the “friendship stage” after 1985.

¹ The only exception was during the Malvinas/Falklands war, in 1982. Guerreiro (2010, 283-284) mentions the risk of, in a worst-case scenario, Argentina facing an “anarchical period” (*período de anarquia*) after the conflict, favouring the emergence of leftist groups who would try to intervene in neighboring countries – including Brazil, with negative repercussions for the *abertura* process. The prospect of Argentina “turning into the Latin American Vietnam” – and the risk it represented to Brazil – was also highlighted by President Figueiredo during his meeting with Ronald Reagan. Ministério das Relações Exteriores - MRE. *President Figueiredo meeting with Ronald Reagan*. Washington, May 12, 1982. Brasília, DF: Arquivo Nacional, 1982. BR_DFANBSB_N8_0_PSN_EST_0047_D0001DE0001 file.

² Argentine ambassador in Brazil.

The focus on images and perceptions emerged in FPA during the 1970s, when researchers turned to the psychosocial context to deal with individual aspects of decision-making (Hudson and Vore 1995). An “image” is a set of beliefs about the intentions and behaviors of an actor, while a “perception” is the conscious or unconscious attribution of meaning to information about the actor or the environment (Snyder and Diesing 1977). The idea was to go beyond systemic approaches, as the policymakers’ estimates about their environment are fundamental when muddling through the risks and opportunities of the international system (Byman and Pollack 2001).

How do these perceptions form? Policymakers draw inferences about their adversaries’ intentions through diplomatic exchanges with their counterparts; the contents are processed to develop perceptions about that state (Trager 2017). This makes (skilled) diplomacy a crucial mechanism in creating new alternatives for a state, even under the various constraints of the international system (Hutchings and Suri 2015). It is through diplomacy that policymakers communicate their demands and interests (Trager 2017), although, these inferences are subject to misperceptions.

What causes such misperceptions? Yarhi-Milo (2014) presents the “selective attention thesis” to provide an answer. She argues that the way individuals and bureaucracies process information is different, through the impact of vivid information and of the “subjective credibility” phenomena in individual judgments. Her thesis is composed by two parts. The first posits that for the policymaker, emotionally salient information, attained via personal interactions receives more weight than abstract reports. The second posits that the credibility of the diplomatic counterpart is contingent to the policymaker’s images of that state (Yarhi-Milo 2014).

Regarding when such misperceptions are likely to occur, Yarhi-Milo (2014) suggests that they happen when policymakers hold strong pre-conceptions, enjoy some freedom to draw on their perceptions to devise strategies, and face difficulty in gathering reliable data. Hutchings and Suri (2015) posits the importance of shared interests and convictions amongst decisionmakers to produce better policies. Therefore, policymakers’ images and perceptions have more importance when they have autonomy (and the leaders’ confidence) to act and when information about specific situations is scarce and/or unclear. As this study will demonstrate, this was the case for chancellors Silveira and Guerreiro.

Hence, this study’s cognitive approach points to the role of individuals, notably policymakers, in foreign policy outcomes. While the importance of systemic constraints is not ignored, they do not determine policies. As Suri (2015) notes, strategic interests in a close relationship may be hindered by years of accumulated distrust. Different policymakers may have different understandings of a similar situation. Following Mercer (2010), this study indicates that emotion and cognition are not competing, but entwined processes which co-constitute beliefs, as recognized by Yarhi-Milo’s (2014) selective attention thesis. Both increases the “assimilation” of new data to existing beliefs.

This research is based on declassified documents of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministério das Relações Exteriores*, MRE). They are available at the MRE’s Archive (*Arquivo Histórico do Ministério das Relações Exteriores*, AHMRE), in Brasília; at *Centro de Pesquisa e*

Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, Fundação Getúlio Vargas (CPDOC/FGV), in Rio de Janeiro; and at National Archives of Brazil (*Arquivo Nacional, AN*). We focused on the telegrams exchanged between the Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires and MRE and on the daily reports provided by foreign ministers to the president (*Informação ao Presidente da República*) between 1974 and 1985. Oral history interviews with Silveira — organized as a book by Spektor (2010) — and Guerreiro (Guerreiro 2010), as well as Guerreiro’s autobiography (Guerreiro 1992), were also consulted.

This paper has three sections, in addition to this introduction and to our concluding remarks. The first section presents the context of the rise and fall of *cordialidade oficial* in the bilateral relationship. In the second section, we analyze the images Silveira held about Argentina, and how they affected his perceptions (and, therefore, the Brazilian stance) toward Argentina. The third section does the same in relation to Guerreiro’s images and perceptions. Lastly, we make some final remarks about our results.

Brazil and Argentina: rise and fall of the official cordiality diplomacy

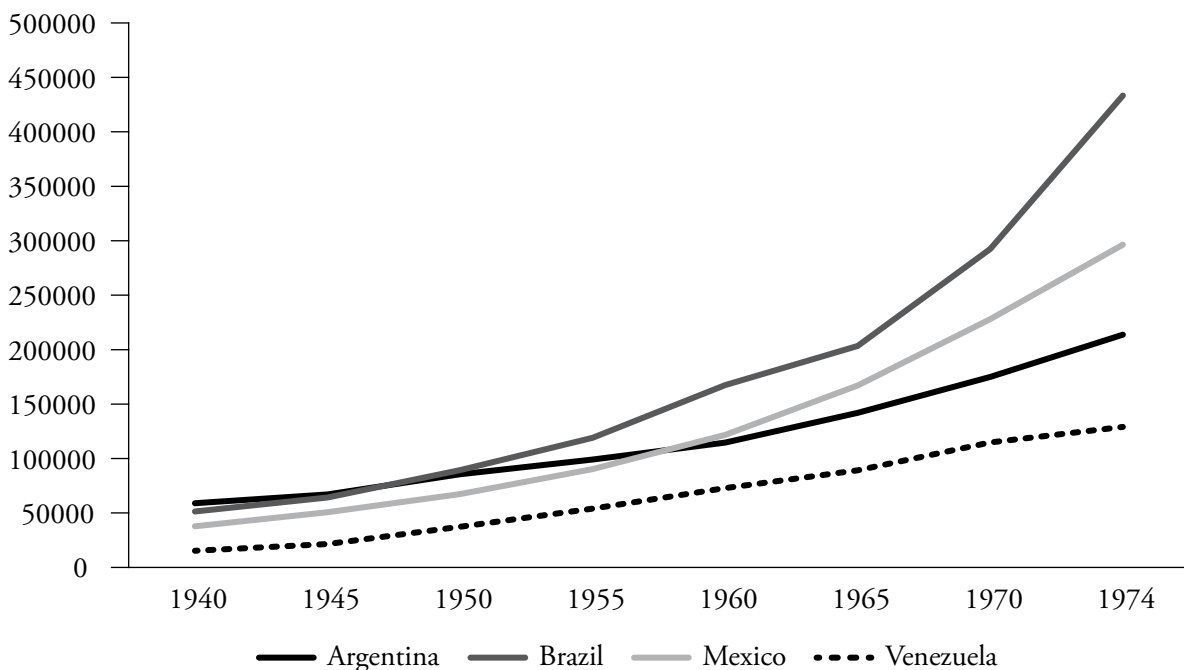
Policymakers’ perceptions are filtered by the pre-existing images they have about other actors, as noted in Yarhi-Milo’s (2014) “selective attention thesis.” Many scholars (Snyder and Diesing 1977; Schafer 1997) indicate that perceptions regarding the nature of relationships between states are a crucial component in image construction. If that nature is perceived as negative, conflictive policies are favored. Therefore, in this section, we present a brief history of the advances and retreats of the cooperation efforts in Brazil-Argentina relations in the twentieth century and the main cause of the crisis in the 1970s: the exploration of the Plate River Basin’s hydroelectric potential.

The Argentine fear of a potential Brazilian expansionism was one of the crucial points in the bilateral relations’ rivalry pattern (Saraiva 2012). The “War of the Triple Alliance” increased that perception, especially when Brazil negotiated a separate treaty of peace with Paraguay, going against the “Treaty of the Triple Alliance,” to avoid the Argentine expansion to Chaco (Doratioto 2002). However, from 1902 until 1974, to deal with Argentina, Brazilian policymakers had followed a strategy known as official cordiality (*cordialidade oficial*) — term coined by Spektor (2002). This strategy included four tactics to avoid a conflict with Argentina: tolerating the high profile of Argentine diplomatic discourse, emphasizing the cooperation opportunities to ease possible disagreements, including Argentina in Brazilian diplomatic initiatives, and promoting good offices when tension heightened between Argentina and the United States. That phase of the bilateral relationship can be described as one of the structural instabilities, involving cooperation efforts (and retreats) during the period of rivalry (Candeas 2005).

The growing disparity of capacities in favor of Brazil gave birth to an asymmetrical rivalry (Saraiva 2012). In 1945, Argentina had the biggest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Latin

America, but in 1974 it was less than half of Brazil's GDP (Figure 1). Argentina was not only affected by economic stagnation but also by a severe political crisis. From 1930 to 1973, no elected civilian president could end his mandate, and 11 of the 15 presidents had a military background (Rouquié 1984). Not only the military coups had been remarkable in the period but also the emergence of urban guerrillas — such as *Montoneros* — actions had aggravated the Argentine crisis (García 1995).

Figure 1. GDP level in four Latin American countries, 1945–1974 (US\$ million)



Source: Maddison (2006).

In contrast, Brazil experienced a protracted period of rapid economic growth. The developmental projects achieved positive results, especially during the period known as the “economic miracle” (*milagre econômico*), during the tenure of President Garrastazu Médici (1969–1973), when the average GDP growth of Brazil was 11% per year (Hermann 2011). Facing this reality, the Argentine demands and complaints were considered as obstructions to Brazilian growth, notably when Brazil was eager to take advantage of its favorable position in South America to achieve such development (Spektor 2002). The discussions about the Plate River Basin resources were the last straw before the abandonment of official cordiality diplomacy.

The expected dilemmas derived from the common-pool problems among the countries in the river system were aggravated by mutual suspicions and rivalry between the region's two biggest countries. Argentina sought a regulation regime for exploitation of resources, while the Brazilian government opposed any proposals that could eventually decrease its capacity to explore the basin's resources in its territory — especially when considering its fossil fuel dependency (Lima 2013).

The central disagreement was about the Argentine “prior consultation” thesis. Such a thesis stated that an actor, before any action that could inflict potential damages to the other parties, should discuss its impacts with the others (Lima 2013). It meant that Brazil should consult Argentina before advancing with its ambitious project of building the Itaipu Dam on Paraná River³. While Argentine policymakers stood up for the prior consultation thesis at the UN and the Non-Aligned Movement, Brazilian diplomats defended the “sovereignty” thesis, stating that a country had a right to explore such resources under its jurisdiction “unless, in that country’s judgment, such use could cause a ‘significant damage’ to the next state in line” (Lima 2013, 354). According to such thesis, state sovereignty should not be restricted by the necessity of another country’s endorsement (Ricupero 2017).

The perception of Argentina as a minor partner for Brazil in South America worried diplomats at *Palacio San Martín* (Vidigal 2007), especially after Brazil and Paraguay signed the Itaipu Treaty in 1973. That document stated the building of a binational dam in Foz do Iguaçu, just 17 km from Argentina (Camargo and Ocampo 1988). By taking the advantage of its upstream position in Paraná River, the Brazilian government had begun the Itaipu Dam’s construction without discussing its impact with the Argentine government (Lima 2013).

In this section, we seek to demonstrate how Argentina and Brazil had different fortunes. Whereas Argentina had the highest GDP in Latin America at the beginning of the twentieth century, its later stagnation contrasted with the rise of the Brazilian economy. To avoid a conflict with Argentina, the official cordiality strategy was followed by Itamaraty (the official headquarters of Brazil’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs) until its demise in the Geisel government. As the discussions about the Itaipu Dam’s construction had dominated the bilateral agenda, chancellor Silveira based his actions on a hardline strategy towards Argentina. What was the cause of such new approach?

Silveira and the “developmentalist competition”

As we saw in the introduction, during a bargain, policymakers deal with the lack of complete information about the intentions of the other actors involved. Therefore, the initial negotiation strategy is based on the images held about others. However, the existence of the “selective attention thesis” may hinder adjustments to that strategy, highlighting vivid information and impressions about the other, while neglecting data that is dissonant with the images held by the policymaker. Some elements that have an impact on that policymaker’s image are related to his/her past experiences in his job or with the other parties involved (Jervis 2017). These elements were crucial to the images of Argentina that Silveira held, as he was part of Itaipu Dam talks while as an ambassador in Argentina.

³ The Itaipu project had the capacity of 12.000 megawatts, and Brazil was entitled to use half of its power capacity. It was, as Lima (2013) demonstrates, one-third of the total electric plants power capacity installed in Brazil in 1974. It would be a crucial new source of energy in the context of the 1973 oil crisis.

Silveira was born in Rio de Janeiro, in 1917. He was a consular assistant in Washington between 1937 and 1941 and was admitted to Itamaraty in 1943. He was assigned to the Brazilian embassy in Havana (1945–1949), Buenos Aires (1949–1950) and Madrid (1954–1956). He was the chief of the Administration Department in 1959. He was the Brazilian ambassador in Buenos Aires (1969–1974), working actively on the negotiations on the Itaipu Dam project with the Argentine government. He became the Brazilian foreign minister in the tenure of Geisel's presidency (1974–1979) and later the ambassador in Washington (1979–1983), and Lisbon (1983–1985) (Abreu and Lamarão 2007). He was part of the *Novos Turcos* movement, composed of young diplomats who sought innovations in foreign policy strategies (Spektor 2004).

Silveira possessed a great degree of autonomy to devise foreign policy strategies, and his appraisals about several courses of action weighed heavily on Geisel's final decisions (Saraiva 1998; Pinheiro 2013). The President had confidence in Silveira and supported him against domestic criticism (Pinheiro 2013). This could explain why Geisel decided not to intervene in Silveira's strategy toward Argentina, even if there were, according to Resende-Santos (2002) and Darnton (2014), incentives amongst the military officers to override his position in order to secure an agreement. Silveira's foreign policy, known as responsible pragmatism (*pragmatismo responsável*), was marked by the search for autonomy through diversification of partners to defend the national interest (Spektor 2004). The end of the automatic alignment with the United States (but maintaining a West-oriented approach) and the search for cooperation with Latin American and African countries were characteristics of that strategy (Pinheiro 2013).

The foreign minister had broad experience in Argentina-related issues. He served both as the second secretary (1949–1950) and as an ambassador (1969–1974). In an interview with CPDOC/FGV researchers, he stated some patterns of the image that he carried of Argentina. He believed the Argentine considered itself “exceptional in Latin America: white, European,” an idea of the racial superiority linked to the economic progress the country experienced at the beginning of the twentieth century (Spektor 2010, 65).

Talking about the period when the Argentine economy stagnated while Brazilian GDP rocketed, Silveira stated that Argentina saw “Brazil, whom they always looked down, grow as a country” (Silveira 2010, 66). He classified such process as an “expectative inversion” (*inversão de expectativas*) in the neighbor country, something crucial to understand the Brazilian strategy toward Argentina in Geisel's tenure of the presidency. According to Silveira, accepting this expectative inversion was “dramatic and difficult,” and made Argentina a “dangerous” country as it “used to be, as Argentina was, at the center of South American countries' attention” (Spektor 2010, 63).

He believed that Brazil should not invest in an alliance with Argentina, at least not unless “that feeling of role frustration, of the Argentine role in South America, is fully overcome by them” (Spektor 2010, 327). On that basis, we can highlight two elements of Silveira's image of Argentina: a nationalist country that was not conformed with its position in South America. Hence, Brazilian policymakers should be careful when negotiating with its neighbor. As we will see, the declassified MRE documents indicate that this image has colored Silveira's perceptions

about Brazil-Argentina interactions during his tenure as a foreign minister, and his policy towards Argentina.

As an ambassador in Buenos Aires (1969–1973), Silveira was directly involved in talks with Argentine policymakers about Itaipu Dam. This participation was the source of many aspects that based the fall of the official cordiality diplomacy and the emergency of a tough strategy to seek an agreement on that matter, especially by providing vivid information about his appraisal of Argentine intentions. He argued, in an example, that the “prior consultation” thesis was just a trick used to hinder the Brazilian development⁴.

When Argentine diplomats sought to internationalize the issue to achieve the support to the prior consultation thesis, Silveira’s suspiciousness grew higher. The Argentine discourse at the 24th session of the UN General Assembly, which urged for a regulation mechanism for Plate River Basin resources, was described as “obviously infantile, [seeking to] exert pressure on Brazil.”⁵ Another strategy adopted by *Palacio San Martín* to gain support for its thesis was the rapprochement with neighboring South American countries. Its “anti-Brazil” stance, formulated by Argentine Foreign Minister Luís de Pablo Pardo (1970–1972), condemning both the Brazilian “imperialism” and “leadership attempts”⁶ outraged Silveira.

That was the context in which, in a private communication with Brazilian Foreign Minister Mário Gibson Barboza (1969–1974), Silveira labeled Pardo as “Machiavellian,” stating that he only had the “scrupulousness of, when using such a definition, offending Machiavelli himself, as the obviousness and childishness of [Pardo’s] strategies and proposals are almost offensive to others’ intelligence.”⁷ Another noteworthy moment of Pardo’s tenure as Argentine foreign minister was when he revealed to Barboza that the major hindrance to the bilateral rapprochement “resided on the envy and resentment under which his country saw Brazil thriving on its path of development.”⁸ Barboza reported this commentary to Silveira.

After the departure of Pardo from *Palacio San Martín*, the bilateral relationship experienced a brief improvement. In 1972, the New York Agreement was signed by both countries, with the acknowledgment that any actions in the River Plate basin could not cause damages to the other riparian. However, its generalist substance minimized its effects, and when Brazil filled the Ilha Solteira Dam in São Paulo, Argentine complaints were severe (Spektor 2002; Lima 2013). Such vehemence had stimulated a guerrilla plan to kidnap Silveira — the intention was

⁴ Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires – BEBA. *Telegram 203 to Foreign Ministry (MRE), April 25, 1970*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1973. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS eba 1969.01.15 file.

⁵ Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires - BEBA. *O recurso água na Bacia do Prata. January, 1970*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1973. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS eba 1969.01.15 file. p. 375-376.

⁶ Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires - BEBA. *Telegram 1237 to MRE, July 26, 1971*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1973. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS eba 1969.01.15 file.

⁷ Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires - BEBA. *Private telegram to Mário Gibson Barboza, August 05, 1971*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1973. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS eba 1969.01.15 file.

⁸ Ministério das Relações Exteriores - MRE. *Telegram 599 to Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires, August 10, 1971*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1973. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, pasta AAS eba 1969.01.15 file.

to force the stoppage of the Itaipu Dam project talks⁹. The Brazilian ambassador highlighted that the risk would be higher at the Itaipu Treaty signature by Brazil and Paraguay, an event that “could turn a guerrilla action into a heroic act.”¹⁰ Argentina denounced the New York Agreement a few months later.

In 1973, Silveira mentioned that the “main Argentine dilemma” was one of a country that believed on a “manifest destiny” for itself but faced the Brazilian growth precluding such *status* for Argentina in South America¹¹. Because of that, and describing the expectative inversion, Silveira thought Argentina was living a “serious illness,” being “stuck in a painful process of adaptation to a minor dimension” something that demanded the foreign ministry’s continued cautiousness¹².

Hence, during his tenure as ambassador in Buenos Aires, Silveira had impressions that laid the ground for the image of a declining Argentina that was also incapable of assimilating such a path. For this reason, his perception was that Argentina tried to internationalize the issue and delay the negotiations, seeking to improve its bargaining power. Its main goal was to hamper any projects that could favor the Brazilian development, broadening the gap between the two countries. Considering this, Silveira replaced the official cordiality diplomacy for a tougher strategy to deal with Argentina.

The situation was aggravated with the appointment of Oscar Camilión as Argentine ambassador in Brasília. Silveira was suspicious of Camilión’s close relationship with the Brazilian media, one that was used by the ambassador to improve Argentina’s bargaining position. The Brazilian foreign minister was sure that Camilión managed such a relationship to build a narrative in which Brazil was to blame for *imbroglio*. In 1971, when serving in Buenos Aires, Silveira had already externalized his mistrust for Camilión. It was based on his “tactics of instigating Argentina to solve its development problems by using the Brazilian example,” something that could “increase Argentina’s resentment and frustration toward Brazil — that, more than ever, is taken here [in Argentina] as a parameter to everything.”

Silveira established the maximum height of 105 meters Corpus Dam, a dam planned by Argentina on Paraná River. According to Silveira, it was a concession to Argentina as the Itaipu Dam’s construction was already in progress — and such a height was becoming irreversible¹³. Also, as the Itaipu Dam was becoming a “reality,” the time was racing against “Argentina’s eternal trick of hampering Itaipu,” which was moved by the “developmentalist competition” of the

⁹ Ministério das Relações Exteriores - MRE. *Telegrama 334 to Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires, April 16, 1973*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1973. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, pasta AAS eba 1969.02.18 file.

¹⁰ Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires - BEBA. *Telegram 988 to MRE, April 16, 1973*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1973. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, pasta AAS eba 1969.02.18 file.

¹¹ Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires - BEBA. *Telegram 1946 to MRE, July 06, 1973*. Brasília, DF: Arquivo Nacional, 1974. BR_DFANBSB_Z4_REX_IPS_0040_d0001de0001 file.

¹² Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires - BEBA. *Telegrama 2338, ao MRE, August 08, 1973*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1973. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS eba 1969.02.18 file.

¹³ Ministério das Relações Exteriores - MRE. *Informação 282 ao Presidente, November 29, 1977*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1978. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS mre bp 1977.03.10 file

Argentine government¹⁴. Moreover, he believed Brazil was more important to Argentina than the opposite, as Brazil was a vital export market — whose replacement would be problematic — for Argentine manufactures¹⁵.

The rise of the military junta in Argentina, the *Proceso*, in 1976, induced the abandonment of the “prior consultation” thesis in favor of claims for trilateral talks about Itaipu Dam. This move was supported by Argentina’s new talks with Paraguay about Corpus Dam — to counter Brazilian arguments that such a project was only an “anti-Itaipu maneuver.”¹⁶ In September 1976, Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay agreed to organize the first technical meeting in the interest of solving the issue. Brazil advocated the height of the Corpus Dam should be from 95 meters to 100 meters, being 105 meters at the maximum, in exchange for 18 generation units in the project. During the meeting, Argentine diplomats based their position on documents considering that Itaipu project would have 30 generation units at its peak capacity. When it was refuted by Brazilian delegates, the “lack of valid arguments” made the Argentine delegates evade the topic of discussions¹⁷.

During the first semester of 1978, Argentina formalized the request for the height of 110 meters to Corpus Dam, which was rejected by Brazil, whose counteroffer of 105 meters was rebuffed by Argentine delegates¹⁸. Major domestic constraints were troubling Argentine representatives, especially from hardline military sectors (Lima 2013); some of whom were defending 120 meters as the appropriate height for Corpus Dam, highlighting the significance of the Paraná River to the country¹⁹.

In October 1978, the tensions among the negotiating parties increased when Brazil and Paraguay had agreed to include two substitute turbines to the 18 previously agreed on Itaipu project. Silveira said the idea came from Paraguayan delegates during a trilateral meeting that had happened in September, in Rio de Janeiro, whose outcome was a document, signed by the parties, stating that Itaipu project would have “18 generation units operating” (Spektor 2010, 233). Argentine complaints were political: While Itaipu project was securing a better performance, Corpus would not have any additional gains²⁰.

Argentina’s claim was that Brazil disrupted the equilibrium that sustained the agreement as Argentine delegates believed the two substitute turbines were already among the 18 previously

¹⁴ *Conference on foreign policy with the Armed Forces General Staff. November 25, 1977.* Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1978. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS mre ag 1977.11.25 file.

¹⁵ Ministério das Relações Exteriores - MRE. *Informação 248 ao Presidente, October 14, 1974.* Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1974. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, EG pr 1974.03.00/2 file

¹⁶ Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires - BEBA. *Telegrama 1296 to MRE, April 25, 1977.* Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1974. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS mre bp 1974.06.04 file.

¹⁷ Centrais Elétricas Brasileiras - Eletrobrás. *Interrelações Itaipu-Corpus. Undated.* Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1974. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS mre bp 1974.06.04 file.

¹⁸ Ministério das Relações Exteriores - MRE. *Telegram draw 329 to Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires, March 23, 1978.* Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1978. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS mre bp 1977.03.10 file.

¹⁹ Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires - BEBA. *Telegrama 4111 to Ministério das Relações Exteriores, December 31, 1978.* Brasília, DF: Arquivo Histórico do Ministério de Relações Exteriores, 1978. Film reel 1663, drawer 19. “Secret”.

²⁰ Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires - BEBA. *Telegram 3569 to MRE, November 10, 1978.* Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1978. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS mre bp 1977.03.10, file CPDOC/FGV.

agreed upon²¹. When Argentine Foreign Minister Carlos Pastor (1978–1981) claimed the issue had gained a domestic emotional appeal, demanding a political solution, Silveira answered he “should meditate” about it and that President Geisel was beginning to doubt the Argentine willingness to come to a deal²². About that issue, Geisel classified Argentina’s posture as “negative,” based on “cautiousness to Brazilian development” (D’Araújo and Castro 1997, 46).

In January 1979, Argentina was willing to accept the 18+2 proposal for Itaipu Dam in exchange for a 110 meters height for Corpus Dam, disclaiming the extra 5 meters would not be functional but only a “compensation” to the country. Silveira believed it was a concession to neighbors. He thought Itamaraty should not grant “cascading” concessions to Argentina, “while so little or nothing is offered to Brazil but obligations and obligations, as if it were they who were granting concessions to us,” when the Brazilian allowance of Corpus Dam with a height of 105 meters was already a “big favor” to *Palacio San Martín*²³. The final form of the document was also under discussions. Silveira wanted to make the trilateral notes exchanged with Paraguay about the issue, the solution that Argentine delegates rejected. Brazilian diplomats did not want to consolidate a formal agreement formula but a technical understanding — something that would represent another Argentine drawback in the bargain (Spektor 2002).

In this context, the two countries could not reach an agreement about the issue. Based on his perceptions about the bargaining process and about Argentina, Silveira invested in a tough strategy believing the neighbor country would capitulate to Brazilian positions, as he believed that the main Argentine goal was to hamper the Itaipu Dam project (and the Brazilian economic development). However, Argentina stood up for its position, relinquishing the possibility of 20 turbines in Itaipu project and seeking a formal trilateral agreement upon that issue. This situation led to a deadlock in the negotiations. Overcoming such a dilemma was a challenge for Silveira’s successor, Guerreiro.

Guerreiro and the “cushioning challenge”

In the last section, we saw how Silveira’s past experiences in Argentina had influenced his images and, therefore, formed the perceptions he held of the country, leading to the tougher stance at the bargaining table about Itaipu and Corpus dams. We will now analyze what image Silveira’s successor Guerreiro held of Argentina, and how it stimulated a vastly different approach to the neighbor country from the one adopted by Silveira.

²¹ Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires - BEBA. *Telegram 3570 to MRE, November 10, 1978*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1978. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS mre bp 1977.03.10 file.

²² Ministério de Relações Exteriores - MRE. *Telegram 11 (série Chanceler) to MRE, December 05, 1978*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1979. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS mre bp 1977.03.10 file.

²³ Ministério de Relações Exteriores - MRE. *Telegram draw 81 to Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires, January 27, 1979*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 1979. Azeredo da Silveira Archives, AAS mre bp 1977.03.10 file.

Guerreiro was born in Salvador, in 1918. He had a Law degree from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) in 1939. In 1946, he became the third secretary, and the second secretary in 1949. Guerreiro had served in Bolivia (1950–1952), Madrid (1953–1956), and became the first secretary in 1958, while serving in Washington (1956–1960). He was the head of the Northern America Division (1961), the United Nations Division (1962–1963) and the *chargé d'affaires* at the Brazilian embassy in Madrid (1963–1964). As ambassador, he was part of the Brazilian Mission to the United Nations (1968–1969) and the chief of the Brazilian delegation in Geneva (1969–1974), replacing Silveira. In 1974 he became Itamaraty secretary-general, and in 1978 the Brazilian ambassador in Paris until being appointed as foreign minister in the tenure of Figueiredo as president (1979–1985) (Abreu and Lamarão 2007).

Figueiredo's government had as its main goal the re-democratization conclusion (Gonçalves and Miyamoto 1993). Guerreiro asserted that Figueiredo wanted to “continue, with some recommended adaptations, the foreign policy of the previous government” (Guerreiro 1992, 27). It meant the refusal of the alternative lines in the foreign policy as the “selective partnerships” (*parcerias seletivas*), whose core principles — as proposed by Brazilian diplomat Roberto Campos — were like former Brazilian President Castelo Branco's (1964–1966) foreign policy (Ferreira 2009). Hence the new foreign policy was known as “universalism” that kept some principles of “responsible pragmatism,” such as the refusal of an automatic alignment to the United States (Lima and Moura 1982).

Not being actively involved in foreign policy issues, Figueiredo preferred not to act as an arbitrator to settle disputes (Pinheiro 2000). He gave autonomy to Guerreiro in one of their first meetings, saying he had “confidence and you will be driving the car – I will just, if necessary, stop and check the oil level” (Guerreiro 2010, 246). When preparing the new foreign policy guidelines, Guerreiro made a “series of in-depth indications, to sense his [Figueiredo] reaction, about Latin American countries, and the United States” (Guerreiro 2010, 247). The chancellor also possessed the autonomy to devise foreign policy strategies, which were later exposed and justified through reports (the *Informação ao Presidente*), even though Figueiredo's absence encouraged other actors to present opposing views in some issues (as in the debt crisis, after 1982).

One “universalist” feature was the continuation of the close relationship that Brazil had with the Third World countries. Guerreiro stated that underdevelopment was a characteristic that brought these countries closer to Brazil (Guerreiro 1992) even though the *status quo* blocked the articulation of alternatives to act under the prevailing power distribution in international politics (Guerreiro 1982). He also highlighted the need for moderation in policymaking as Brazil did not have a “power surplus” that could give the country a leeway for errors (Guerreiro 1992, 29).

Solving the Itaipu Dam issue was crucial to Figueiredo. In the first meeting with Guerreiro, the president stressed out his willingness to find a solution, pointing that he was ready to go to Buenos Aires (Guerreiro 2010). Guerreiro believed the Itaipu-Corpus dispute was “a false problem” that involved “a series of subjective attitudes, foolish traditions, silliness, and public explorations” precluding a settlement (Guerreiro 2010, 266–267). The motivation for such

circumstances could be the Argentine fear of a Brazilian expansionism linked to the Brazilian capacity to realize such an endeavor.

Guerreiro considered the Brazil-Argentina rivalry was of Great Powers' interest, and that it was anachronical as Argentina "already was, obviously, in a minor position and in 10 or 15 years, the distance [between Brazil and Argentina] could be a blatant gap" (Guerreiro 2010, 105). So, such image did not attribute to Argentina's main cause for such rivalry, but it was in part caused by the Great Powers, precluding an understanding that could lead to the increased bargaining power to Brazil and Argentina in international forums. Aside from that, such a gap was not a problem but an opportunity to Brazil if it could deal with the process Guerreiro called the "cushioning" (*acolchoamento*) of Argentina.

Guerreiro described the cushioning as a big challenge to Itamaraty. In such process, Argentina would turn "from a rival into a junior partner, but not so clearly stamped" as if such rivalry remained, "Argentina would do a pact with any power that would balance it: the United States, the Soviet Union, or Satan" (Guerreiro 2010, 105). Therefore, it was Brazil's responsibility to help its neighbor face the reality that it was not the protagonist in South America. Guerreiro's perception was the opposite of Silveira's one, which reckoned that Brazilian concessions would be explored by Argentina.

The Brazilian foreign minister thought that Argentine diplomatic victories would not disturb Brazil as "it would be good they had some [victories], when not moved by suspicions about Brazil" (Guerreiro 2010, 106). In short, as Argentina was the second biggest country in South America, it would be fundamental to Brazil and its regional leadership projects — hence the importance of "cushioning" its biggest neighbor.

One crucial point to understand such different points of view is the foreign ministers' experience in Argentina. While Silveira had served twice in Buenos Aires, once as ambassador, when he dealt directly with the Itaipu-Corpus negotiations, Guerreiro had never served in Argentina. By keeping some distance from the issue, Guerreiro had a diverse perception. He said that Silveira's "clear and well-defined ideas" about the Argentine caused him "some discomfort," and that he did not hold ideas so well-defined because he did not have experience in the country (Guerreiro 2010, 250). Thus, Guerreiro's perceptions did not have the "past experience" bias.

The "optimistic" image that Guerreiro held of Argentina pushed him through a more flexible stance at the bargaining table. He abandoned the idea of adding two substitute turbines and stood for the 105 meters height to Corpus Dam in exchange for 18 turbines in Itaipu project²⁴. Arguing the extra turbines could be installed in the future through new trilateral negotiations, he managed to convince Paraguayan delegates, initially reluctant to accept that position, showing the impact of these extra turbines would not be significant to the final project²⁵. President Figueiredo feared that Argentina would refuse the offer, but Guerreiro asserted that such conciliatory stance was

²⁴ Ministério das Relações Exteriores - MRE. *Memo G/59 to Secretary-General, May 9, 1979*. Brasília, DF: Arquivo Nacional, 1979. BR_DFANBSB_N8_0_PSN_EST_0159_D0001DE0001 file.

²⁵ Ministério das Relações Exteriores - MRE. *Informação 142 ao Presidente, July 23, 1979*. Brasília, DF: Arquivo Nacional, 1979. BR_DFANBSB_N8_0_PSN_EST_0159_D0001DE0001 file.

positive: in case of refusal, the burden of the deadlock would be Argentine, undermining the idea of Brazil being an “arbitrary, bossy country that did whatever it wanted” (Guerreiro 2010, 265).

At the end, Argentina came to terms with Brazil. The Itaipu-Corpus Tripartite Agreement was signed on October 19, 1979, in Ciudad Puerto Stroessner (now Ciudad del Este), formalizing an agreement whose technical characteristics satisfied Brazil and whose format satisfied Argentina (Saraiva 2012). From that moment on, a series of bilateral presidential visits and the signing of new agreements happened.

Yet there were still some Argentine groups who were skeptical about such rapprochement. The main suspicion was about Brazilian opportunism in such movement, especially because Argentina was an open market to manufacturing imports, following the *Proceso's* liberal economic policies²⁶. Guerreiro asserted the Argentine fear was twofold: First, there was a belief that such rapprochement would be of greater benefit to Brazil, whose industry was stronger; and second, the fears were linked to a “traditional prevention” related to the historical rivalry and to “the countries’ different political, economic and social paths.”²⁷

The effort toward “Argentina cushioning” was only at the beginning. That is why, in example, one of the main concerns during Figueiredo’s trip to Buenos Aires was to highlight the equal cooperation terms and the effort to avoid the mentions of the bilateral status gap that favored Brazil²⁸. Guerreiro’s rationale was that, in the future, “close relations could improve the bargaining power” of both countries, especially after an Argentine economic recovery²⁹.

The Malvinas/Falklands War in 1982 helped Brazil in the “cushioning” task. The *Proceso* saw such war as a chance to justify the significant military equipment spending and to seize the islands before Great Britain reinforce its defenses in the islands (Schenoni et al. 2020). The Argentine decision to invade Malvinas/Falklands surprised Brazil, which was not informed of *Proceso's* decision. Guerreiro being informed of the situation through television news. When journalists asked his position on the matter, Guerreiro, who was taken by surprise by journalists in New York, declared that Brazil had historically been supporting Argentina’s position and hoped for a peaceful settlement to the conflict (Guerreiro 1992). Feeling satisfied with the statements, President Figueiredo took them as the official Brazilian position throughout the conflict (Guerreiro 2010).

In the course of the battle, bilateral contacts were intensified, and Brazil had provided Argentine Air Forces with two Embraer EMB-111 (known as *Bandeirulhas*) and kerosene, hoping it would help turning bilateral cooperation “intimate and irreversible in a great range of areas.”³⁰

²⁶ Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires - BEBA. *Telegram 47 to Ministério das Relações Exteriores, January 8, 1980*. Brasília, DF: Arquivo Histórico do Ministério de Relações Exteriores, 1980. Film reel 1680, drawer 19. “Secret”.

²⁷ Ministério das Relações Exteriores - MRE. *Informação 046 ao Presidente, March 3, 1980*. Brasília, DF: Arquivo Nacional, 1980. BR_DFANBSB_N8_0_PSN_EST_0288_D0001DE0001 file.

²⁸ Ministério das Relações Exteriores - MRE. *Informação 046 ao Presidente, March 3, 1980*. Brasília, DF: Arquivo Nacional, 1980. BR_DFANBSB_N8_0_PSN_EST_0288_D0001DE0001 file.

²⁹ Ministério das Relações Exteriores - MRE. *Informação 046 ao Presidente, March 3, 1980*. Brasília, DF: Arquivo Nacional, 1980. BR_DFANBSB_N8_0_PSN_EST_0288_D0001DE0001 file.

³⁰ Ministério das Relações Exteriores - MRE. *Memória. DOSSIÊ I – Malvinas. April 19, 1982*. Brasília, DF: Arquivo Nacional, 1982. BR_DFANBSB_N8_0_PSN_EST_0044_d0001de0001 (DOSSIÊ I – Malvinas) file.

Guerreiro also feared the repercussion of any actions that could instigate in Argentina a “resentment that would last for generations,” dismantling the cooperation efforts and “reviving all the ghosts of the past” (Guerreiro 2010, 282). Furthermore, Guerreiro was concerned about the risk of an Argentine huge defeat that could lead the country to “a period of anarchy, or a period when leftist forces could seize power” (Guerreiro 2010, 283). A foreign policy reorientation, in which the *Proceso* would seek help from the Soviets, was another alarming possibility to Brazil, as, according to President Figueiredo, “nationality is stronger than ideology.”³¹

During the war, Brazil represented Argentine interests in the UK (Saraiva 2012) and acted as a broker to circumvent the European Economic Community’s sanctions and sell Argentine commodities to Europe through Brazilian ports (Bandeira 1995). European pharmaceutical companies also used the Brazilian ports to export essential medicines to Argentina³². Argentina’s defeat in the Malvinas/Falklands War led to substantial changes in its foreign policy principles. First, the country experienced the “discovery of its Latin American personality,” generating a rapprochement both with Brazil and the Andean Community³³.

The American position during the war, providing logistical support to the British, had an influence on such reorientation as *Proceso* generals were expecting that the Reagan government would keep a neutral position in the conflict. Guerreiro highlighted Brazil’s position in the war reinforced the bilateral rapprochement process and that Nicanor Costa Méndez, Argentina’s foreign minister, stressed that the conflict undermined the “disregard” some Argentines had for its South American neighbors (Guerreiro 2010, 288).

Table 1. The features of Silveira’s and Guerreiro’s images of Argentina

	Antônio Azeredo da Silveira	Ramiro Saraiva Guerreiro
Argentina moved by	Expectative inversion	Fear of Brazilian expansionism
Concessions would lead to	Weakness signals, more Argentine demands	Conditions to “cushion”, accommodate Argentina
Toughness would lead to	Argentine retreat	Argentine resistance, reason for Argentine fears
Bargaining strategy	Closer to <i>deterrence</i> principles, no concessions	Closer to <i>appeasement</i> principles, with concessions
Bilateral cooperation was	Dangerous, because of the expectative inversion	Crucial to the cushioning process of Argentina
Bilateral relationship dynamics	Developmentalist competition	Obsolete rivalry, illusory suspicions
Rivalry sources	Argentine domestic groups	Great Powers’ interests, illusory suspicions

Source: Own elaboration.

³¹ Ministério das Relações Exteriores - MRE. *President Figueredo meeting with Alexander Haig. Washington, May 11, 1982*. Brasília, DF: Arquivo Nacional, 1982. BR_DFANBSB_N8_0_PSN_EST_0047_D0001DE0001 file.

³² Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires - BEBA. *Telegram 817 to Ministério das Relações Exteriores, April 13, 1982*. Brasília, DF: Arquivos Históricos do Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 1982. Film reel 1497, drawer 17, “Confidential”.

³³ Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires - BEBA. *Telegram 1428 to Ministério das Relações Exteriores, June 1, 1982*. Brasília, DF: Arquivos Históricos do Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 1982. Film reel 1497, drawer 17. “Confidential”.

We saw in this section how Guerreiro managed to get not only the signing of the Itaipu-Corpus Tripartite Agreement, but also the transformation of Brazil-Argentina relations. He achieved that by following an opposite strategy than the followed by Silveira (Table 1). Such a shift toward bilateral rapprochement was followed by the Declaration of Iguazu signing in 1985, promoting the integration of both economies. Guerreiro's perception of rivalry origins and its repercussions on the bilateral relationship, especially in Itaipu-Corpus negotiations, led to a more positive stance toward bilateral rapprochement.

The Brazilian position during the Malvinas/Falklands War was another crucial element in such movement, favoring the cushioning process to accommodate Argentina under Brazil's leadership in South America. Following this, not even the re-democratization process in Argentina, in 1983, has disturbed the *détente* — Figueiredo met Argentina's Foreign Minister Dante Caputo in 1984, highlighting the importance of fostering such process (Guerreiro 1992).

Conclusion

Silveira and Guerreiro held diverse images that influenced his diverse strategies to deal with Argentina. Silveira described the Argentine expectative inversion related to its role in South America, and the bilateral “developmentalist competition,” in which any Brazilian progress was framed as Argentine losses, triggering Silveira's suspicions. Brazil's economic growth amid Argentine stagnation made matters worse as Argentina was not willing to accommodate to a scenario where it would have a minor role in South America. Silveira was skeptical about a bilateral rapprochement and refused to give concessions in the Itaipu-Corpus negotiations as he believed it would lead to more Argentine demands just to hamper the advancement of the Itaipu Dam project.

Guerreiro, unlike Silveira, had neither served in Argentina nor had direct participation during Itaipu-Corpus talks until becoming President Figueiredo's foreign minister. As we saw, he admitted that such context allowed him to have a different stance, as he did not have a consolidated image about Argentina. It added to his different perceptions of both the Brazil-Argentina's rivalry origins and the neighbor's economic stagnation.

Guerreiro thought it represented an opportunity for Brazil to accommodate — or, in his words, “cushion” — Argentina, downgrading its fears of a Brazilian expansionism. Hence, he believed that adopting a comprehensive stance in bilateral interactions, would create a path to confidence building among the two countries. Keeping a rivalry pattern would be counterproductive to Brazil in a moment where uncertainty was dominating the international system and in which it was crucial to secure more bargaining power in multilateral forums. Thus, Brazil's path for an assertive foreign policy aimed to consolidate its leadership position in South America. That is why the areas of tension, especially with respect to Argentina, the

second biggest country in the region, should be vanished, in order to consolidate a new, benign Brazilian image to its neighbour.

Such differences inspired a tougher stance in Itaipu-Corpus negotiations during the tenure of Silveira as a foreign minister. But his hopes for an Argentine retreat were not materialized and a deadlock emerged in bilateral negotiations. When Guerreiro became the foreign minister, he decided to adopt a softer stance, giving some concessions to Argentina, leading to the signing of the Tripartite Agreement. The Brazilian solidarity with Argentina during the Malvinas/Falklands War also helped to consolidate a new phase in the two Latin American countries' bilateral relationship.

This study's approach shows how different policymakers' images and perceptions can influence foreign policy. This paper contributes to the re-emergent literature focused on diplomacy, especially considering the individual level of analysis, following Byman and Pollack's (2001) urge to "praise great men." It will be of interest to Political Psychology researchers, especially when we consider the growing attention to (and literature on) cognitive approaches in studying foreign policy decision making (Kertzer and Tingley 2018). Further, based on recently declassified Brazilian archives, this study also makes an empirical contribution to the subject, highlighting the chancellors' influence in the rapprochement process.

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