

Multipolarity, Alliances and Internal Balancing: Opportunities for Brazil

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to gain insight into Brazil's role in an unbalanced multipolar scenario. To achieve this objective, the principal concepts and assumptions of neorealism and offensive neorealism are set forth. It is argued that the optimal strategy for Brazil at this juncture is to pursue internal balancing to enhance its bargaining

position among major powers and peer competitors. In this sense, the paper is normative, although its recommendations are derived from the system's imperatives, such as the vulnerabilities of alliances in a multipolar world. The United States is engaged in pivotal areas in Asia and Europe, which creates a margin of maneuverability in Latin America, historically a zone of influence for the United States. Moreover, Brazil

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must enhance its material strength, as it is a country of considerable richness and size, and thus of interest to great powers. To achieve a strong bargaining position, structural problems such as defense spending and investment must be addressed. We conclude that, regardless of whether Brazil “picks a side” or maintains a neutral position, internal balancing is necessary to achieve its objectives.

Keywords: Multipolarity; internal balancing; defense; Brazil.

Multipolaridad, alianzas y equilibrio interno: oportunidades para Brasil

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es obtener una visión sobre el papel de Brasil en un escenario multipolar desequilibrado. Para lograr este objetivo, se presentan los principales conceptos y supuestos del neorrealismo y el neorrealismo ofensivo. Se argumenta que la estrategia óptima para Brasil en este momento es perseguir un balance interno para mejorar su posición de negociación entre las grandes potencias y competidores similares. En este sentido, el artículo es normativo, aunque sus recomendaciones se derivan de los imperativos del sistema, como las vulnerabilidades de las alianzas en un mundo multipolar. Estados Unidos está involucrado en áreas clave en Asia y Europa, lo que crea un margen de maniobrabilidad

en América Latina, históricamente una zona de influencia para Estados Unidos. Además, Brasil debe fortalecer su poder material, ya que es un país de considerable riqueza y tamaño, y, por lo tanto, de interés para las grandes potencias. Para lograr una posición de negociación sólida, deben abordarse problemas estructurales como el gasto en defensa y la inversión. Concluimos que, independientemente de si Brasil “elige un lado” o mantiene una posición neutral, el balance interno es necesario para alcanzar sus objetivos.

Palabras clave: multipolaridad; balance interno; defensa; Brasil.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary international system is characterised by an imbalance in the distribution of power among major global actors. In contrast to Lula’s initial and subsequent terms as President, there is a notable increase in tension and the ongoing involvement in armed conflicts between parties in the West and those in the East. Brazil should adopt a neutral stance only when it possesses the requisite material strength to engage in bargaining with the various poles. In neo-realism, it is anticipated that states will seek to achieve equilibrium due to the inherent pressures of the international system. Such states may engage in a variety of balancing behaviors.

This paper proposes that Brazil should prioritize internal balancing and the projection of its power at the regional level. In a

multipolar world, the reliability of alliances is questionable. Therefore, the optimal strategy for Brazil would be to prioritize the enhancement of its material capabilities, organizational and doctrinal perspectives. Nevertheless, for this to occur, it is essential to make a long-term, consistent investment that will support large-scale projects and reinforce the country's strategic economic sectors. Furthermore, a review of the defense budgetary aspects, acquisition processes, and the actors involved in formulating Brazil's defense policy is essential. This paper commences with an exposition of the principal concepts and balancing options associated with neorealism. Subsequently, we examine the concept of polarity in neorealism and argue that the contemporary international system is characterised by an absence of equilibrium among major powers, which gives rise to heightened tensions. In conclusion, we examine the case of Brazil and propose an internal balancing strategy, presenting data on the country's current projects and defense policy. In a relatively stable and peaceful region, Brazil has the opportunity to strengthen its position as a regional leader and project its influence in other regions, such as West Africa. Nevertheless, this is contingent upon the success of efforts to establish a material foundation. In this sense, the present paper is a normative analysis. Methodologically, the paper is based on a review of the literature on neorealist premises and studies that analyze Brazilian foreign policy and defense segments. It then applies this to the object of inquiry, namely the strategic options

available to Brazil in an unbalanced multipolar world.

NEOREALISM AND BALANCING OPTIONS

Neorealism is a systemic theory that seeks to derive the outcomes of the international system from its principal characteristics. The theory does not concern itself with the specific actions of individual states, as its primary focus is on the systemic nature of international relations. Nevertheless, the theory posits that states are constrained by the international system, and those that fail to adapt are likely to suffer the consequences, including a loss of resources, power, and, in extreme cases, the dissolution of the state. As Waltz (1996) first proposed in *Theory of International Politics* (1979), a theory must address a distinct domain of inquiry. Given its intrinsic pluralistic nature with regard to potential variables, foreign policy cannot be regarded as a theory in this sense. Furthermore, there has been no proposal for a unifying theory of foreign policy and international politics.

However, as Resende-Santos (2008) and others (Ellman, 1996; 1999) have argued, there is a latent theory of domestic behavior in Waltz's formulation that can provide significant insights into state behavior. As Kenneth Waltz posits, the international system is characterized by three fundamental attributes: (i) anarchy as the prevailing ordering principle, (ii) functional equivalence among units, and (iii) a dynamic distribution of power and material resources. While the fundamental

ordering principle of the international system remains anarchy, the only variable that can undergo change is the relative distribution of material capabilities.

The fundamental principle that governs a state's actions in this context is the imperative for survival. For any state to achieve its goals, whether that be maintaining its current position or seeking world domination, it is essential that it survives. In order to ensure its own survival, a state has two main options: (i) external balancing and (ii) internal balancing. Those who are unable to maintain compliance with the system's imperatives are subject to consequences, analogous to the pressures faced by firms in a competitive market. The logic that compels states to form alliances and arm themselves is the security dilemma (Hertz, 1950). This is a situation in which mutual distrust among states and their intentions leads to a spiral of investments in capabilities.

Systemic pressure will prompt states to achieve equilibrium. External balancing entails the formation of alliances with reliable partners, the transfer of responsibility to other parties, or the adoption of a partisan stance. With regard to internal balancing, the existing literature is less developed, and it encompasses the building of capabilities, the extraction and mobilization of resources, the formulation of a strategy, the

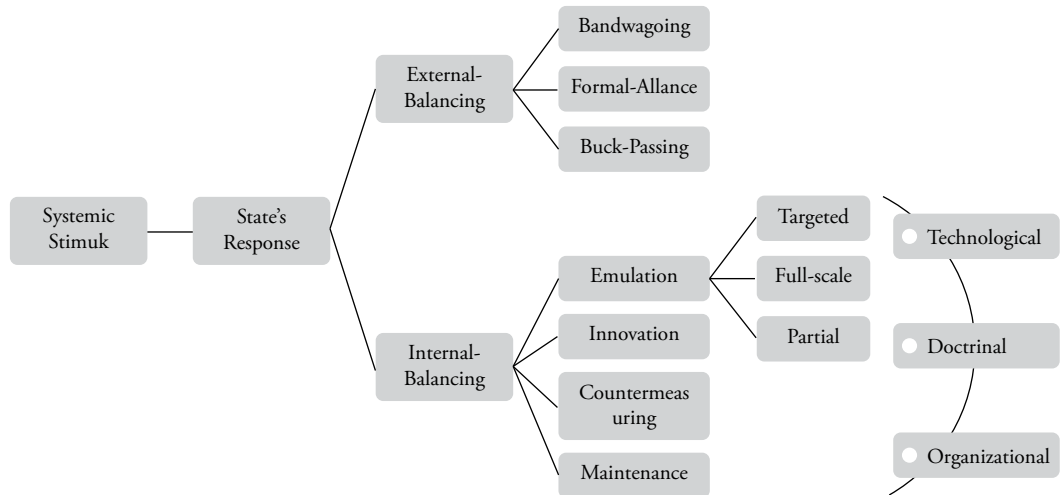
establishment of an organizational structure, and the development of a doctrine. This may be achieved through the implementation of countermeasures, emulation, or innovation. It is typically only great powers that innovate, as they possess an additional margin of safety and resources that can be allocated to risk-taking projects.¹

SIMPLIFIED BALANCING OPTIONS

A second strain of neorealism has been proposed by John Mearsheimer, which he terms "offensive realism." The term is derived from his ontological perspective, which posits that states are compelled to continuously augment their power and resources as the optimal strategy for survival. It is not possible to attain the status of global hegemony in the current geopolitical climate, given the existence of nuclear weapons. Moreover, the effectiveness of water as a weapon and the inherent challenges associated with amphibious assaults and occupations must be considered. Nevertheless, it is possible to aspire to become the dominant regional power, thereby limiting the growth of other regional powers. Mearsheimer presents us with other balancing strategies, which can more accurately be described as strategies. i) War is the most effective and statistically beneficial strategy for a state that initiates it; ii) Blackmailing can be an effective

¹ Critiques that argue that neorealism is a degenerative research program do not pay attention to the new developments of the field, arguing that it was a degenerative paradigm. See: Narizny (2017); Vasquez, (1997); Legro and Moravcsik (1999).

FIGURE 1.



Source: the author.

strategy, but its results are limited; iii) Bait and Bleed involves making rivals engage in a prolonged war. Success in this case is low, as it is difficult to enforce war on states, especially without causing suspicion; iv) Bloodletting is a strategy that prolongs a war with an adversary through different means. This strategy has greater chances of success, as history shows. In addition to the strategies that I have previously discussed, Mearsheimer also develops a theory of balancing behavior. Balancing occurs when a great power assumes the responsibility of preventing an opponent from altering the balance of power, whether through external or internal means. Another potential course of action for a threatened state is to attempt to deflect responsibility by pointing the finger at another party. However, this strategy carries the risk of weakening the state in question, just as bandwagoning behavior

from weaker states can have the same effect. Another potential course of action is appeasement. However, as Mearsheimer notes, this strategy transfers the advantage to the aggressor and establishes a status quo that favors the latter. Additionally, Mearsheimer posits offshore balancing as a distinct form of balancing. In examining the cases of England and the United States, Mearsheimer (2014) asserts that these countries only intervened in Europe to prevent the rise of regional hegemonies. Other forms of intervention, such as the establishment of state structures, are regarded as an inefficient use of resources.

POLARITY IN NEOREALIST THEORY

The number of great powers in the international system, as measured by the relative distribution of resources, can give rise to

different configurations of polarity. This topic is based on the works of the following authors: Waltz (1979) and Mearsheimer (2014) have made significant contributions to this field of study. A bipolar or multipolar system is the typical configuration. Unipolar systems, such as the one that was characterized by U.S. supremacy after the Cold War, are rare and tend to be short-lived due to the mechanism of balance of power.

In a scenario where only two powers compete, imbalances are resolved internally by each power. However, in a system comprising more than two powers, adjustments in alignments represent an additional means of balancing the system, offering greater flexibility. Waltz posits that a system comprising three powers is inherently unstable and prone to transformation. He posits that stability is contingent upon the maintenance of anarchy and the absence of significant alterations in the number of actors within the system.

Thomas Christensen and Jack Snyder (1990) posit that multipolarity is inherently unstable and conducive to conflict escalation. This is due to two factors: “chain-ganging,” whereby allies become embroiled in unwarranted wars instigated by alliance partners, and “buck-passing,” whereby states that do not face an imminent threat do not balance against the threatening power, resulting in the transfer of the cost of balancing towards the potential threat. In a multipolar world, the possibility of an ally switching allegiances is an inherent reality. Such a transformation has the potential to impair the viability of the alliance. It

is therefore imperative to emphasize that alliance members must take steps to prevent the defection of any of their number. This may entail recourse to armed conflict, should this become necessary to forestall such a change. These dynamics underscore the intricate nature of international relations and the pivotal role of stability in geopolitical alliances..

In a context of multiple centers of power, a significant portion of political relations is shaped by the imperative to maintain alliances. Nevertheless, a prevalent risk in alliances between parties of comparable standing in a multipolar system is the practice of “buck-passing,” whereby one ally attempts to transfer the financial burden of an action to another ally. To illustrate, even in instances where States A and C confront comparable threats from State B, State C may opt to allow State B to assume the primary responsibility for a joint response. Therefore, in the context of multipolarity, uncertainty is pervasive, leading to a sense of insecurity. The management of alliances between partners of unequal balance is inherently challenging. These elements illustrate the intricate challenges inherent to a multipolar geopolitical context.

In a bipolar system, the potential for uncertainty is diminished. The defection of a minor ally is unlikely to have a significant impact on the balance of power. Consequently, the leaders of each alliance bloc in a bipolar world are less politically constrained by their allies. The probability of conflicts involving multiple major powers is significantly elevated in a multipolar

world. This distinction highlights the distinct dynamics between bipolar and multipolar political systems, each with its own set of challenges and risks. In the context of a bipolar world, one of the most significant risks is the potential for major powers to react in an exaggerated manner to initiatives taken by other actors. Such actions have the potential to precipitate an escalation of tensions and conflicts. To illustrate, the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 represents a pivotal point in the Cold War, wherein the United States' response to the deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba could have potentially resulted in a nuclear conflict. Similarly, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 prompted a robust response from the United States, contributing to heightened tensions between the two superpowers.

Moreover, conflicts in a bipolar system, unless directly involving the two major powers, are less lethal and destructive than wars between multiple powers that are characteristic of a multipolar system. For example, the Vietnam War, although a prolonged and bloody conflict, did not result in a direct confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, thus avoiding the potential for a global conflict. The aforementioned examples serve to illustrate the inherent dangers and characteristics of conflicts in a bipolar world.

In response to a perceived threat, states will seek to achieve equilibrium in a multipolar world. This is contingent upon an objective assessment of the distribution of power. In such a context, states with greater capabilities may be inclined to pursue a

strategy of balance of power. One of the primary arguments presented is that in the absence of reliable alliances, a state's most effective balancing strategy is internal balancing, which also enhances its bargaining power vis-à-vis potential alliances, enabling it to "recruit" them. As Resende-Santos (2008) posited, what other implications does the concept of balance have beyond the formation of alliances? In the short term, some states may enjoy the benefits of favorable circumstances and external support, but in the long term, their resilience and stability depend on their own actions and the strength of their internal structures (2007, p. 65).

Mearsheimer posits that there are two forms of multipolarity: balanced multipolarity and unbalanced multipolarity. In a system of balanced multipolarity, the distribution of power among three or more powers is similar, or at least comparable between the two most powerful. This prevents the emergence of a potential hegemon and increases the likelihood of distrust among allies, as well as cost shifting. These factors, in turn, make it easier for a potential aggressor to exploit suspicions, a dynamic that is likely to be perceived as a threat by others. In an unbalanced multipolarity system, the scenario is more dangerous. This refers to a system dominated by three or more major powers, one of which is a potential hegemon, a state that holds, by a reasonably wide margin, the most formidable military and the greatest power. In such a system, the incentive for the potential hegemon to seek regional dominance is significant,

thereby heightening the already considerable tensions. Consequently, the remaining powers are motivated to establish a counterbalancing force. The hegemon will leverage its privileges to facilitate defections. In this scenario, the act of balancing is rendered highly inefficient.

It is therefore proposed that the current IS is best characterised by an unbalanced multipolarity situation (Mearsheimer, 2018; Cepik and Schneider, 2010; Schweller and Pu, 2011). The United States continues to maintain a military budget that exceeds that of the next largest contributor by more than half, possesses cutting-edge technological capabilities, and has a larger and more prepared armed forces than China. Russia, a military power, has demonstrated resilience in the Ukraine war, yet lacks the economic capacity to maintain a great war power with the United States. However, both countries present a significant threat to the United States as they continue to expand their capabilities and aspirations. In relative terms, they are experiencing an increase in power. Moreover, at this time, they are engaged in collaborative efforts. The notion that the world is unipolar is no longer tenable. U.S. official documents identify China and Russia as major power competitors and recommend the implementation of containment strategies and continuous innovation and capability development to address these threats.

In this context, Mearsheimer, in his most recent publication (2018), proposes a policy of restraint in American foreign affairs. The author posits that states

attempting to become liberal hegemons are destined to fail, as they engage in protracted and costly wars of state-building (Mearsheimer, 2018, p. 190). The author posits that this crusader impulse is deeply entrenched in the thinking of liberal elites, making it challenging to implement a more realistic foreign policy. Mearsheimer puts forth the notion of fortifying a coalition that is in opposition to the internationalist impulse, with a particular focus on the competitive dynamics among major powers and the pursuit of a more pragmatic approach to foreign policy. This represents the translation of policy into practice as a form of offshore balancing.

However, what is the rationale for medium-sized powers such as Brazil? What strategies might Brazil adopt to align its foreign policy with the prevailing international circumstances, while simultaneously enhancing its capabilities without being threatened? A relatively peaceful neighborhood provides Brazil with a certain degree of security, although the relative distribution of power is global, and Brazil has ambitious goals. In this case, it is not sufficient for Brazil to merely maintain its current posture or rely on the formation of a multipolar alliance without a robust material foundation.

MULTIPOLARITY, BRAZIL AND INTERNAL-BALANCING

Brazil has secure borders and is situated in a relatively peaceful region, which allows it to project its power and aspire to become a

regional leader. In the absence of an imminent threat, it is unclear why Brazil would pursue internal or external balancing strategies. One potential approach would be to adopt a maintenance posture. In matters of relative importance, however, such a course of action would entail a loss of capabilities. In an ontological perspective that is closely aligned with Mearsheimer's, Elias (1993) posits that those who fail to ascend are destined to decline. The preservation of national identity necessitates a constant process of expansion. Moreover, during the period between 2006 and 2012, Brazil unveiled ambitious plans and strategic objectives for the forthcoming century, which necessitated a substantial and sustained investment in strategic sectors and issues. What strategies for balancing the country's interests are most effective? This paper is normative in scope; however, it does not claim that the only optimal strategy is that which is presented here. The domains of defense and foreign policy are open to debate.

In the 2000s, there was a prevailing sense of optimism regarding Brazil's potential role on the global stage. This was largely attributed to the country's economic growth and the concomitant enhancement of its material capabilities, coupled with an increasingly active engagement in

international relations (Villa and Viana, 2010; Soares de Lima and Hirst, 2006). As argued by Visentini and Reis da Silva (2010), the foreign policy of the country in question became "active and affirmative," with four main pillars of international engagement. The aforementioned strategies can be classified into four categories: (a) engagement with South America; (b) commitment to multilateralism in the pursuit of peace and development; (c) an assertive commercial agenda; and (d) diversification of partnerships with developed and developing countries. The Brazilian foreign policy agenda is ambitious. However, it is unclear whether a nexus has been constructed between foreign policy and material capabilities to pursue these goals. It is essential to ascertain the country's actual capacity to achieve its objectives and, most importantly, to oversee its region. This has a significant impact on the ability of Brazil to consolidate its position as a global power hub, particularly in relation to its leadership role within the South American region (Malamud, 2011).²

The international scenario has undergone significant shifts since the 2000s. In accordance with Amorim Neto (2011) and Júlio Cássio Rodriguez (2012), the primary variable influencing the development of foreign policy and defense strategies

² In Bolsonaro's presidency, however, scholars feared that under Bolsonaro, the 'Brazilian ruling elite has given up a role in "broadening the participation of countries in the Global South within multilateral institutions, and a seat in the conversation on global governance' (Herz, 2022, p. 386). Nonetheless, in Lula's third term, these goals were reinstituted in the country's foreign policy objectives, although the international system has changed.

is the systemic incentive. The expansion of Brazil's international projection in the 2000s was due to the growth of its material capabilities and the relative distribution of these capabilities in the global scenario. In a study presented by Amorim Neto (2011), a significant correlation is identified between the international structure and the actions of Brazil. The strategic options available to a state are directly linked with the international system and with the distribution of power on a systemic level (Rodríguez, 2012). In an unbalanced multipolar world, positioning and bargaining can be challenging due to the potential for heightened tensions and the possibility of defections. It is therefore imperative that a country rely on its own efforts.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that external balancing options represent the optimal approach for Brazil. Bandwagoning and buck-passing are not viable options for Brazil, given its size and strategic objectives. Celso Amorim, President Lula's most trusted advisor on matters of national security, has asserted that Brazil is sufficiently influential to contribute to the formation of a multipolar global order, despite criticism that it has been remiss in addressing Russia's cyber activities and China's broader foreign policy. Nevertheless, the ability of Brazil to engage in a robust dialogue with both parties while maintaining its strategic autonomy and soft power in the Western Hemisphere hinges on its capacity to exercise regional leadership and diplomacy, as well as its overall strength. Malamud (2011) posits that Brazil's leadership is deficient

in that it is exercised without followers. Moreover, he underscores that the principal objectives of Brazil's foreign policy, namely regional leadership and a seat on the United Nations Security Council, remain unattained. This paper posits that foreign policy and the development of material capabilities are inextricably linked, and thus internal balancing is a necessity.

In addition to being a significant geopolitical actor, Brazil must also possess the requisite capabilities to exert influence on the global stage. This necessitates the enhancement of its strategy, doctrine, and organization, as well as the mobilization and extraction of resources. If one were to adopt a position on the matter, it would be prudent to do so in a way that allows for strong bargaining power, as exemplified by President Getúlio Vargas's approach with the United States and the Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional (CSN). The question is not whether Brazil is in a position to make offers, but rather whether it is capable of demanding that other parties offer more in return. This is not a manifestation of excessive patriotism. Brazil is already capable of pursuing an internal-balancing strategy in a number of areas, including aerospace, naval fleet expansion, and space exploration. Furthermore, the country's secure borders and difficulty in occupying its territory represent additional advantages. It would be prudent to invest in areas of vulnerability, such as air defense, where Brazil currently lags behind. Brazil must seize this opportunity, as global powers turn their attention to Latin America and its resources. A

strengthened Brazil can leverage its bargaining position, particularly if it attains a regional power status. This is distinct from the unipolar moment of the 1990s and early 2000s, when the United States was the sole major superpower, and Brazil lacked the ability to negotiate with other powers in a way that would yield the greatest benefit.

Brazil spends around 1.5% of its GDP in defense, approximately \$20.2 billion³ at current rates. Recently, in an attempt to re-industrialize the country⁴, Brazil has initiated a New Industry Brazil program, which is designed to facilitate investment in the defense sector. Moreover, a new Plano de Aceleração do Crescimento (PAC), which aims to rebuild Brazil's infrastructure and invest in strategic industries in conjunction with the New Industry Program, is projected to allocate R\$ 53 billion to defense. Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that in excess of 80% of the Brazilian defense budget is allocated to personnel-related expenditures⁵, leaving little room for investment. The equitable distribution of resources represents one of the oldest and most pressing challenges in the field of economics. The implementation of civilian control and a more decisive role played by Congress and auditing agencies would undoubtedly facilitate progress in this regard. In terms of regional distribution:

Regional defence spending remained dominated by five countries, with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico making up more than 80% of the region's total. Of these, Brazil's budget of BRL121bn USD24.25bn) is the largest, or 44% of the regional figure. In nominal terms, Brazil's defence budget advanced a modest 3% from the previous year, although, when measured in constant dollars, spending remained flat. More significant, perhaps, are the cuts to the country's capital budget. Between 2015 and 2021, Brazil's capital allocation averaged approximately USD2.5bn per year, or around 10% of the total defence budget. However, in 2022, the capital figure fell from USD2.6bn to USD1.6bn, retreating further to USD1.4bn in 2023. After these cuts, capital expenditure represented just 6.1% of the country's 2023 defence budget. (IISS, 2023)

Despite the fact that Brazil has a number of significant defense-related projects underway, the country's ability to fully realize these initiatives is often constrained by limitations in investment. Although Brazil may appear to be a regional leader, the reality is that its financial resources are not reflected in its capacity for engagement. Brazil's larger economy and budget translate into a greater expenditure. However, as previously argued, this expenditure is poorly managed, with R&D (research and development), O&M (operations and maintenance), and

³ SIPRI, 2023.

⁴ In the mid 1980's Industry accounted for almost 45% the GDP, while it fell to less than 20 in 2023 (IRBD, 2024).

⁵ See: Brazil's 2020 White Book of National Defense.

investment largely neglected due to the significant role played by mandatory expenses. In terms of per capita expenditure, Brazil's lead is not as pronounced.

Brazil has elected to procure existing models with offset contractual agreements to modernize its fleet. This approach was exemplified by the acquisition of 36 Gripen E aircraft from Swedish aerospace manufacturer SAAB. In addition to the aircraft themselves, the purchase included training and a partnership with Embraer to construct a portion of the jets in its industrial complex. Brazil has demonstrated innovative capacity in the aerospace sector by developing the cargo aircraft KC-390. Brazil has already developed satellites and has favorable terrain for launching, although it has yet to develop rockets. The Brazilian Navy is investing in the PROSUB program, which aims to develop a nuclear-powered submarine. However, the program's costs have proven to exceed its benefits, making its justification questionable.⁶ The frigates and conventional submarines serve to illustrate Brazil's capabilities in this domain.⁷

It would be erroneous to discount the value of partnerships and emulation, as evidenced by the case of tanks. Armored vehicles are already being manufactured at Iveco's facility in Minas Gerais. While international partnerships are a necessity, it is not an absolute requirement that they remain static. If circumstances dictate a

change, a strategic approach to internal balancing can facilitate the transition to a new set of partners. Brazil is developing the SISGAAZ and the SISFRON to safeguard its northern borders and the "Blue Amazon" region with an array of weapon systems. In this instance, it is evident that air defenses and advances in space technology are of paramount importance. It would be prudent for Brazil to consider incorporating unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) into its arsenal, given the country's significant lag in this area.

Due to budgetary constraints, the realization of large-scale projects that entail significant expenditure and procurement is a challenging undertaking (Diniz, 2010). The absence of a force strategy that guides political defense planning in the country results in the aforementioned shortcomings and constrains the country's military capability. In a comparative analysis of the armed forces of Brazil, India, Israel, and South Africa, Diniz (2010) identifies significant deficiencies in the Brazilian military, particularly in terms of equipment and personnel ratios.

In the context of diplomatic discourse, the concept of multipolarity is often regarded as a positive phenomenon by Brazilian policymakers. Lula asserts that Brazil is now in a position to engage in equal negotiations with the G7, given that the combined GDP of the BRICS countries represents 38% of the

⁶ Diniz (2017), Hertz and Dawood (2017).

⁷ Although even the 4 frigates are built in a partnership between Engeström and Thyssen Krupp.

global economy.⁸ It is erroneous to assume that the number of countries involved is indicative of the polarity of their involvement. While Iran and other countries may have a common cause, they are not formal allies. China and Russia are similarly not considered allies. In a 2008 publication, Brazilian diplomat Tânia Malinski (2008, p. 55) posits that:

To advocate for the strengthening of the multilateral system, which ultimately should reflect a multipolar order, is to defend the idea that the plurality of views is a value and that all nations have a contribution to make to the international system. In this sense, the notion of human rights gains relevance as the idea that all nationalities have an intrinsic dignity that should be mirrored in the respect for the sovereignty of the state that represents them.

This can be described as a significant example of a liberal delusion. The initial objective, as previously stated, is to establish a minimum force structure. Subsequently, the establishment of a regional leadership will prove to be a significant challenge. This is due to the fact that the United States views Latin America as its own backyard, and there are other countries and leaders, or governments that are yet to accept Brazil as their natural leader. It is imperative that tangible outcomes be achieved. One avenue of approach was demonstrably effective until the Lava Jato operation, which

prompted the internationalization of Brazilian infrastructure firms in South America and West Africa. In order to regain and consolidate a period of genuine projection of power, it is necessary to possess tangible material capabilities that are aligned with a clearly defined strategy. This encompasses budgetary and civil-military matters, in addition to economic choices pertaining to industrialization. The pursuit of wealth and power is a dynamic interaction. These two elements are mutually reinforcing and exhibit a positive feedback loop.

Should Brazil succeed in its efforts to achieve regional hegemony, it is likely to encounter resistance from other countries, particularly the United States. Since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, the United States has regarded Latin America as its own sphere of influence. Nevertheless, the United States is engaged with a number of global issues, including those related to the Middle East, China's growing influence, the Taiwan Strait, and the potential for Russian intervention in Europe. This may be an opportunity for Brazil to develop its own capabilities. Given the United States' current engagement in pivotal areas of the globe, in contrast to the period between 2006 and 2012 when Brazil was ascendant, the latter now has a more realistic opportunity to assume the responsibilities of regional leadership. This may be achieved through the projection of its diplomatic and economic capabilities. It is reasonable

⁸ Discourse available at: Pádua (2023).

to assume that the United States will not overlook its historical involvement in the region. However, the United States is currently constrained by its responsibilities in the East and is unlikely to invest significant resources in preventing a Brazilian rise and regional leadership at this time. Nevertheless, it is imperative that Brazil mobilizes and develops material capabilities in order to achieve this goal. This is particularly pertinent in the context of aspiring to regional leadership, given the potential for opposition. Moreover, the responsibilities of a leader necessitate a certain degree of strength, particularly in the event of a conflict.

In the context of international politics, the transition towards a more balanced multipolar system will require Brazil to exercise even greater caution in its approach to alliances and the avoidance of responsibility for challenging situations. In this scenario, with enhanced capabilities and preparedness that align with a well-established strategy, Brazil is in a position to negotiate with the various poles for the most advantageous position within the system.⁹

Although this paper presents a normative argument in favor of internal balancing and a power-enhancing scenario, the debate concerning the optimal strategy for Brazil in the contemporary international system remains open to a range of perspectives. In addition to the major powers,

countries such as India, Turkey, and the former European powers are making significant investments in defense. Despite a decline in Brazil's industrial production, these countries continue to invest considerable resources in industrial development. In terms of budgetary considerations, it is imperative for Brazil to prioritize the maintenance of essential public services such as health and education. However, this does not preclude the country from aligning itself with the prevailing imperatives of the international system.

In the present scenario, it is imperative that Brazil adopt a realistic approach to the challenges of internal balancing. It is imperative that resources be effectively mobilized and directed towards the enhancement of technological, organizational, and doctrinal capabilities. Internal balancing must be aligned with a realistic foreign policy, forming a foreign policy/defense nexus, in order for the country to achieve its desired outcomes. It is imperative that significant issues such as budgetary distribution, civil-military relations, and investment figures be subjected to rigorous examination. Additionally, a pragmatic approach to international negotiations is essential. In light of its dissatisfaction with the status quo, Brazil is pursuing a strategy of greater global integration, enhanced material capabilities, regional management, and the formation of new international alliances (Rodríguez,

⁹ For a systematic literature review on balancing and neorealism, see: (Dawood, 2018; Brooks and Wohlforth, 2008; Campbell, 2019; Lieber, 2000; Ávila, 2014; Raska, 2015; Parent and Rosat, 2015).

2012). It is argued that a primary focus on enhancing material capabilities is a necessary condition for achieving other aspirations, including a seat on the UN Security Council, the status of regional leader, and other international goals.

Brazil is not a country that has historically demonstrated a high level of innovation, particularly when considering the significant internal challenges it faces. While some sectors, such as aerospace, may be able to innovate to a limited extent, the majority of sectors are dependent on international collaboration in order to achieve a similar level of advancement. Offset agreements facilitate innovation, and consistent investment in research and development across different governments is what makes large-scale defense projects viable and, consequently, drives the development of various sectors. Given the international context of rising defense budgets and an increase in armed conflicts, it is recommended that export promotion be pursued as a policy, as was the case with the KC-390. However, investment must be consistent and not contingent on the whims of bureaucratic politics.

Rodriguez (2012) reaches the conclusion, which we endorse, that the analysis of Brazil's recent foreign policy reveals an aspiration to act as a great power, particularly within the BRICS framework. However, the actual capabilities of the country are more aligned with those of a middle power, with significant limitations in its actions and international presence. Therefore, the

country is unable to achieve the primary objectives of its foreign policy. In light of these considerations, it is pertinent to examine the implications of Brazil's comparatively limited material capacities for the implementation of its foreign policy. In addition to the regional implications of undermining regional leadership or the potential for Brazil to assume a more prominent regional role, there are significant constraints on its ability to engage more actively on the global stage. This is evident in its aspiration to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. The years 2012-2024 do not result in a significant alteration to Rodriguez's analysis.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This brief paper examines Brazil's role in an imbalanced multipolar global order. Initially, several fundamental tenets and notions derived from neorealism were introduced in conjunction with an "offensive neorealist" perspective. In these theoretical frameworks, the system's imperatives shape the behavior of states. Nevertheless, there remain avenues for achieving equilibrium, whether through external or internal means. Following a review of seminal studies on neorealist theory and Brazilian foreign policy, the paper proceeded to examine the available options for Brazil in an unbalanced multipolar world. It is argued that Brazil must adopt a robust internal balancing strategy in the present scenario;

otherwise, it will continue to lag behind its peer competitors, lose bargaining power alongside the great powers, and be unable to project power at a regional level as a leader. It is imperative that structural issues, such as the unequal distribution of defense resources and the dearth of investment in novel programs, be addressed. There are several avenues for enhancing our material capabilities, organization, and doctrine. These include emulating, acquiring off-the-shelf solutions through offset contracts, and even innovating in certain sectors where we have developed a competitive advantage. The crux of the matter is that Brazil must build its capacities now, or it will likely be marginalized by the crude multipolar structure. Should it succeed in enhancing its material capabilities, however, it will be in a position to engage in negotiations with the superpowers in order to secure advantageous outcomes, while maintaining a posture of neutrality. Brazil may also opt to “pivot” towards a particular alliance, while maintaining its autonomy and not becoming a vassal state.

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