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## Forty Years of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379 (XXX) on Zionism and Racism: the Brazilian Vote as an instance of United States – Brazil Relations

*Os Quarenta Anos da Resolução 3379 (XXX) da Assembleia Geral das Nações Unidas sobre Sionismo e Racismo: o voto brasileiro como uma questão nas relações entre o Brasil e os Estados Unidos*

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### Introduction

On 10 November 1975, Brazil voted in favor of resolution 3379 (XXX) of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which “[d]etermines that Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination”.<sup>1</sup> The *New York Times*, on 13 November, lambasted that “Brazil’s conscienceless military dictators are seeking Arab oil and investments with their votes” (Shame of the U.N. 1975).

Such simplistic explanation can hardly suffice to clarify the controversial Brazilian decision, taken in the context of “responsible pragmatism”, the foreign policy of president Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979), which sought to make Brazil less attached to ideological alignments of the Cold War, and to strengthen the country’s autonomy. (Breda dos Santos 2000, 2005; Dávila and Lesser, 2012; Pimentel 2002; Seixas Corrêa 2007).

There is a limited number of studies on the Brazilian vote on resolution 3379 (XXX), such as Sochaczewski (2004), Dávila and Lesser (2012) and Caraciki (2013). More often, the episode is commented in texts about Brazil and the

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1 Resolution 3379 (XXX), “Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination”, approved by a vote of 72 to 35, with 32 abstentions. The resolution 3379 was subsequently rescinded by UNGA resolution 46/86, of December 1991.

Middle East (Den Hartog 1989; Breda dos Santos 2000, 2002, 2003 and 2005; Lessa 2000; Casarões and Vigevani 2014) or in assessments of foreign policy of the military regime (Gonçalves and Myiamoto 1993; Spektor 2009; Vizontini 1998, Pinheiro 2013). Some texts on Geisel's government also mention the vote (Góes 1978), as much as the memoirs and interviews of key-actors (Abreu 1979; D'Araujo and Castro 1997; Spektor 2010; Guerreiro 2010).

Comprehensive studies on Brazilian foreign policy regard the episode, implicitly or explicitly, as if the Brazilian affirmative vote for resolution 3379 (XXX) would be the manifestation of the inherent rationality of the general goals and strategic concepts of responsible pragmatism: facing the risk of having Brazilian oil supply embargoed by Arab countries, the Brazilian diplomacy redefined its position in relation to the conflicts of the Middle East and, ultimately, voted in favor of the resolution (Selcher 1978; Cervo and Bueno 2012).

This article is based on diplomatic documents, memoirs and interviews given by key decision-makers. It posits that President Geisel took the ultimate decision to vote in favor of resolution 3379 (XXX) mainly because the US pressure to vote against meant that a change in Brazilian position would be seen as giving up its autonomy. This text focuses on the decision-making process of Geisel's foreign policy and explores the idea that the affirmative vote was neither an unavoidable nor an expected consequence of responsible pragmatism's tenets, but rather an almost fortuitous choice in face of the need to reassert its position towards the US.

The article is structured in four sections: the first discusses the decision-making processes for foreign policy during Geisel's administration; the second considers the issue of Middle East and its place in the Brazil-US relations of the period; the third reviews the dynamics of the UNGA regarding the Middle East and Brazil's role in it; the fourth tries to interpret the Brazilian vote and identify how it fitted the country's foreign policy.

## Foreign policy decision-making under Responsible Pragmatism

Generally speaking, the Ministry of External Relations (Itamaraty) has a central role in the decision-making process of the Brazilian foreign policy. It can be said that the patterns of a differentiated and specialized organizational group endowed with their own perceptions and interests is decisive most of the time to understand the orientation of Brazilian foreign policy (Drezner 2000; Halperin 1974; Hill 2003).

For the first decade after the military coup (1964-1973), however, the National Security Council (NSC), populated by militaries and not by diplomats, and its concepts and principles (national interest, security and development, ideological frontiers), enshrined in the National Security Doctrine (NSD), were prevalent in the formulation of Brazilian foreign policy. The NSD was associated

with US security policy for the continent, readapted from the World War II defense strategy to an anti-Communist one (Pinheiro, 2013, 70-72).

By the 1973 oil crisis and after Geisel's inauguration in 1974, it was clear that there was a need to adjust the foreign policy due to the diversification of the country's interests, and the changes in the international system. Geisel came to power with previous experience in decision-making in foreign matters. He resisted the military hard-liners of the regime, who insisted on the principles of the NSD and its emphasis on West-East ideological frontiers. Geisel's economic development project was highly depended on imported oil, which required an investment in diversification, in particular after the October War resulted in a dramatic rise in oil prices and supply cuts by the Arab countries. Brazil realized the need to engage the Third World as a political entity, not only a disparate group of countries (Gonçalves and Miyamoto 1993). In this context of great international economic constraints, it was clear for Brazilian decision makers that the Brazil-US relationship was certainly going to suffer in several areas (Pinheiro 2013, 124).

In such scenario, the very idea of an automatic alignment with Washington was definitively buried. Both Geisel and his Minister of External Relations, Antonio Francisco Azeredo da Silveira, considered that non-interference and respect by the US for Brazilian decisions were a cornerstone of their foreign policy. President Geisel had a centralizing style; he used to discuss matters with few advisers, but decisions were usually taken by him personally. For decisions concerning foreign policy, Geisel would consult Silveira first and foremost, and only then hear the other adviser. This special relationship between Minister and President was one of the main reasons Itamaraty was able to "maintain its position as a central locus of policy formulation". The practice established by Geisel alienated the NSC (Pinheiro 2013, 91-95).

Silveira caught Geisel's attention when the General was still president of Petrobras and the ambassador was in Buenos Aires. Just before his election, Geisel met Silveira and heard positively his ideas on the importance of Brazil strengthening its ties to Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East as a means to make its opinions more forceful in the international scenario, and particularly to the superpowers. The President was convinced of Silveira's abilities as a negotiator and of the soundness of his ideas. He even decided to ignore the considerable reservations expressed by the intelligence and military establishments (Gaspari 2008; Spektor 2010, Hurrell 2013).

The 1973 oil crisis had spurred the reconceptualization of Brazilian foreign policy that would mature under Geisel and Silveira, to be known as responsible pragmatism. It had clear inputs from previous Brazilian strategies from the 1960s and early 1970s but was innovative in its enunciation and boldness of execution. The new doctrine attempted to whitewash Brazil's international credentials, distancing itself from the infamous accusation of sub-imperialism and colonialism (Lima and Moura 1982; Vigevani 1974).

The Brazilian foreign policy wanted to abandon doctrinal concepts that could prevent the country from reaching its short and long-term goals. It was meant to be, in the words of Spektor (2004), neither stationary nor revolutionary, but rather neutralize any aspects of the international system hampering Brazil from realizing what it believed to be its potential, as well as manipulating the positive ones. In practice, a whole gamut of actions was available to Brazil with the general purposes of expanding markets, attracting investors, ensuring the supply of raw materials, and avoiding being tied up to the policies of its partners. The country increasingly took up a Third World discourse, but without a confrontationist attitude (Lessa 1998; Spektor 2004; Gonçalves and Miyamoto 1993).

The speech of Silveira at the opening of the UN General Assembly in 1974 sets out the changes. Its tone and content are direct in clarifying the immediate priorities of the government. It underlines support for the independence of Portuguese Africa, strongly condemns apartheid, and the use of force, and violent occupation of territory in the Middle East, calling the international community to “meet with appropriate measures the suffering of the Palestinian people” (Seixas Corrêa 2007, 315).

In addition to aiming at an approximation with Arab countries and supporting the Palestinian cause, the Geisel administration made relations with developing countries a priority. The multilateral dimension of the Brazilian foreign policy was guided by efforts to modify the international hierarchy and ensure progress in their bilateral relations with developing countries, including Arab countries. A clear outcome was the increase in the potential for disagreement with US policies (Selcher 1978; Den Hartog 1989; Lessa 1998; Lessa 2000).

Brazil-US relations oscillated significantly after 1945, but the Medici years (1969-1973) were normally seen as a moment of improvement. The US political strategy towards Latin America had changed. The Nixon Doctrine – with its ideas of key-countries and delegation – meant less US interventionism in the continent, although in the framework of an unequal partnership; some Latin American countries began to diversify their external relations and became more autonomous towards Washington. This scenario meant for Brazil not the absence of clashes with the US, but rather that the more relevant disagreements were dormant or could have their resolution postponed (Pinheiro 2013; Spektor 2009; Cervo and Bueno 2012).

There are different understandings of the processes taking place after 1974. The more traditional perspective postulates an emerging rivalry between Brazil and the US. The underlining logic is that of intra-capitalist dispute between the traditional power and the new one, whose ability to follow complementary paths had come to an end. This meant a systematic competition and disagreements on central issues such as the supply of raw materials, sources of energy, multiplicity of partners, etc. Brazil's adventures in Africa and the Middle East, its policies towards South America or its liberality in pursuing partners in strategic domains in

Western and Eastern Europe were not necessarily seen as purposeful attacks on US hegemony, but certainly as signs of an adversarial behavior. Hence the perception that the vote on resolution 3379 (XXX) as a cornerstone in Brazil's search for universalism evolved over three decades in Brazilian academia, with considerable nuances (Vigevani 1973; Moniz Bandeira 1989; Gonçalves and Myamoto 1993; Vizentini 1998; Lessa 2000; Cervo and Bueno 2012; Hurrell 2013).

In recent years, Spektor (2009a; 2009b) has spearheaded an effort to reassess the changing Brazil-US relations based on heavy use of archival material. In this new perception, the idea of emerging rivalry would not describe reality appropriately. The assessment is less structural and lays emphasis on conscious efforts by both Brazil and the US to build a positive agenda as part of an equalitarian relationship. Washington – or at least elements in its bureaucracy, Henry Kissinger at the forefront – would accept Brazil's status as a great power and establish a partnership with the country (see also Gaspari 2003; Dávila and Lesser 2012).

In either interpretation, the potential for attrition was significant. The main difference is that in the more traditional perception, clashes were seen as almost inevitable and not altogether undesirable. In the more recent one, they were foreseeable, but the very idea of a partnership was to coordinate strategies to avoid or mitigate them as much as possible (Lessa 1998; Spektor 2009; Hurrell 2013).

## Brazil, the US and the Middle East

Throughout the period from 1945 to 1975, the US was obviously a central feature in Brazilian foreign policy, regardless of the significant changes in its orientation. In general, trends in Brazil's international strategies are assessed in relation to the degree of autonomy towards Washington. From the end of World War II to the inauguration of Geisel, Brazilian foreign policy is normally evaluated as having been more autonomous between 1961 and 1964 and very much aligned between 1946 and 1950 and 1964 and 1967, with the other periods falling somehow in the middle of this spectrum (Cervo and Bueno 2012).

That analysis of foreign policy, however, takes mostly into account some key aspects of Brazil's international relationship, but not necessarily reflect the role of the Middle East, which was a peripheral arena during that period (Sochaczewski 2004; Silva and Pilla 2012). In the early years of the Cold War, Brazil had very rarified relations with the Middle East and most issues tended to surface at the UN. In that forum, either resulting from alignment or from a Westernized world-view, Brazilian discourse and vote was characterized by the adhesion, or low resistance, to the hegemony of the US, especially in issues related to international peace and security, at least in relation to "capital issues which involve the adoption of defense measures by the Western coalition against Soviet expansionism" (MRE 1957).

In 1947, Brazilian politician Oswaldo Aranha, as president of the UNGA, had a pivotal role in maneuvering to adopt resolution 181 (II) allowing for the

partition of Palestine, an outcome welcome by the US and the Soviet Union. Brazil's positions in relation to the conflicts in the Middle East were qualified by the Ministry of External Relations as oriented by the search for equity and respect to the principles of international law (Breda dos Santos 2000, Breda dos Santos 2005; Pimentel 2002). In the 1950s and 1960s, the Brazilian military took part in the first United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I) from 1957 to 1967.

As much as Aranha's role in the General Assembly to approve the partition, the Brazilian contribution to UNEF I was not meant primarily to seek alignment with the US, but both were welcome by Washington. The relevant role of Brazil in drafting resolution 242 (1967) after the Six Days War was also perceived as a demonstration of constructive intent (Breda dos Santos 2002). All along, it can be said that the meaning of the Middle East for Brazil – apart from a few technical cooperation agreements and lackluster embassies – was very minor, not qualifying the region even as a potential source of attrition with the US (Casarões and Viegani 2014).

In the early 1970s, a series of changes in the international scenario, in Brazilian domestic and foreign policies, in its relationship with the US and in the place occupied by the Middle East in that relation altered completely the situation. Brazil had been growing on a breathtaking pace since the late 1960s, with a model of development dependent on imported oil. As a result, the country was badly beaten by the oil crisis that gained momentum after the 1973 October War. Near the end of the government of Emílio Medici, a change was announced in Brazilian foreign policy for the Middle East. The adjective “equidistant” would no longer be used to characterize the Brazilian positions with respect to the Middle East. As noted by Pinheiro, “[i]n so doing the government intended to avoid any threat of boycott from its regular Arab suppliers, as had been made against the US and the Netherlands in October [1973], and later in November against Portugal, Rhodesia and South Africa, as part of the Afro-Arab deal” (2013, 117).

For Brazil, the oil shock was aggravated by the fact that by 1973 the Third World had coalesced around an Afro-Asian-Arab alliance with a clearer agenda and more concrete demands. In addition, the embargo promoted by Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) gave the bloc an ability to harm those states that were seen as supportive of Israel, the apartheid or of Portuguese colonialism (Yergin 1991; Braveboy-Wagner 2009). Brazil was a possible target. On November 24, 1973, a resolution passed by African countries included Brazil among six countries that could potentially be embargoed if they did not cease to support the government of South Africa's white minority. Arab demonstrations in the same vein took place in the following months (Selcher 1978).

The oil crisis and the pro-active Third World caused strong embarrassments to the newly inaugurated Geisel administration. Brazil imported about 80% of the total oil it consumed: in 1974, it was the largest importer of goods among developing countries, and the seventh worldwide. The 15% of Brazilian exports



revenues in 1972 which were destined for the purchase of oil jumped to about 40% two years later (MRE 1975, 96).

The Middle East, once barren, was by the mid-1970s a particularly fertile ground for attrition between Brazil and the US. First, the circumstances of Brazilian economic growth made the region increasingly important in the diplomatic agenda, not allowing anymore for a lighthearted treatment of the 1940s through 1960s where US position could be taken as a yardstick (Den Hartog 1989; Caraciki 2013). The Middle East became a primary political battleground between an emboldened Third World wielding the oil weapon and the Western countries. Even after some shy reprisals during the embargo, the US was seen a major supporter of Israel and hence disagreeing with Washington became a tool to ingratiate oneself with the Arab countries (Yergin 1991; Manor 1996). For Brazil's responsible pragmatism, it was necessary to reassess its votes in the General Assembly based on the overall situation and on the specific weight of each decision in the UN.

### The Middle East and Brazil in the politics of General Assembly voting

Two intertwined threads should be addressed in order to better interpret the meanings of Brazil's vote in the UNGA. The first, a historical assessment of the stance taken by Latin American countries in general and Brazil in particular towards Israel and the Middle East in the UN. The second, a contextualization of the role of resolution 3379 (XXX) within the range of votes taken annually on the Middle East and in relation to the positions and alliances of the Third World in the UNGA.

It is the sad fate of resolutions on the Middle East that they be seen by most observers as pro-Israel or pro-Arab, depriving the voter of a principled opinion. Glick (1958, 3-17) asserted that the Latin American countries followed guidelines taking into account factors not directly related to the conflict, such as humanitarianism, right of self-determination, sovereign equality, Catholicism, and an interest in the universality of UN membership. Discrepancies amongst Latin American countries would derive mainly from divergent interpretation of the facts on the ground. Recent research confirms that Brazil was hardly voting pro or against Israel or the Arab countries, but rather having in mind its own ideas and priorities (Casarões and Vigevani 2014).

In the momentous 1947 vote on the partition of Mandate Palestine, Latin Americans were pivotal in ensuring the adoption of resolution 181 (II), having cast no less than 12 out of 33 affirmative votes – a fact seen at the time as a strong display of support for Israel, although not necessarily meant as such (Glick 1958; Rubin 1976; Sharif 1977). Brazil voted in favor of the partition, but the country's position was less remarkable than that of Oswaldo Aranha, in charge of chairing the Assembly, who effectively maneuvered to achieve a positive result (Breda dos Santos 2000, 24-29; Vigevani and Kleinas 2000; Pimentel 2002, 288-289).



In the immediate aftermath of the partition and the war of 1948-1949, Brazil had a pattern of vote that clearly was not framed by the manicheistic view of being either pro-Israel or pro-Arab. Brazil tended to be against efforts to delegitimize the newly born state while pressuring it to solve the Jerusalem imbroglio. This voting pattern was retrospectively branded by Brazilian diplomacy as an *equidistant* one (Glick 1958; Breda dos Santos 2000; Pimentel 2002).

Over the following years, Latin Americans were decreasingly enthusiastic about Israel. The country was still perceived as a small struggling Western-style democracy surrounded by bigger and potentially stronger Arab nations, but there was a slightly pro-Israel bias in the perception that a withdrawal would be difficult while Arab countries continued their belligerency (Rubin 1976; Sharif 1977; Abugattas 1982).

As an elected member of the Security Council in June 1967, Brazil was instrumental in helping the construction of resolution 242 (1967), with its dual requirement of withdrawal from the occupied territories, and the end of belligerency and mutual recognition. Understood by its formulators as equidistant, the Brazilian stance could be construed as inadvertently positive to Israel, as it recognized somehow a *status quo*, insisted on a negotiated solution and avoided the revolutionary proposals advanced by the more extreme members of the Arab League (Breda dos Santos 2000; Breda dos Santos 2002; Spektor 2010; Cervo and Bueno 2012).

By the early 1970s, the situation for Brazil and the other Latin Americans in the UNGA regarding the Middle East had changed significantly, for three main reasons. First, the October War and the oil shock of 1973 have shown the relevance of the Arab political lobby. Second and directly related, those years marked the actual beginnings of an authentic Third World coordination in global affairs. Latin American states aiming for influence would have to conform to the new reality. Third, 1974 was the year when the self-determination of the Palestinian people as such was introduced in the UN agenda. Brazil and others had started already to redirect their votes in order to be closer to the Arab position and criticize Israel more directly in hope of gaining or keeping Third World support in the votes of more interesting matters (Rubin 1976; Abugattas 1982; Braveboy-Wagner 2009; Dávila and Lesser 2012).

In any given UNGA session, there are a number of resolutions dealing with different aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict and, since 1974, with the self-determination of the Palestinian people – and the thirtieth session, in 1975, was not an exception. Starting in 1972 and culminating in 1982, there was a steep increase in the number of resolutions, normally condemning Israel in different regards (Manor 1996). Albeit votes and speech rhetoric did not necessarily mean concrete acts outside the UNGA hall, any state could have their ability to influence others, to gain supporters for its own cause and even to attract investments based on how it voted.

The draft which became resolution 3379 (XXX) originated from amendments proposed by Somalia to another draft was subsequently discussed as an autonomous draft under the item on elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, and was co-sponsored mostly by the twenty members of the League of Arab States. In the political context of the UNGA, the draft was clearly perceived as opposed mostly by the US and its Western allies, as well as Israel. The text basically likened Zionism to racism, specifically mentioning its relationship to apartheid (Manor 1996; Dávila and Lesser 2012; Caraciki 2013).

Resolution 3379 (XXX) was adopted by 72 affirmative votes against 35 negative and 32 abstentions. Most resolutions on the Middle East conflict could command a far larger majority in the UNGA, normally over 100 of the 144 member states (Manor 1996; Caraciki 2013). The reason for the tighter majority and the significant number of abstentions is the highly controversial character of the text, which necessarily generated tensions and pressure. In a case as such, many countries would simply choose not to explicitly take sides, in order to avoid being further pressured or blamed. Proponents of the resolution would certainly take into account the controversy involved and the vulnerability of others. A member state could be considered friendly to a cause even if not voting for all the resolutions. In assessing how to vote, Brazil would certainly take into account how it would be seen by those for and against the resolution.

Israel and the US denounced acerbically the resolution and both countries tried their best to avoid its adoption – Israeli Ambassador Herzog having even torn the draft from the rostrum. The immediate concrete consequences of resolution 3379 (XXX) were confined to a symbolic corner. The text did not foreshadow the expulsion of Israel from the UN, it was rather an alternative to that strategy. The resolution, however, could evolve to other measures, similar to those adopted to deal with South Africa. Over the following years, Israel was increasingly isolated in the UN and in other international fora, having difficulty to have its candidates elected and being included in programs of work as the object of the combat against racism (Manor 1996).

Voting in favor of the resolution was seen as a result as a gesture of opposition to Israel, in spite of any explanation claiming otherwise. It was further, mainly in the case of a Latin American country such as Brazil, perceived in Washington as an act of defiance, with anti-humanistic and anti-Semitic overtones. For the Arab nations, a favorable vote would signify an outstanding gesture of criticism to Israel, which might be worth rewarding. One can speculate that a hypothetical Brazilian abstention would not have been the ideal choice of the US, but would certainly have deflected most of the criticism. For the Arab group, an abstention might have been seen – in light of the already changed Brazilian pattern of vote in the standard resolutions on the Middle East conflict – as a lesser problem, but hardly a reason to punish Brazil (Dávila and Lesser, 2012; Caraciki 2013).

## Resolution 3379 (XXX) recalibrating the Brazil-US partnership

As noted, in his 1974 speech at the UN General Assembly, Silveira had aligned the vectors that would guide the Brazilian foreign policy. With responsible pragmatism, the Brazilian diplomacy sought to depart from the ideological alignments that compromised the pursuit of key Brazilian interests. He mentioned the reassessment of Brazilian stances on apartheid, Portuguese colonialism, Israel's occupation of Arab territories, and the Palestinian people, framing the change in Brazil's pattern of vote that had started to take place. The issue of Zionism was not even considered (Seixas Corrêa 2007, 309-317; Sharif 1977).

The guidelines forwarded to the Brazilian delegation in New York for the 1975 General Assembly suggests that:

The confrontation between the United States and the non-aligned will probably reach its most acute point in the debate on the Middle East issue. In the absence of real progress in bilateral understandings, Arab countries will tend to use the parliamentary possibilities to pressure Israel, increasing its diplomatic isolation (Secretaria de Estado das Relações Exteriores [SERE] 1975g).

The instructions, however, assumed that the Arab countries would try to expel Israel from the UN, suspend it, deny the country its credentials or somehow request an exam of its participation in the Organization. As late as September 18, it did not foresee the idea of equating Zionism and racism. In any case, it indicates that, having rejected more extreme propositions in the previous year, Brazil would align with no position without careful consideration of the parliamentary scenario (SERE, Ofício 77, 9/18/1975).

A few days later, on 3 October, the Somalis brought up Zionism in their amendments to the omnibus resolution on racism. The insertion took all countries by surprise, even Israel. When a concerned Brazilian delegation requested instructions from Brasília on 13 October, the draft on Zionism had already been made autonomous from the original all-encompassing draft (Missão do Brasil junto às Nações Unidas [Delbrasonu] 1975a). Sometime between 13 and 15 October, the request was reinforced by a phone call from Ambassador Sergio Corrêa da Costa to the Minister. According to Silveira, the Ambassador wrongly reported that most, if not all Latin Americans, would vote favorably, and that the paragraph on Zionism was within a larger resolution – although the original cable from New York transmitted an almost final text, and indicated a few Latin American countries willing to vote for it something that proved wrong (Abreu 1979; Manor 1996; Spektor 2010).

Although the day before the Mission had cabled the final draft on Zionism (A/C.3/L.2159), the terse answer from Brasília on 16 October simply stated that Brazil should vote in favor of the draft and make no explanation of the vote,

alluding to “instructions conveyed by phone”. Given a sibylline reference in another cable a few days later, it is believable that Corrêa da Costa had argued for abstention or absence in view of the suddenness of the draft and its controversial nature. Silveira claimed, years later, he wanted to make an explanation of vote or reverse the vote in the Plenary, but none of these are initially hinted (Góes 1978; Sochaczewski 2004; Spektor 2010; Delbrasonu 1975a; Delbrasonu 1975b; SERE 1975b; SERE 1975e).

Unlike the discussions about the vote in the Plenary a few weeks later, records about this initial decision are difficult to find. The difficulty is aggravated because most recollections and memoirs tend to conflate the two moments of vote, not distinguishing between the initial one in the Third Committee and the latter one in the Plenary. It is, however, worth speculating on the reasons for the original instruction.

Apparently, Silveira and Vice-Minister Ambassador Saraiva Guerreiro were initially in favor of abstaining or not taking part in the vote, a technique used in the previous session when resolution 3236 (XXIX) was considered too ambiguous, and put to vote too fast. Both were cognizant of diplomatic subtleties and knew an abstention would not mean cooperation with the US, but rather a diminished level of disagreement with both Washington and the Arab countries. President Geisel, however, was distrustful of the option of abstaining, perceived as a diplomatic subterfuge to yield to US preferences and might have preferred to vote in favor. In addition to that, if, over the phone, Corrêa da Costa had reported a Latin American majority in favor, Brazil would feel less embarrassed about voting affirmatively (SERE, Ofício 77, 9/18/1975; D’Araújo and Castro, 1997; Sochaczewski 2004; Spektor 2010; Guerreiro 2010).

Traditionally, authors have related the positive vote with an attempt to being closer to Arab countries. It is difficult to assess if oil was a direct factor, since the embargo had stopped in early 1974 and was reserved for close allies of Israel or Portugal – one reason for Brazil to have changed its vote over a year before. Brazil might have sought to ingratiate itself with potential Arab investors or just underestimated the domestic and international negative reactions in assessing them against the possible boost to be gained amongst its Third World partners (Den Hartog 1989; Gonçalves and Myamoto 1993; Spektor 2010; Pinheiro 2013).

The international uproar about the vote was dutifully reported by the Brazilian mission to the UN and probably surprised the Brazilian government, as much as the lack of Latin American consensus. Strong accusations were formulated by the US and European delegations, which reverberated strongly in the world press. In Brazil itself the initial reaction of the press was limited, but increased after the harsh position taken by the daily *Estado de S. Paulo* on October 21. The Jewish community, always on guard against possible waves of anti-Semitism, was quick to mobilize and denounce the choice of vote.

Immediately after the vote in the Third Committee, President Geisel apparently started considering changing the vote from affirmative to abstention when the subject would go to the Plenary in early November. According to Góes (1978, 30), the General was surprised by the response to the Brazilian position and believed that the decision was taken precipitously, after that single phone call from New York to Silveira, and was willing to reverse the vote. In later years, Geisel would reconstruct his memory to a peremptory assertion of his conviction on the correctness of the resolution. There is reason, however, to believe that, in the early days after the initial vote, the President was prone to change his mind – a version supported by Silveira himself (Góes 1978; Abreu 1979; Mariz 1993; D'Araújo and Castro 1997; Breda dos Santos 2003; Spektor 2010).

More than the factual evidence of a willingness to change the vote, it is arguable that the kind of reaction evoked by the Brazilian yea pointed to its dissonance with responsible pragmatism. The policy steered by Geisel and Silveira was concerned with reaping the benefits of international interdependence by manipulating the international system in order to maximize Brazil's power. It was not meant to recant Western values, but rather to explore the limits of Brazilian autonomy within them. (Lessa 1998; Spektor 2004). Yet, the initial reaction to the vote was utterly negative within and outside Brazil, with the very core values of the country being questioned without any immediate gain.

One week after the vote in the Third Committee, the US campaign against the draft resolution reached Brasília in the form of a lukewarm *démarche* of a mid-level diplomat from the Embassy with the acting Director of International Organizations. The official presented a standardized note on the disappointment with the vote. After the *démarche*, Washington received a report of Brazil's surprise with the strong reaction to the vote, and acknowledgement that Silveira's 22 October interview while visiting London<sup>2</sup> was an attempt to mitigate the vote's deleterious effects. The report also registered the unlikelihood that Brazil would change its attitude in the Plenary and the perception that statements by the Israeli Chargé d'Affairs were an unwelcome pressure. That same day, acting Minister Guerreiro authorized two cables to the Brazilian Mission to the UN, reporting on the US note and on the outrage in Brazil for the supposed leakage of said document to the press, supposedly by the the Department of State. The US *démarche* and its content were reported on October 24 by the Brazilian press and the Brazilian irritation, the following day (American Embassy, 1975, 1976a, 1976b; SERE, 1975c; SERE, 1975d; "Washington censura o voto", 1975). The vehemence of the cables sent from Brazil hint, although there are no records, of more forceful *démarches* by the US and maybe other actors.

2 Since Brazil did not explain its vote at the Third Committee, the interview by Silveira in London was the first explanation and expresses Brazil's realization that its decision was more complex than expected. The Minister affirmed only that "we did not vote against Zionism, but rather against racial discrimination".

This is a turning point. Until the publicizing of the *démarche*, albeit reluctantly, there was a chance of changing the vote. Once the public became aware of the US pressure, Brazil feared to be put in the same position as Chile, which, in the same press report, was criticized for voting affirmatively, denounced for human rights violations and accused of selling its vote to the Arab countries to avoid condemnation by the same General Assembly. The final Chilean decision to change vote was seen as a sign of vulnerability, succumbing to a dictate of Washington (Hofman 1975; Sochaczewski 2004).

The perception that Brazil was having its arm twisted by Washington to change its vote was apparently decisive in galvanizing Geisel's decision not to change his position. Different sources report that the President was disgruntled by the publicity given to the *démarche*, and felt that national honor demanded that Brazil should not yield to pressure. Likewise, Minister Silveira, in a statement given in Paris on 25 October, staunchly defended the Brazilian vote ("Itamaraty reage à nota oficial", 1975). Silveira, in an interview years later, confirmed that the controversy about the US note was central in Brazil's decision to maintain its position (Góes 1978; Mariz 1993; Abreu 1979; Spektor 2010).

Following the Plenary session affirmative vote, in early November, the government developed its arguments in favor of Brazil's position along the lines of adequacy, if not necessity, with responsible pragmatism, denial of any anti-Israeli or anti-Semitic sentiment and reassertion of the principle of fighting discrimination, including Zionism, seen as a "racial and exclusivistic doctrine" (UNGA 1975, 798). Implications that the ultimate reason to avoid change was the relationship with the US were carefully eschewed. Yet the pressure on Geisel was evident in the fact that Brazil ultimately made an explanation of vote in the Plenary, in spite of its original intention not to justify itself (SERE, 1975f).

The process of deciding how Brazil would vote has to be understood not as a simple indignant reaction to a purported offense to national pride, but rather in the broader framework of the relations between the two countries. As outlined above, there was an attempt, on one side, by Geisel-Silveira and, on the other, by Ford-Kissinger to establish a partnership on equal terms. Part of the bargain was that the US would not belittle Brazil and would respect those disagreements that were to emerge, in particular in areas where, as was the case of the Middle East, Washington had been warned about Brazil's need to tread its own way (Gaspari 2003; Spektor 2009; Spektor, 2010).

The initial vote, however unclear its immediate motivation, might have been a move in search for Third World solidarity or Arab investments, and the ensuing hesitation, a result of the considerable domestic and international backlash; but the final and more important decision was part of the ongoing dialogue with Washington, not so much in its substance but rather in asserting the terms of the conversation and the status of the partners.



The view that this vote was “a condition for Brazil’s own economic expansionism” (Moniz Bandeira 1989, 226) certainly does not fit into the factual situation of hesitation and half-hearted reprehension, culminating in a decision that was far from seen as ideal by Brazil. It is not possible either to claim that the vote derived from “an imperialist self-image of Brazil as leader of the non-aligned world in the 1970s” (Dávila and Lesser 2012, 228), or that the support for the resolution as an “anti-Zionist bet” to reap benefits from newly-found developing allies (Caraciki 2013). It is true that *ex post facto* Brazil developed critical arguments about Zionism, but they were always weak in the country’s discourse. Even if the Brazilian decision generated good-will or concrete gains from the Third World, it was not originally aimed at that. In the months after the vote, Brazilian diplomacy did not openly change its position but tried to assimilate it to historical principles followed by the country or dodge the issue as subtly as possible (MRE, 1975; American Embassy, 1976a; Sochaczewski, 2004; Spektor, 2010).

## Conclusion

Some factual details of the decision-making process might never be fully uncovered. Yet, what is known is enough to deepen the understanding on Brazilian foreign policy decision-making process during the Geisel administration, on responsible pragmatism, and on the position of Brazil regarding the US and the Middle East.

The vote on resolution 3379 (XXX) was taken mostly by the President himself with an unclear degree of influence by Silveira. The main factor in the first vote was most likely simply time – or lack thereof – added to the centralizing style of the President. In the Plenary, the underlying reason to vote affirmatively could not easily be clarified given its nature of response to the US.

The case of resolution 3379 (XXX) is useful to demystify some ideas about responsible pragmatism. It is a common feature of many analyses to hypostasize a complete doctrine and practice of foreign policy for Silveira’s tenure. As much as he might have strategized his steps, the evidence is clear that the policy was built along the way, with the practical realization of rhetorical postulates as adaptations with varied degrees of coherence with the original ideas. In a similar manner, as the denunciation of the military agreement after a report on human rights, the episode of resolution 3379 (XXX) only *post facto* could be made to fit the principles Brazil wanted to uphold. Brazil incorporated the vote into its panoply of consolidated diplomatic positions, unequivocally calling “Zionism a form of racism and racial discrimination”, although from time to time a testimony to the harshness of the decision would resurface.

The very issue of the Middle East was an example of the multiplicity of paths that could be taken by the Brazilian foreign policy. Brazil had changed its



pattern of vote in the UNGA already in 1974, with a clear goal of avoiding the embargo, and with the more remote interest of receiving special treatment from Arab investors. Yet, supporting resolution 3379 (XXX) was not a *sine qua non* step in this path. Brazil had to swiftly assess the possibilities of how to vote and what would be the consequences – and evidence points to the decision makers being initially unclear on the issue.

What transpires in the documentation is that the Middle East and its conflicts increasingly became an issue to be seriously considered in the relations between Brazil and the US. If in previous years Brazil could see the region with relative indifference, it became indispensable to take clearer positions after 1973. Even more important, it was known to Brazilian and US policy makers that friction could be caused by the Middle East. Geisel and Silveira expected it to be treated in the framework of the dialogue proposed by Kissinger. The vote on resolution 3379 (XXX) was far from an accident, but also from a Machiavellian master plan. It was a message sent to Washington on how Brazil saw the bilateral relations of the two countries should play out in the future.

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## Abstract

In 1975, Brazil voted in favor of the United Nations General Assembly resolution 3379 (XXX), equating Zionism with a form of racism. Focusing on the decision-making process of president Ernesto Geisel's (1974-1979) foreign policy, "responsible pragmatism", this article discusses how the ultimate decision to vote in favor of resolution was taken taking into account mainly US-Brazil relationship.

**Keywords:** Brazilian Foreign Policy, United Nations Organization, Resolution 3379 (XXX) of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Zionism, Racism, "Responsible Pragmatism" foreign policy, Ernesto Geisel's Government Foreign Policy (1974-1979).

## Resumo

Em 1975, o Brasil votou a favor da resolução da Assembleia Geral das Nações Unidas 3379 (XXX), que equiparou o sionismo a uma forma de racismo. Centrando-se no processo decisório da Política Externa do "Pragmatismo Responsável" desenvolvida pelo governo do Presidente Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979), este artigo discute como a decisão final para votar a favor da resolução foi tomada tendo em conta principalmente as relações entre o Brasil e os Estados Unidos.

**Palavras-chave:** Política Externa Brasileira, Organização das Nações Unidas, Resolução 3379 (XXX) da Assembleia Geral das Nações Unidas, Sionismo, Racismo, Política Externa do "Pragmatismo Responsável", Política Externa do Governo Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979).

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