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How can Geopolitical Agents Restrain an Emerging Power's Global and Regional Leadership? Evidence from Brazil

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Abstract

The investigation of the content and circumstances of domestic influences on foreign policy outcomes constitutes part of the challenge of conceptualization in foreign policy analyses. This paper contributes to that research agenda, aiming to isolate and to analyze the crucial causal forces of Brazil's international power projection (or lack thereof). To achieve these objectives, the paper uses the model of neoclassical geopolitics, emphasizing geopolitical agents' perceptions and capacities as pivotal domestic variables, and undertakes an empirical test on a single case study of Brazilian geopolitical design (2003-2018). The paper adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach, operationalized by techniques of process tracing and discourse analysis. Results show that the deterioration of Brazil's relative potential and the lack of improvement of Brazil's position in foreign affairs are most likely explained by (a) geopolitical agents' choices, which have made (b) South American integration a top priority with respect to Brazil's geopolitical design.

Keywords: Brazil, Foreign Policy, Neoclassical Geopolitics, Lula da Silva, Dilma Rousseff, Michel Temer.

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1.Introductionⁱ

Despite (i) the relatively large potential of Brazil, and (ii) the permissiveness of the related systemic constraints, Brazil has not been able to increase its influence in the international arena in recent decades. In this paper, I attempt to offer insight into this research puzzle. In addition, for roughly a decade Brazil's relative potential has also greatly declined. The objectives of this research are thus to (a) identify the central causes of this dual problem (the deterioration of Brazil's potential, and the lack of increase in external influence), and (b) to explain how related causal mechanisms have operated. My main argument is that the acts of Brazilian geopolitical agents have weakened Brazil's relative potential and, consequently, have curtailed the country's capacity to project power in IR. It seems that these acts have been determined by a solid leftist culture, which has pushed forward the continental maneuver of South American integration. To put this argument to the test, in Section 1, I explain the theoretical framework of the model of neoclassical geopolitics (theoretical assumptions, concepts, and variables) that create the analytical framework for the study. Then, in Section 2, I implement an empirical single case study of Brazil's geopolitical design and geopolitical agents (2003-2018), following the aforementioned theoretical-methodological framework. The research tasks will include the (a) identification, and (b) characterization of the geopolitical agents. The set of methods comprises not only the application of the model, guided by scholarly inquiry into the key causal forces of Brazil's stated problems, but also phenomenological aspects. Deductive logic is used too, in the sense that I depart from the geopolitical theoretical framework to observe empirical political reality, pursuing a "full-scale scientific methodology" (Vasegh and Mohamadi,2020).

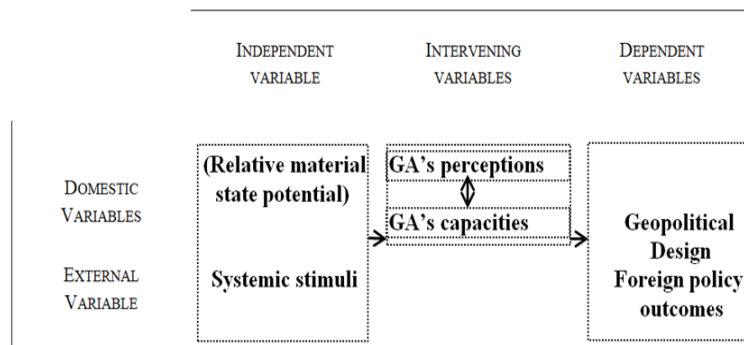
I take two recognizable methodological steps to achieve the research objectives: (a) I identify *what* the specific variables are that are relevant to the analysis of Brazil's foreign policy problems from the geopolitical point of view, as covered in Section 1, and (b) I explain *how* these variables translate into foreign policy outcomes (geopolitical design), as accomplished in Section 2. The single case study is operationalized by content analysis, discourse analysis, and process tracing. As for sources, the analysis covers primary sources such as geopolitical agents' speeches,

decrees, and relevant interviews. Specialized literature is also the focus of attention and is discussed in detail.

2. The Model of Neoclassical Geopolitics

The path to achieving the research objectives starts by picturing the theoretical-methodological framework of neoclassical geopolitics (Morgado, 2017-2019-2020b), which, in line with other pieces of research (for example, Torkameh and et al,2022) tries to overcome the flaws and inconsistencies of critical geopolitics. As the independent variable of neoclassical geopolitics is the international system (as it is with neoclassical realism too – Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016)), presentation of a brief set of considerations about the international system is thus in order. Despite the usual ambiguousness, it can be argued that between 2003 and 2018 the international system was relatively permissive in and to the South American region – i.e., during that period Brazil did not face major threats from external powers, or, in other words, the country did not suffer major constraints. Moreover, studies have shown that Brazil’s relative material potential in that period was relatively large (Morgado,2017-2018).ⁱⁱ

Figure (1): Model of Neoclassical Geopolitics



(Source: Morgado,2019:103)

The main point of this section, however, is to theoretically ascertain what the specific domestic variables are that are relevant to analyzing geopolitical design as a foreign policy outcome. The variables of the geopolitical agent’s perceptions and capacities are identified as the answer. I have already worked on the research tasks related to (1) the identification of the

geopolitical agents, and (2) their characterization (Morgado 2019, 97-98). This paper revisits and develops this research agenda.

The (1) identification of geopolitical agents involves heads of state or heads of government, ministers of foreign affairs, ministers of national defense, and other specific ministers (such as security ministers) who constitute the foreign policy cabinet.ⁱⁱⁱ Depending on the caliber of the geopolitical agents, the staff and teams of institutional technocrats, clusters of foreign affairs-, defense-, and intelligence experts who provide reports and advice may also be influential in the decision-making process.^{iv} This group of individuals is, nonetheless, not addressed in this study (with a few exceptions), and can be more substantially investigated in the future.

After identification follows the (2) characterization of the geopolitical agents. For the purposes of this paper, the characterization of the geopolitical agents' perceptions includes (2.1) an analysis of strategic culture through the study of perceptions of geographical space, (2.2) considerations about the coherence of the geopolitical agents' discourse and an investigation of their network of relations, and (2.3) an exploration of the intentions of the geopolitical agents by identifying their ambitions. The characterization of geopolitical agents' capacities is accomplished by (2.4) inserting those capacities into the domestic power structure. I will provide details about these methodological tasks.

The analysis of strategic culture (2.1) involves scrutinizing geopolitical agents' sense, or perception, of geographical space. This constitutes an essential assignment for mapping the "consciousness horizon" of the geopolitical agents. This means assessing what kind of perceptions the geopolitical agents have about the implications of the incentives of the geographical setting in geostrategic formulation, the creation of geopolitical design, and foreign policy conduct. The hypothetical causal link is that if the geopolitical agents are not clearly aware of the sum of the findings of geopolitical studies,¹ and if they consequently accumulate observable failures in foreign policy, then the latter can be considered misguided in terms of their sense of space – or as I innovatively label them, geomisguided.

Considerations about the coherence of the geopolitical agents' discourse and an investigation of their network of relations (2.2) means not only evaluating the ideology of the discourse (statist or non-statist, nationalist or

non-nationalist) – which influences the geopolitical agents’ capacity to extract resources (Lobell and et al,2009:38) – but also identifying the existence or lack thereof of the institutionalization of that discourse into a net of political relations.

The (2.3) exploration of the intentions of the geopolitical agents (Chauprade and Thual 1998:496) is accomplished by identifying their ambitions. Rose (1998:152) asserted that relative material state potential, being the foundation of foreign policy, impacts the ambitions of geopolitical agents in terms of their shaping of the external environment. Furthermore, the ambitions of geopolitical agents will most likely define the national interest in policy terms (geopolitical design) since, according to Bessa, the conversion of the national interest into material political objectives always depends on the geopolitical agent’s interpretations and ambitions.^{vi}

Finally, (2.4), the study inserts the geopolitical agents’ capacities into the domestic power structure. In other words, it acknowledges not only that geopolitical agents’ capacities are constrained by their perceptions (i.e., one cannot act accurately when one cannot perceive accurately), but also by the domestic power structure (i.e., one may well perceive, and may be capable of acting well per se, yet may not have the necessary freedom from the domestic power structure to act). In these terms, the inquiry into the domestic power structure involves observing the convergence or divergence between the preferences of the geopolitical agents and those of the nation. Moreover, it requires revisiting the topic of the existence or non-existence of the institutionalization of a net of political relations, as the latter may well constitute a geopolitical continuity – and may consequently directly constrain geopolitical agents’ capacities. The magnitude of relative material state potential is connected, ultimately, to the variable “geopolitical agent’s capacities” (i.e., a state cannot act beyond its capabilities).

A final segment of the paper is devoted to discussing literature about Brazilian foreign policy, reflecting on alternative explanations to the ones I provide here.

The theoretical framework is concluded with a definition of key concepts employed in the paper. Accordingly: (a) “the international system” refers to the interstate political system characterized by an anarchic ordering principle (Ripsman and et al,2016:43); (b) relative material state potential designates “the capabilities or resources... with which states can influence

each other” (Wohlforth,1993:4),^{viii} meaning both material and non-material resources;² (c) “strategic culture” corresponds to “...a set of inter-related beliefs, norms, and assumptions...” that establish “...what are acceptable and unacceptable strategic choices...” (Ripsman and et al,2016:67); (d) “consciousness horizon” denotes the mindset of the geopolitical agent, in the sense that the researcher is required to delimit the contours of the cognitive dimension of geopolitical agents (Carvalho,2018); (e) “perception of space” signifies what meaning the geographical setting’s incentives have for the geopolitical agents (assuming that the geopolitical agents are aware of these incentives); (f) “geomisguidance,” a concept I earlier coined (Morgado,2016a:171), corresponds to a classification of the “perception of space” according to which geopolitical agents are unaware or misunderstand the geographical setting’s incentives, or even consciously refuse to take advantage of them; (g) “ideology” refers to a set of logical ideas that aim to explain the world, but, most of all, to change it in favor of the aspirations of a group, class, culture, or state (Tannenwald,2005:15) – consequently, an ideology is normative, since it implicates pursuing what is desirable (i.e., what should be); (h) “geopolitical design” means both a list of state objectives (national objectives) and its hierarchy (Chauprade and Thual, 1998:486-487); (i) “geoconjunctive maneuver” – another concept that I authored – refers to the state’s cooperative behavior in the domains of applied geopolitics and foreign affairs,³ thus, is in logical opposition to “potential for conflict” as a theoretical principle of geopolitics (Morgado, 2020b:133-134). Finally, (j) a “geopolitical continuity” occurs as a “dynamics of continuity” that can be deduced from the durability of certain objectives – or, as Chauprade and Thual put it, “geopolitics considers the importance of the fact in relative terms, including that fact in durable dynamics” (1998:483).

3.Bazil Geopolitical Agents and their Geopolitical Design

Following the methodological guidelines explained above, the purpose now is to trace how specific domestic variables impact foreign policy outcomes. South American integration, Brazil’s top objective within geopolitical design is the foreign policy outcome at stake.^x in other words, the point is to trace the relevance of the intervening variables by identifying and explaining them as the probable causes of the phenomenon investigated herein.

3-1. The Identification of Brazil's Geopolitical Agents (2003-2018)

Brazilian geopolitical agents between 2003 and 2018 included the following individuals: Three presidents: Luíz Inácio Lula da Silva, Dilma Rousseff, and Michel Temer. Six ministers of foreign affairs: Celso Amorim, António Patriota, Luís Alberto Figueiredo, Mauro Vieira, José Serra, and Aloysio Nunes. Nine ministers of defense: José Viegas Filho, José Alencar, Waldir Pires, Nelson Jobim, Celso Amorim, Jacques Wagner, Aldo Rebelo, Raul Jungman, and Joaquim Silva e Luna. Further, ten chiefs of staff of the presidency: José Dirceu, Dilma Rousseff, Erenice Guerra, Carlos Eduardo Esteves Lima, António Palocci, Gleisi Hoffman, Aloizio Mercadante, Jacques Wagner, Eva Chiavon, and Eliseu Padilha.

Apart from the presidents, the individuals who remained in positions of power for the longest time were Celso Amorim (eight years as minister of foreign affairs and three years as minister of defense), Dilma Rousseff (five years as chief of staff of the presidency), and Nelson Jobim (four years as minister of defense).

José Dirceu and Jacques Wagner deserve special mention. Although José Dirceu served only two years as chief of staff of the presidency, and Jacques Wagner six months in the same position, and less than one year as minister of defense, they are both considered crucial agents of the Workers' Party (PT), as will be described below. The same applies to the late Marco Aurélio Garcia (2010-2013), a professor at UNICAMP and founding member of PT, who was a special foreign policy adviser for Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff (Saraiva and Gomes, 2016:84).

3-2. Characterization of Brazil's Geopolitical Agents (2003-2018)

The three above-mentioned Brazilian presidents and the selected individuals who comprised part of their foreign policy entourage constitute the key geopolitical agents under consideration.

Analysis of Strategic Culture via Perceptions of the Geographical Space: The Brazilian School of Geopolitics, Continentalization, and Pátria Grande
Some of my research findings about the Brazilian School of Geopolitics (BSG) (Morgado, 2016b; 2017; 2021) can be summed up by confirming that certain authors of the BSG helped to cement a strategic culture of South American continentalization.^{xi} This strategic culture can be observed not only in the writings of these authors but, more recently, in Martin (2007:

118) too – also considered an author of the BSG. Martin became a proponent of the South American integration maneuver, in contradiction to another recommendation of his that Brazil should create a powerful navy and project power on the sea – a contradiction that I have pointed out elsewhere (Morgado,2017:231-234).

It may seem to stretch credibility to trace a causal link between a Brazilian continentalization project – advocated by some authors of the BSG – and Brazil’s major foreign policy objective of South American integration, as it appears there is a lack of evidence to sustain the claim that Lula da Silva, Dilma Rousseff, and Michel Temer read and were directly influenced by the works of Travassos, Couto e Silva, Meira Mattos, or Martin (thereby shaping their consciousness horizon).^{xii} However, one can attest with certainty to the simultaneous existence of both phenomena; indeed, they are somehow correlated.^{xiii} Even if this research has been unable thus far to trace the causal link, the result remains unchanged. That means that the objective of South American integration (as a geoconjunctive continentalization maneuver) emerged as a central objective in Brazilian foreign policy (Ministério da Defesa,2012a:11). Therefore, the South American integration maneuver is, positively, the political substance of a continentalization project, prescription, or imperative.

There are, however, great differences between the ideas of the mentioned authors from the BSG – who defended Brazil’s territorial integration and national sovereignty – and the South American regional integration that has been pursued in recent decades. Regarding the latter, Brazil’s geopolitical agents worked hard to dissolve the country’s territorial stability⁴ and, moreover, transferred national responsibilities from national institutions to international ones.

Hence, if not through the influence of the BSG, how did the South American integration project emerge as a top priority in Brazilian foreign policy? It appears reasonable to argue that the answer lies with the Pátria Grande project.

Pátria Grande (“The Great Bolivarian Fatherland” or the “Extended Country”) denotes the project of creating a regionally unified South American bloc (Dellatorre,2018). It is “great space” thinking – inspired not only by nineteenth-century figures, such as Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín, but also the Inca Empire (Espinoza and Saavedra,2007) – which

inescapably aims to meld the South American states into a cohesive political union. Two particular aspects of the *Pátria Grande* project suggest that this is wholesome matter for geopolitical studies. The first aspect is geographical: a sense of space oriented around cultivating a great space. The second aspect concerns identity: namely, a progressive leftist culture rooted in South American international socialism – covered in more detail in the following sub-section.

Returning the analysis to the Brazilian geopolitical agents, Lula da Silva was both influenced by and a protagonist of the *Pátria Grande* project (Dellatorre,2018). Among many measures implemented by Lula da Silva were the creation of the São Paulo Forum in 1990, the creation of the UNILA (Federal University for Latin American Integration) in 2010, and the hundreds of political meetings and speeches accomplished under that objective – see his speech at the nineteenth meeting of the São Paulo Forum, calling for much deeper integration in South America (Puggina,2014). Dilma Rousseff was also a proponent of the *Pátria Grande* project. She attended the meeting of the foundation of CELAC in 2011, in which Hugo Chávez quoted Bolívar’s words that “Brazil is the greater guarantee” of the project, also expressing the intention of unifying the region for a “*Patria Grande de América Latina y El Caribe*” (Chávez,2013). Michel Temer admitted (at a UNASUL 2012 summit) to having been the author of the “single paragraph” in Article Number 4 of Brazil’s 1988 constitution. This paragraph establishes that “Brazil will pursue Latin American integration towards a Latin American community” (Constituição,1998). At the referred-to summit, Temer also added that the creation of a “Latin American nation” is the final goal of Brazil (RedeBrasil.Net,2018).

As mentioned, the South American regional integration maneuver – as a path to *Pátria Grande* – constitutes a milestone in Brazil’s geopolitical design. It is articulated in the programmatic constitution of the country and in other policy documents, such as the National Defense Policy and National Defense Strategy. The same milestone also appears in Brazil’s White Book of National Defense in the following terms: “The South American integration remains a strategic objective [sic] to Brazil’s foreign policy” (Ministério da Defesa,2012b:37). This evidence conflicts with claims by Malamud (2011:19) that regional integration was no longer the main goal of Brazil in 2011.

In summing up, the Brazilian geopolitical agents favored, at least until 2018, a geoconjunctive process of continentalization that undermined Brazil's territorial integrity and national sovereignty under the aegis of an internationalist culture. The latter issue is described in the following sub-section.

3-3. Considerations about the Coherence of the Geopolitical Agents' Discourse and an Investigation of their Network of Relations

Regarding political discourse, although socialist ideology is relevant as an umbrella term for describing the objectives and modalities of action in Brazilian politics, that ideology is not the central feature. Since any ideology is plastic and can be adapted, or radically changed, its cultural nature is the central aspect in the discourse of Brazilian geopolitical agents. In other words, radical socialism (or communism) as absorbent culture (Carvalho, 2003) existing in both (1) the political discourse, and (2) the network of political connections and their interests or objectives.

From both the form and outcomes of the discourse of Brazil's geopolitical agents, it can be asserted that (1) their political discourse has been remote from any form of state-sponsored nationalism (Morgado, 2016c). In fact, in 2017 I noted the existence of anti-national geopolitical continuity among the geopolitical agents, which did not change with the end of PT's administration (Morgado, 2017:248). The strong label of "anti-national politics" may be used if one takes into consideration the modalities of action connected to the South American integration maneuver, which have been directly in opposition to the elementary interests of the Brazilian people. In the same vein, anti-statist politics could also be observed, in the sense that the Brazil's geopolitical agents prioritized the same maneuver, thereby jeopardizing Brazil's national sovereignty. On the other hand, in 2018 I noted that the existence of any component of statist ideology in Brazil could only be considered if exclusively aimed at increasing the power of the state in internal affairs – certainly in terms of enlarging the state's capacity for control; consequently, making international engagement easier (Morgado, 2018;14). I will come back to this point in the next sub-section. However, at this point, further evidence should be provided from more recent years to solidify the previous research findings and reinforce the related claims.

First, the attraction (to say the least) to crime of some of the high officials of PT. The case of Haddad's devotion to the political relevance of the Lumpenproletariat in acquiring and maintaining political power is a clarion

example of this (Haddad,1998). This positioning, it can be argued, represents the root of the state's complicity in crime in Brazil. From this complicity emerged scandals of corruption, money embezzling and laundering, and other crimes that are specified below.

Second, PT has maintained direct relations with criminal organizations, such as the Red Command and the First Command of the Capital (Coronel,2014) (Azevedo,2017a) (Antagonista,2018).

Third, Haddad's aforementioned association of politics with crime has strengthened in the last three decades (2) a very solid socio-political network. The São Paulo Forum has been at the center of that network of relations and is moreover one of the most relevant constraints on Brazilian geopolitical agents' perceptions and capacities. Among the many other problems with the São Paulo Forum, the following can be pointed out: (i) protective relations of leftist political parties (including the PT) with drug cartels and criminal organizations; consequently, mixing politics with crime (Morgado,2018:19); the anti-democratic meddling of foreign parties and countries in one another's politics, consequently violating constitutions and national democratic orders; (iii) the obscure funding of the organization, leading to speculation about financing from drug-trafficking profits (vide Morgado 2017 for more empirical data).

The relations of PT with Brazilian universities (USP, for example) and São Paulo Forum cannot be forgotten either. The case of Emir Sader (identified by the late FARC commander Raul Reyes as an example (Maisonave, 2003)) – a former Head of Department of Political Science at Universidade de São Paulo and director of the leftist journal *America Libre* – and Gilberto Carvalho, also a member of the editorial board of *America Libre* – suggest that Brazilian universities may well be working as centers for gathering intelligence and serving leftist parties (and creating a body of militants too) – namely, the PT.

Digging more into the network of relations, José Dirceu comes into view. José Dirceu was trained by the Cuban intelligence services and was also a fundamentally important coordinator of the São Paulo Forum for a long period (Magalhães,2000) (Blogdelinks,2016). In connection, he was at the core of the Mensalão corruption scandal, for which he was put on trial, condemned, and arrested. Dirceu was released from prison in November 2019, after a controversial decision by the Brazilian Supreme Federal Court

(STF), and later stated that he would work to put the PT back in government. Jacques Wagner, a PT and São Paulo Forum high official (iG São Paulo,2020) (Câmara dos Deputados,2020), actively collaborated in PT's corruption scandals, and is currently under investigation for receiving a bribe of R\$ 82 million (Bonfim,2018). When Jacques Wagner assumed his seat at the PARLASUL (MERCOSUL's parliament) in April 2019, he stated that he was working to "...strengthen the integration among the Latin American countries" (Redação,2019). The late Marco Aurélio Garcia also helped to construct the São Paulo Forum (Pomar and Regalado,2013:158). Other high-level officials of the São Paulo Forum include Celso Amorim (Foro de São Paulo,2012); Waldir Pires, who is affiliated to the PT; Aldo Rebelo, who was affiliated to the Brazilian Communist Party (PCdB) until 2017; and Raul Jungman, who was affiliated to the Socialist People's Party (PPS) until 2018 – the preceding three individuals were also ministers of defense. All the agents mentioned in the former paragraph were or are affiliated to parties that participate in the São Paulo Forum (São Paulo Forum,2020).^{xv}

The Grupo de Puebla, created in July 2019, seems to be a parallel organization or an offshoot of the São Paulo Forum in the sense that it gathers progressive leftist political forces in support of the objective of South American integration. Among its Brazilian founding members are Luiz Lula da Silva, Dilma Rousseff, Fernando Haddad, Celso Amorim, Aloizio Mercadante (the chief executive of the organization), and Carol Proner (Grupo de Puebla,2019). Therefore, Lula da Silva and Celso Amorim work directly for both São Paulo Forum and Grupo de Puebla – constituting factual links between the two organizations.

As for the network of international organizations for South American "integration," apart from the Rio Pact (1947), the Organization of American States (1948), and the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA) (1960) (since 1980 the Latin American Integration Association (LAIA)), little effort was directed at pro-multilateral cooperation in South America until 1991, when MERCOSUL was created.⁵ Today, that organization constitutes one of the main engines for South American integration (Amorim,2010:227),^{xvii} together with the São Paulo Forum, created one year before MERCOSUL. The Union of South American Nations (UNASUL), created in 2008,^{xviii} and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean

States (CELAC), founded in 2010, are other international organizations that have also given momentum to the geoconjunctive maneuver under study.^{xix}

If South American regional integration is the goal at the core of the majority of these international organizations, and if they have turned the continentalization project into a political reality, it seems reasonable to state that their final objective is *Pátria Grande*. If materialized as a progressive leftist bloc, this involves building a Union of Socialist Republics of Latin America.

3-4. Exploration of the Intentions of the Geopolitical Agents by Identifying their Ambitions

From the phenomenological point of view, intentionality refers to “toward something.” The aforementioned pieces of evidence suggest that the intentions of Lula da Silva, Dilma Rousseff, and Michel Temer were, or are, oriented towards South American integration. In this context, favoring the internationalist-continental progressive left^{xx} (Morgado,2016c:20) – to the detriment of the interests of the Brazilian people in relation to national sovereignty, independence, and prosperity^{xxi} – may reasonably be attributed to those geopolitical agents (Morgado,2018), insofar as the final project of the *Pátria Grande* was factually a priority for them – as it was.

The ambition of seizing control over an entire sub-continent cannot start without concentrating power domestically (the statist aspect mentioned above). In Brazil, apart from what has been mentioned with regard to the network of political relations, the progressive left enjoys: (i) hegemony over the Catholic church, taking into consideration Liberation Theology, which can be traced to the Grupo de Puebla (DefesaNet,2019); and (ii) hegemony over the education system – the research presented here has already covered the topic of the infiltration and occupation of university chairs^{xxii} – to which should be added ideological monopoly, censorship, and the exclusion of anything that does not accord with the leftist canons of educational programs.^{xxiii} The outcomes for education have been extremely poor: 43% of Brazilians failed to reach the minimum standard in text interpretation, mathematics, and sciences (Pisa,2018) (Filho,2019). PT still controls large segments of the public bureaucracy (Almeida,2019) too.^{xxiv}

In resume, the progressive left has been influential in terms of religious structures, education, state bureaucracy, mass media (Carvalho,2004), and a large proportion of show business – i.e., has attained a state of Gramscian cultural hegemony (Bianchi,2007) (Carvalho,2014). It has obtained direct

control of the majority of the political class (through crimes, bribes, and trafficking in political influence, as described below); and it has had control over the democratic mechanisms of the political system through secret vote counting (Journal Nacional,2014) due to its control of the Electoral High Court (TSE) (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral,2014). Together with control of the STF and higher-level judicial system (Instituto Borborema,2017), it does not seem unreasonable to claim that it has penetrated segments of the Brazilian Armed Forces as well. To close the circle of concentration of power, the alliance of PT with wealthier socioeconomic classes also took place, as stated by the former Brazilian President (and political scientist) Fernando Henriques Cardoso (Moreira,2016). Members of the middle class seem to be the only actors largely untouched by this sham, and therefore remain the guarantors of democratic principles in an environment of corrupt institutions.

Moreover, the ambition of the *Pátria Grande* is associated with a compromise between a South American bloc and Chinese interests. This would reduce the residual US influence in the region. In Brazil, the former prospective settlement would include the use of 5G technology, the deepening of international trade, and “the China-Brazilian joint effort to develop remote sensing satellites” (EPRS,2017:47), among many other fields.

The USA has not taken much action to fight its prospective loss of influence in South American countries.^{xxv} However, even if the US has criticized the meddling of Russia and China in South America – as the former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson did – then the progressive left jump to defend the Russian-Chinese bloc – as a declaration by PT’s international affairs secretary published in the São Paulo Forum’s website shows^{xxvi} (Foro de São Paulo,2018). A paper by Ferreira and Costa Filho (2017) tested the argument of anti-Americanism in Lula da Silva’s foreign policy. Although they mentioned that Brazil-US relations did not radically change during Lula da Silva’s terms, the fact is that the Brazilian government evinced, during those times, a critical stance towards the USA. That stance was denounced, among other people, by the late Ambassador Roberto Abenadur (Apud Morgado,2017). Therefore, it becomes hard to accept Lessa’s narrative (2010) about the existence of a Brazilian-US “strategic partnership” during Lula da Silva’s administration.

To conclude the matter with China, the sympathy of PT and the São Paulo Forum for the Chinese Communist Party serves as confirmatory evidence. In addition, as regards opinions about the USA, few continue to disregard the claim that China is engaged in an anti-Western crusade.^{xxvii}

The research compels me to insist on the point that the aforementioned Brazilian geopolitical agents have had little or no ambition to pursue national interests – as understood in the basic sense of the people’s interests – as previously mentioned. Rezende et al. (2018) provided relevant data in relation to the assessment of the relative material potential of Brazil. They accurately argue that “transnational and organized crime groups” constitute a major threat to Brazil’s national security. Nevertheless, they fail to identify Lula da Silva’s connections to those criminal organizations via the São Paulo Forum. In diminishing and undermining the domestic foundation, how then may Brazil become a relevant player in IR? Additionally, the reasoning that led Bernal-Meza (2010:206) to affirm that Brazil’s Lula “re-take[s] realism as [a] foreign policy paradigm” is incomprehensible – outside of ideological sympathy. Lula da Silva and his administration seem to have had two main objectives: strengthening the PT, and strengthening the South American progressive left – as collected in the São Paulo Forum. The modalities of action have included weakening Brazil’s relative potential through corruption and embezzling money from the national treasury to distribute to allies, as described in the following sub-section.

3-5. The Insertion of the Geopolitical Agents’ Capacities into the Domestic Power Structure

As one can deduce from the arguments and evidence presented above, although not a domestic political structure, the São Paulo Forum affects the geopolitical agents’ capacities through culture, strategy, and ideology. The São Paulo Forum is considered a geopolitical continuity, while the association between the related political parties and crime (which has existed since the creation of the organization in 1990) can explain the homicide rate in Brazil – an average of 57,593 murders per year between 2003 and 2018 (Homicide Monitor, 2018). Not only that, but also targeted killings, as of the late Celso Daniel.^{xxviii} in attempting to link economic development with Lula da Silva’s discourse on “Humanism,” human rights, and human security, Rizzi and Antunes (2017) did not manage to contrast that discourse with the reality of the average number of intentional

homicides just mentioned, which Lula da Silva and his successors did not work to reduce, it seems. Nor did Amorim manage to make that contrast (2010:238-239).^{xxix} Therefore, it is considered extraordinary how homogenous some academic literature has been in praising Lula da Silva's foreign policy when one takes into consideration the evidence concerning how deeply his party has shattered Brazil's potential, namely through connections to criminal organizations – one of the most relevant outcomes of which is the permanently elevated homicide rate since 2003. Furthermore, Lula da Silva can also be held responsible for the tragic situation in Venezuela, bearing in mind that the Venezuelan dictatorship was built with his help through the São Paulo Forum (Vide Morgado,2017:263 for evidence).

Economic problems exist alongside (and are tied up with) the mentioned domestic security problems. With Mensalão, a vote-buying corruption scandal, the PT stole at least R\$ 101 million (Globo,2012). With Petrolão, a money laundering and bribery scheme operating between companies and the government, the PT stole R\$ 42.8 billion (G1,2015). As further corruption-related money, the PT distributed R\$ 8 trillion among its favorite companies (Imprensa Viva,2017), while Brazil's GDP was R\$ 6.6 trillion in 2017 (IBGE,2017). The list is not yet complete. In 2014, the PT provided Bolivia's Evo Morales with almost half a billion USD through Petrobras, which was used in his election campaign (Mazzini,2014). The PT, through the Brazilian State Development Bank (BNDES), also provided Angola's and Cuba's dictatorships with US\$ 875 million (Azevedo,2017b). Some literature designated this latter corruption as "investments in infrastructures" [*sic*] (Saraiva and Gomes,2016:95), while others criticized it (Almeida 2018). The fact is that the economy of Brazil was left in a very bad shape in 2018 and public debt reached 78.3% of GDP (BIT,2018:19).

Thus, whereas solidarity within the São Paulo Forum permitted a political alliance between the leftist political parties, and links to criminal organizations allowed the PT to enjoy their backing and support, the Mensalão corruption scandal allowed PT to buy the collaboration of the rest of the Brazilian political class. As Lula da Silva, Rousseff, and Temer appointed eight (out of eleven) STF judges, the cooperation of the high-level judicial sphere was also guaranteed.⁶ The twisting of domestic power structures could thus have taken place to fulfil the objective of the sub-

continental integration project (geopolitical design) and its modalities of action based on international power networks (geopolitical continuity). Rousseff, but especially Lula da Silva, enjoyed more than the necessary freedom (from the domestic power structure) to act. Money from corruption bought that freedom. In addition, the network of political relations, explained in 2.2., substantially enlarged the geopolitical agents' capacities.

3-6. Discussion of the literature and Alternative Explanations

Both the empirical facts of (a) the diminishment of Brazil's relative material potential – what Malamud (2017:164) refers to as the exhaustion of “domestic resources” – and (b) the failure to fortify and increase Brazil's position in the international system are explained, in this paper, as outputs of the Brazilian geopolitical agents' anti-national acts and choices. Accordingly, the primacy of a key domestic factor must be noted, in the line with Vigevani and Ramanzini Júnior's claims (2011). In these terms, Zahluth Bastos and Hiratuka's (2020) dependence-theory-based hypothesis of a “more hostile context” for Brazil during Rousseff's term is not considered convincing, and nor do I understand Brazil's economic recession and corruption to be a result of a “systemic variable,” as Giaccaglia affirmed (2018).

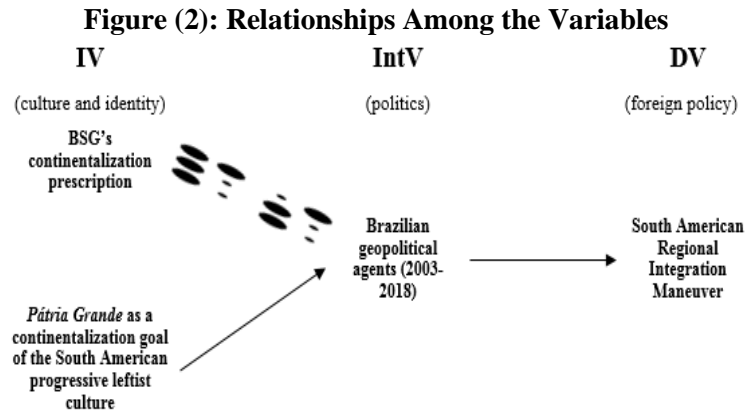
Bernal-Meza (2020) asserted that the process of Brazil's decline began during Rousseff's first term and continued during Temer's administration. This corresponds to the empirical decline of economic and social parameters. Hence, Milani and Nery (2019) are mistaken when they claim that “...Brazil's diplomatic dynamism and the sketch of a grand strategy were left behind...” and that, furthermore, the political, economic, and social crisis came in the aftermath of President Rousseff's impeachment.

In line with these statements, it seems fair to agree with Reis da Silva's and Pérez's argument (2019) that the decline of Brazilian foreign policy was not only due to the performance of the “presidential administrations but was also affected by domestic variables, international events, and economic factors.” My explanation of the puzzle seems to be more precise – corruption and the embezzlement of money by the PT's (geo)political agents for the purpose of strengthening the internationalist progressive left and aspects of anti-national behavior undermined the state's potential, and therefore impacted Brazil's international role.

Hence, deep divergence arose between Brazil's geopolitical agents (2003-2018) and the Brazilian people, which claim can be backed up by the fact of the permanent demonstrations of the Brazilian people against the political class since 2013.

In these circumstances, I cannot but diverge from Amorim, who announced that the PT made Brazil more "respected" and admired (2010:239): nothing but the contrary. Marcondes and Mawdsley (2017) quote the late Marco Aurelio Garcia, who "branded the Temer-Serra foreign policy [...] 'mediocre and submissive' and criticized the suggestion that the Brazilian diplomatic presence in Africa and the Caribbean might be reduced." Actually, that reduction was an unavoidable consequence following the corrosion of Brazil's relative potential – once again, caused by the PT officials' anti-national choices.

Malamud (2011) inquired why Brazil has not managed to create an "effective regional leadership" so far. I insist here that the priority of the geopolitical agents has not been to build up for Brazil a world or regional status, but to dissolve the country in the region. This paper has provided sufficient empirical data to challenge the argument that, during the PT administration, Brazil's sovereignty was intended to be preserved. Two of the crucial objectives of Brazil in the political discourse – "sovereignty" and "regional integration" (as mentioned by Martins and Nunes (2017)) – are essentially incompatible – as Almeida also observed (2004:2010). This claim contests, therefore, a reading of Brazil's external behavior in the last decades as conforming to a predominance of realist systemic imperatives (Neto and Malamud,2015), identifying, at the same time, what seem to be the real causes of the problems and effects (not "causes") described by Cervo and Lessa (2014:149). Finally, this paper concurs with Novichkova's (2018a; 2018b) identical conclusion concerning the results of Brazil's geopolitical design of recent decades: "in political terms, [the] South American integration did not help to improve Brazil's power status, neither in the region, nor in the world" (Novichkova,2018b:11).



4. Conclusion

With this paper I aimed to identify and explain the possible causes of the decline of Brazil's relative potential and the country's failure to project power in the international arena. The main argument, which was put to the test, was that the most probable cause of the related problems was the anti-national choices of the Brazilian geopolitical agents, i.e., the deviation of the performance of geopolitical agents from Brazil's elementary national interests (security; preservation of the public treasury; economic growth; protection of the education system, etc.). In one sentence, an élite existing above and acting against the interests of the nation.

Furthermore, Brazil's geopolitical agents formulated and have been executing an anti-national and anti-statist geopolitical design – the South American regional integration maneuver, which has been disarticulating Brazil's national sovereignty. This was also traced as both a cause of the problem and a foreign policy outcome.

The paper has tried to make the point that such causes can explain the path of Brazil – from having emerging power status to economic, social, and political unrest, in addition to limited power projection in relation to foreign affairs.

The research findings also show that the strategic culture of BSG's continentalization do not seem to have directly *caused* the prioritization of Brazil's engagement in the South American integration maneuver. This is due to the lack of evidence of the existence of that strategic culture in the consciousness horizon of the geopolitical agents. On the other hand, the South American leftist movement is embedded in the continentalization

turn. Therefore, the latter can be pointed out as the alternative causal force of the South American integration maneuver, as Brazil's foreign policy objective. In this way, the *Pátria Grande*, as a continentalization-related goal of South American progressive leftist culture – of which São Paulo Forum is the highest political organization and represents the institutionalization of the political discourse in a net of political relations – has shaped Brazilian foreign policy, in the sense that South American integration has become top priority in Brazilian geopolitical design. This place has been granted through the perception of space (“great space” and “*Pátria Grande*”), cultural boundaries and core values (“progressive left”), and the intentions and ambitions (“concentration of power”) of the geopolitical agents. These factors constitute, consequently, pivotal elements that delimit the “consciousness horizon” of the geopolitical agents. A domestic power structure twisted and manipulated with embezzled money generated through corruption and the abuse of power completes the explanation.

This environment is hardly supportive of the interests of the Brazilian people in terms of national sovereignty and prosperity. Therefore, the behavior of the Brazilian geopolitical agents is labeled “anti-national.” In fact, the mentioned project of the concentration of power – which is perhaps the aspect of the described apparatus that is more visible to the people – has been rejected by massive public demonstrations by the Brazilian people since 2013. It seems fairly justifiable to assert that citizens have perceived that their interests have not been served over recent decades.

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NOTES

i. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the public lecture “Geography and Politics in South America in the First Decades of the 21st Century” at ELTE University, Budapest, 12 November 2019. I would like to thank the audience for their questions and comments, which helped me to improve the work to this final version. A former version of this abstract was also accepted for the ISA 2020 Annual Convention, Honolulu, which was cancelled due to the COVID-19’s restrictions. The author may be reached at nuno.morgado@uni-corvinus.hu A.M.D.G.

ii. Vide these literature pieces for a comprehensive analysis of Brazil’s state potential. In addition, Milani et al. (2017) also admitted that, between 2003 and 2014, “...all, or almost all, the conditions for success [of Brazil] were present.”

iii. The geopolitical agents or the “foreign policy executive” are “...the top officials and central institutions of government charged with external defense and the conduct of diplomacy” (Taliaferro, 2006:470).

iv. Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016, p.124) called them the FDIB – foreign, defense, intelligence bureaucracy.

v. These geopolitical studies’ findings come from dialectic inquiry and comparison between the geohistorical approach that examines former policies on one hand, and the study of geopolitical design, which reflects upon present policies and future scenarios on the other, using the method of controlled comparison to refine conclusions.

vi. Bessa argued that national objectives are always an ultimate prisoner of the political class [geopolitical agents] (Bessa, 2012:99-100). Vide also Thual (1996:20).

vii. Wohlforth gave this definition of state power, but I consider it more appropriate for state potential.

viii. In other words, potential should be distinguished from power. The latter is understood as “...the relative ability of the state to extract and mobilize resources from domestic society...” (Lobell and et al, 2009:38). Consequently, one apprehends power as a concrete capacity that produces effects, a concept dependent on potential. It follows logically that power is inferior to potential.

ix. I have already worked with the concept of “geoconjunctive maneuver” as applied to the South American regional integration maneuver as the priority for Brazilian foreign policy (Morgado, 2018). In the same line, when the paper mentions “the geoconjunctive maneuver” it refers to the South American regional integration maneuver.

x. According to Zhebit (2019), the traditional cores of Brazilian foreign policy are “international autonomy, multilateralism, South-South engagement and environmental activism.” Zhebit did not, therefore, mention South American integration and BRICS, which according to Brazil’s policy documents are two of the most important landmarks in Brazilian foreign policy.

xi. Some notorious examples are (i) Travassos and his plans for Brazil’s continental projection (1935); (ii) “geopolítica de colaboração continental” (Couto e Silva, 1980:137-138); (iii) “áreas interiores de intercâmbio internacional” que não dependam de “conexões marítimas” (Meira Mattos 1980, p.151), “será portanto, nas forças emanantes da continentalidade que teremos que buscar, essencialmente, as soluções para esta pan-região” (Meira Mattos, 1980:161), and “regional integration” (Meira Mattos, 1980:120).

xii. In this way, one cannot trace a direct influence, but a diffuse cultural influence (Morgado 2016c, p.19).

xiii. Retrieving my past words sheds light on the matter (2016b:93): “The hypothesis that could be formulated and sustained is, therefore, that the political objective of South American integration, crystallized in Foro de São Paulo under a socialist ideological command, could be perceived as a political consequence of the continentalization applied geopolitics’ approach [sic].” However, not through a straightforward causal link between the BSG and Brazil’s selected geopolitical agents.

xiv. Namely, through the demarcation of territorial reserves. More detailed information in another of my papers (Morgado, 2018:12-13).

xv. Almeida (2010) (2018:9) acknowledged the influence of the Cuban intelligence service on PT and also the fact that the São Paulo Forum is “a Cuban-sponsored coordinating mechanism for all leftist parties” in South America, with links to criminal organizations (2010).

xvi. MERCOSUL was created on the basis of the Integration, Cooperation, and Development Treaty (1988) signed between Brazil and Argentina.

xvii. Whereas some authors consider that MERCOSUL has not advanced the South American integration project enough (Barbosa, 2010), others have pointed out that Lula da Silva “Bolivarianized” MERCOSUL (Almeida, 2018:33), consequently debauching its original goals.

xviii. As Fuccille et al. (2017) asserted, Brazil had a central role in the creation of UNASUL.

xix. It must be emphasized that the current Brazilian President, Jair Bolsonaro, withdrew the country from CELAC and UNASUL in 2019, creating a (limited) standby in the maneuver.

xx. For unpacking sources, vide Morgado 2016c, 20. The ambition of the Pátria Grande project involves many other agents. As also pointed out in 2016, Jorge Bergoglio favors a “permanent continental mission,” “a united regional bloc,” or “a great homeland” (the Pátria Grande) in Latin America (San Martín, 2016). While visiting Panama in January 2019, Bergoglio repeated his ambitions of seeing a unified Latin America (“Great Homeland”) by quoting Simón Bolívar (La Prensa, 2019).

xxi. Therefore, in contrast to Cunha Leite (2016:135), Brazil’s national interests – in the sense of real people’s interests – do not seem to be diffuse.

xxii. Further information can be added. The progressive left – PCB (e.g. João Quartim de Moraes), PT (e.g. Marilena Chauí, Emir Sader, André Singer, Marco Aurélio Garcia) and PSOL (e.g. Vladimir Safatle) among many others parties and agents – has a solid hegemony over the vast majority of the universities in Brazil.

xxiii. For evidence to back this statement vide, for example, the testimony of Diniz Filho, Professor of Geography at Universidade Federal do Paraná (2017) and the investigative documentary by Brasil Paralelo (2020).

xxiv. Vide a list of examples in Morgado (2016c:18).

xxv. UNASUL already includes a South American Defense Council, which was predictively created to challenge the Rio Pact.

xxvi. The PT, a party of intense “international activism” – as Cruz and Stuart declared (2010:78).

xxvii. There is much evidence to sustain this argument – namely, Document Number Nine or the “Briefing on the Current Situation in the Ideological Realm” (Drezner, 2013).

xxviii. Gilberto Carvalho, already mentioned as a link between the PT and FARC, was accused of muddling the investigation into who ordered the assassination of Mayor Celso Daniel (Jayme, 2005).

xxix. The fact that Amorim refused in an interview to label Maduro’s regime a dictatorship (Militão 2018) helps with understanding why Amorim’s conception of human rights might be thought peculiar.

xxx. The STF is an organ that has violated the constitutional separation of powers through legislative activity. Its resolution of November 2019, designated with the intention of releasing Lula da Silva and his companions from prison, is an advanced case of the mixing of powers (Benites, 2019).