

Brazil's foreign policy and the 'graduation dilemma'

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The word 'graduation' has been used in a variety of ways. In this article, while acknowledging the existence of other meanings of the term in International Relations and the social sciences, we take the position that states dealing with the 'graduation dilemma' confront different and even contradictory expectations from international and domestic audiences. State elites and leaderships may therefore send various signals to internal and external publics, and the process of sending and interpreting these signals is a complex two-level game, prone to apparently paradoxical behaviour. The framework we set out in this article focuses on second-tier states that are non-nuclear powers, such as Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea and Turkey. In this article, we address the Brazilian case only.

In their respective foreign policy trajectories, these states face a graduation dilemma whenever their key decision-makers have the opportunity to choose and the intention of choosing between different international strategies: between a more autonomous type of development or a more dependent one; in security terms, between bandwagoning and balancing; when building a multilateral policy, between traditional alliances and innovative, flexible coalitions; in geopolitical terms and in the field of development cooperation, between an emphasis on North–South or an emphasis on South–South relations. Naturally, these ideal binaries offer several other options which decision-makers may perceive and select, given the political grey areas between the extremes of such dichotomies.

No less significant is the non-material element of a graduation dilemma, whether symbolic or interpretative, and how it feeds into decision-making. How decision-makers choose and construct different international scenarios in their own perceptions (e.g. one under western hegemony, or a more multipolar one), and how they highlight a country's national assets in order to open negotiations with other powers, will depend upon their own cognitive skills and ideological background. To investigate the graduation dilemma in foreign policy, we need to incorporate variables related to perceptions, interpretations, and the political choices made by the members of a country's elite. These variables are at play in any policy-making process, whether or not a country faces a graduation dilemma; however, in the case of our framework, they play a particularly relevant role related to self-perception and identity-building issues in a state policy area (foreign

policy) whose agendas cut across many other sectors. The more autonomous the interpretative frame, the higher the risks of confrontation with status quo powers and conservative domestic audiences. Therefore, we build the concept of graduation dilemma around three main components that key decision-makers need to face: (1) the scope of their international ambition, the country's material capabilities and the systemic permissiveness; (2) the possible contradictions related to role expectations from international and domestic audiences; and (3) the uncertainty associated with unanticipated results and third countries' perceptions of foreign policy decisions.

With this conceptual framework in mind, this article analyses how Brazil's foreign policy under the Workers' Party (PT) during the Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff governments re-enacted some longstanding dualities in the country's international agenda: monetarism vs structuralism, Americanism vs globalism, acquiescence vs autonomy. Each of these dichotomies reflects some fundamental divergences in the general orientation of Brazilian foreign policy since the nineteenth century. On the one side are the liberals and those inclined towards a close relationship with the United States (monetarists and cosmopolitans); on the other side are the developmentalists, nationalists and Third Worldists, strategically orientated towards the South and more favourable to the diversification of Brazil's foreign affairs (structuralists, globalists and autonomists). The analytical framework that we propose is a conceptual refinement that attempts to go beyond these binaries. Based on the assumption that Brazil's foreign policy changes according to the incumbent government (in other words, that foreign policy is also a public policy), we examine the hypothesis that there is no consensus within the Brazilian elite about the country's pattern of international relations. As we shall explain in a later section, this is particularly true in periods when the government in power has a straightforward ambition for graduation, as was the case during the presidential mandates of both Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff. The article explores three main themes: (1) the limited ability of the systemic change and power transition literature to explain the ambitions and actions of second-tier non-nuclear states in respect of redefining their international positions; (2) the concept of graduation in our analytical framework; and (3) Brazil's graduation dilemma.

Systemic change, power transition literature and graduation

This section is devoted to a brief critical discussion of systemic change and power transition theories, and the inadequacy of both for understanding the role of second-tier countries in peaceful change of the international order. The former theory takes a systemic perspective in the analysis of international change.¹ Its adherents argue that the structural conditions for a transformation of the international order can appear in two types of situation: (1) owing to the uneven pace

¹ See e.g. Robert Gilpin, *War and change in world politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); George Modelsky and William R. Thompson, 'Long cycles and global war', in Manus I. Midlarsky, ed., *Handbook of war studies* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 23–54.

of development of nation-states, the hegemonic power and defender of the status quo eventually experiences a relative decline, not least because of overstretch, and the challenging state overtakes the dominant one in terms of its relative capabilities; (2) the dominant state and defender of the status quo begins to decline, but the rules and institutions it has created remain in place, thus setting up a classic situation of mismatch between power and order, or between power and rules.

What are the limits of this type of theory in understanding the processes of transition in the present? First, it does not account for the peaceful transition processes that tend to prevail today, in so far as systemic change theory predicts a hegemonic war in which the challenger replaces the former hegemonic power in a competitive course of action that is never fully completed. As it is presented in such theories, this competitive course of action is a never-ending cycle which always forecast the existence of a hegemon and a challenger in competition for power and hegemony. In fact, post-Cold War power transition processes have been substantially influenced by market dynamics and the interests of large corporations (particularly those of the finance sector). The unprecedented advance of contemporary capitalism's financial dimension offers countless possibilities for profit to corporations, without the need for resort to war among the main actors of the interstate system to serve as a historical landmark of hegemonic power transition. This is not to say that asymmetric conflicts are not relevant in respect of technological innovation in the defence sector and, as a result, of increased industrial production and economic competitiveness. The major powers' military budgets and weapons exports continue to grow, the exported arms being directed primarily to peripheral or semi-peripheral countries. Markets are constitutive of international power: in other words, today economics is high politics, and war matters a lot less to corporate interests than it did in the 1960s or 1970s. The question thus arises: how can we best understand power transition in this overlap between the political and the economic?

Second, and of greater importance to our framework, the game envisaged in these structural theories of systemic change includes only the international system's two most powerful actors: the dominant power and its challenger. Their major contribution is to analyse the management of a strategic competitor seeking international primacy. Through processes of bandwagoning and balancing during the competition between the status quo power and the challenger, other countries are going to swell the ranks of the two opposing sides. This assumption posits an international system with very simplified dynamics, whose rules are uniform among all participants, in a zero-sum competition that always ends in a bipolar configuration. The process takes a linear route from a multipolar world to bipolarity, then to war and, finally, to the establishment of a new unipolar balance. This game presumes that all actors are unitary and act according to their relative power capabilities, and to the strategic choices they make in response to their opponents.² The model also ignores internal politics, domestic societies, and

² The classic critique of the unitary actor model is Graham Allison, *Essence of decision: explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).

the economic power system of transnational companies in the competition for systemic supremacy. It is precisely at this point that our proposed framework aims to fill the gap regarding both the behaviour of those countries that do not seek international primacy (despite their desire for a change in their position within the international hierarchy) and the role of internal politics in explaining their foreign policy strategies. We shall consider foreign policy to be the result of a choice between different, and often conflicting, ways of pursuing distinct interests.

Power transition theory, on the other hand, sets out to increase the challenger's agency. In this way, in addition to power parity between the dominant state and its challenger, its proponents have introduced the challenger's degree of satisfaction with the status quo. If the challenger is dissatisfied with the international status quo, it will require changes that will be resisted by the dominant state. Only when the dissatisfied challenger manages to attain power parity will war be likely.³ Recent applications of the power transition theory have concluded that this last condition did not come about during the Cold War period; and that China today, as a challenger, has not reached parity with the United States, so that its intentions remain unknown to the supporters of this theory.⁴

Although this slightly more critical theory does introduce the agency dimension, the actors in the model remain unitary and the competition involves only two agents: the dominant and the challenger. Both systemic change and power transition theories apply only to states competing for international primacy. Therefore, they are inadequate in analysing situations of diffusion of power towards so-called challengers—such as the one we have been witnessing since the end of the Cold War. The thawing of the system brings with it greater fluidity, generating concepts such as incomplete multipolarity, polycentric globalization and flexible coalitions. It is within this context that the emerging powers, or semi-peripheral states, have made their appearance and been viewed—rather hastily—as the new challengers to the West and the status quo.

Nevertheless, power transition theories are of limited use when it comes to analysing the behaviour of states that do not have the same kind of systemic impact as major powers do. Second-tier countries without nuclear weapons are not seeking international primacy, but they have an ambition to rise in, and redefine, international hierarchies. Although foreign policy decisions might not be sufficient to achieve this objective, they are certainly a very important component of such a country's strategy. The goal of this article is not to propose an alternative model for power transition or systemic change; rather, it aims to propose a foreign policy analytical tool for second-tier non-nuclear states, that is, countries with minor systemic impact but aspiring to change their international status and ranking. Therefore, the concept of graduation, which is discussed below, may

³ A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The war ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Jacek Kugler and A. F. K. Organski, 'The power transition: a retrospective and prospective evaluation', in Midlarsky, ed., *Handbook of war studies*, pp. 171–94.

⁴ Douglas Lemke, 'The continuation of history: power transition theory and the end of the Cold War', *Journal of Peace Research* 34: 1, 1997, pp. 23–36; Steve Chan, 'Is there a power transition between the US and China? The different faces of national power', *Asian Survey* 45: 5, 2005, pp. 687–701.

be more fruitful in explaining the foreign policy strategies of countries that (1) lie outside the core of major powers and their allies in the West; (2) do not have nuclear weapons; and (3) have differentiated themselves from other developing countries in terms of their material capabilities and relative international recognition.

Graduation: unpacking the concept

In development literature, graduation refers to change in a country's economic status and therefore in its possibilities of benefiting from advantageous packages in trade, aid and development funding mechanisms. In this case, graduation is a step forward, a result defined by international organizations or foreign agencies of the developed world, after which a country's national government can no longer have access to benefits such as trade facilitation schemes, financial assistance or reduced interest rates. Clearly, an exogenous 'other' is the agent responsible for defining if and when a country has undergone graduation. Once graduation has taken place, the developing country loses rights and benefits. This is why developing countries have often been fearful of, and seek to avoid, the graduation label.

Increasingly, the idea of reciprocity is seen in conjunction with the concept of graduation in tariff negotiations and trade concessions.⁵ The Uruguay Round of trade negotiations cautioned that the special treatment accorded to developing countries was under threat from the pressure to 'graduate' the richer ones, thus reducing their scope to enjoy non-reciprocal trade benefits.⁶ Competitive countries may be deemed to have undergone graduation: the United States General System of Preferences mandates the graduation of those countries that have reached a certain level of development, based on the premise that they no longer need preferential treatment to compete in developed markets. The United States measures a country's level of development primarily by reference to World Bank indicators, although it may also consider certain discretionary factors.⁷

In macroeconomics and global finance, graduation is arguably one of the most important issues, but there has been remarkably little theoretical or empirical investigation of the subject. This is mainly because graduation has been conceived as a result, and not as a process. The large body of literature on sovereign lending and default, for example, while producing many important insights into the fundamental distinction between willingness and ability to pay, basically treats a country's developmental and political characteristics as parametric. There is

⁵ Brian Bridges, 'East Asia in transition: South Korea in the limelight', *International Affairs* 64: 3, 1988, pp. 381–92; Bernard D'Mello, 'Development round, neo-liberal development', *Economic and Political Weekly* 40: 49, 2005, pp. 5146–49; Barry K. Gills, 'Economic liberalisation and reform in South Korea in the 1990s: a "coming of age" or a case of "graduation blues"?'?, *Third World Quarterly* 17: 4, 1996, pp. 667–88.

⁶ William Brown, 'Restructuring North–South relations: ACP–EU development co-operation in a liberal international order', *Review of African Political Economy* 27: 85, 2000, pp. 367–83.

⁷ Maria Regina Soares de Lima, *The political economy of Brazilian foreign policy: nuclear energy, trade and Itaipu* (Brasília: Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão [FUNAG], 2013); Amy M. Mason, 'The degeneralization of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP): questioning the legitimacy of the US GSP', *Duke Law Journal* 54: 2, 2004, pp. 513–47.

very little that explains the political, social, economic and financial dynamics that ultimately render a country less prone to certain types of crises.⁸ In all these domains, the implication seems to be that the very concepts of North/core and South/periphery can be dismissed—that it is possible by means of statistical permutations to dispel the world's disparities, asymmetries and hierarchies. A concept like 'graduation' has been used to blur not only the fundamental divide between wealth and poverty, but also the cleavage between rule-makers and rule-takers.⁹

In all these different framings of graduation there is a sense of purpose and direction to human progress, and an idea of expansion, improvement and development which is associated with an individual agent, be it a human being, a local community, a region or a nation-state. But, whether speaking of individuals or countries, oversimplification should be avoided; and, in the case of states, it is important to remember that the adoption of a development strategy and the making of foreign policy depend on both systemic permissiveness and domestic politics. To date, when using the concept of graduation, many social scientists adopt a misleading linear conception of history, as though once a country has graduated it is at no risk of losing its economic capacity and power projection resources again.

In this section, we develop our definition of graduation and point to its advantages in relation to the analyses proposed in the systemic change and power transition literature, with their limited ability to explain the foreign policy strategies of second-tier countries that wish to raise their international status and ranking. We then present an analytical framework of states' patterns of behaviour in the process of graduation, as well as four ideal-types of corresponding foreign policy strategies. Finally, we offer a concise definition of the graduation dilemma.

How should we define graduation in order to distinguish it from the term as defined in the development literature (i.e. graduation as a result) and from the concepts of rising state or emerging power currently in use in International Relations (which imply an upward and linear trajectory)? In our framework, graduation is not a result, but the historical process of change in international hierarchy, scale and status in three socio-political spaces: (1) in the power core of global institutions (going from being a rule-taker to being a rule-maker; occupying a veto position in international institutions); (2) in the international political economy (the country's weight in international trade; the regional and global importance of its GDP; its strategic economic assets); and (3) in socialization among states, as the country's graduated status is recognized by the dominant powers and by its peers. Our concept of graduation presumes a gradual process, a non-linear course of indeterminate speed and direction—a country may remain stationary at a certain level or even go backwards.

The analytical reach of the concept of graduation which we propose here, therefore, is broader than the concepts of emerging power and rising state, since

⁸ Rong Qian, Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff, 'On graduation from default, inflation, and banking crises: elusive or illusion?', *NBER Macroeconomics Annual* 25: 1, 2011, pp. 1–36.

⁹ Shridath S. Ramphal, 'South–South: parameters and pre-conditions', *Third World Quarterly* 4: 3, 1982, pp. 460–66.

these assume the existence of two conditions only: emerging/rising and fading/declining. Methodologically, our analytical framework builds on the following assumptions: (1) it applies to semi-peripheral countries enjoying relative weight and relevance in the international political economy, having differentiated themselves in relation to other developing countries; (2) it does not apply to nuclear weapon states, whether they are parties to the non-proliferation regime (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States) or not (India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan);¹⁰ (3) graduation implies an ambition to move upwards in international hierarchy, but also a political willingness to change global governance rules without making use of military power and without being an anti-systemic power.

Figure 1: Expected patterns of state behaviour

		Graduation	Non-graduation
Categories	Ambition	Prominence	Followership
Dimensions	Role	Rule-maker	Rule-taker
Southern perspective on North–South relations	Geopolitical vision	Short-term imperative	
Relationship with the region	Integration	Interaction	

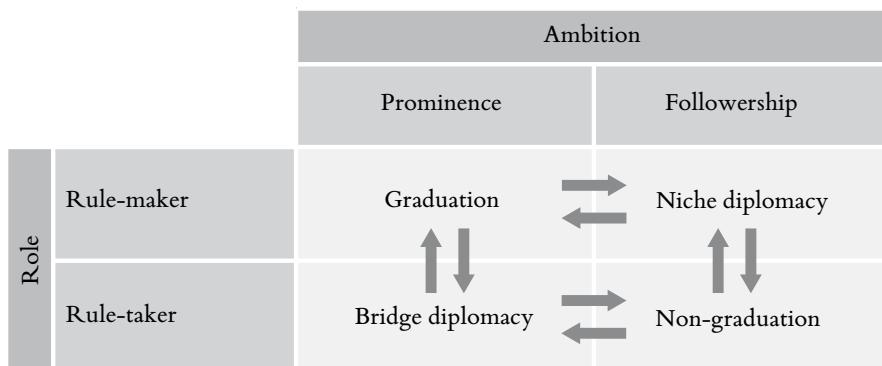
Figure 1 opposes graduation to non-graduation, and outlines expected patterns of state behaviour in respect of selected categories and dimensions. The two main categories that we have used are ambition and role. Ambition refers to the political project that a state's elite and key decision-makers may craft and implement, in terms of either global prominence or followership. Role emphasizes international rule production, and deals with functions performed by a state either as rule-maker or as rule-taker. Dimensions are presented in connection with global and regional patterns of state behaviour. As far as North–South relations are concerned, graduation is associated with a geopolitical vision of the South that emphasizes a long-term 'grand strategy',¹¹ whereas non-graduation is associated with a world vision that is rooted exclusively in short-term imperatives, and in which foreign policy tends to be intertwined with investment and trade interests. As for the regional dimension of a state's behaviour, graduation supposes close

¹⁰ We assume nuclear weapons to have dissuasive effects that give their holders a veto power in international negotiations. Non-nuclear states have to rely on pacific means to fulfil their international ambitions.

¹¹ Celso Amorim, formerly minister of foreign affairs (under Lula) and defence (under Dilma), proposed a definition of Brazil's grand strategy in his book *A grande estratégia do Brasil* (Brasília and São Paulo: FUNAG/São Paulo State University, 2016). See also Celso Amorim, *Acting globally: memoirs of Brazil's assertive foreign policy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

and deep links in terms of regional integration in all areas (e.g. social, educational, infrastructure, policy-making, defence), and not just loose regional forms of interaction (e.g. policy dialogues, trade exchanges). In a nutshell, graduation implies an ambition for international prominence, a role as rule-maker, a geopolitical vision and a commitment to regional integration. Brazil, Turkey, South Africa and, to a lesser extent, Mexico and Saudi Arabia are the main candidate states for graduated status.

Figure 2: Ideal-types of foreign policy strategies



The relationship between ambition and role yields four ideal-types of foreign policy strategy (figure 2). Horizontal and vertical movement from one strategy to another is possible, but only a state that is a rule-maker and whose ambition is prominence can be a candidate for graduated status. Prominence combined with a rule-taker role results in ‘bridge diplomacy’ between countries of the North and South, or between developing countries possessing very unequal material power. A state that practises bridge diplomacy fosters conflict mediation and cooperation on several international development and security agenda issues, such as multi-lateral trade negotiations, climate change, human rights, humanitarian aid and cooperation. The cases of Brazil,¹² South Africa¹³ or Turkey¹⁴ may illustrate this ideal type. As Nelson Mandela once said:

If there is to be global harmony, the international community will have to discover mechanisms to bridge the divide between its rich and its poor. South Africa can play an important role in this regard because it is situated at a particular confluence of world affairs.¹⁵

¹² Chris Alden and Marco A. Vieira, ‘The new diplomacy of the South: South Africa, Brazil, India and trilateralism’, *Third World Quarterly* 26: 7, 2005, pp. 1077–95.

¹³ Janis van der Westhuizen, ‘South Africa’s emergence as a middle power’, *Third World Quarterly* 19: 3, 1998, pp. 435–55.

¹⁴ Malik Mufti, ‘Daring and caution in Turkish foreign policy’, *Middle East Journal* 52: 1, 1998, pp. 32–50.

¹⁵ Nelson Mandela, ‘South Africa’s future foreign policy’, *Foreign Affairs* 72: 5, 1993, p. 89.

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A state that is a rule-maker and a follower develops niche diplomacy¹⁶ tools (as in the cases of Norway¹⁷ or Canada¹⁸). Choosing diplomatic niches implies concentrating on foreign policy arenas where the country has greater comparative advantage in terms of resources, expertise and experience. However, niche diplomacy never contradicts current hegemonic visions of the world order, rooted in the western values of liberal democracy and free markets. Nigeria's regional peace-keeping, Brazil's leadership in UN peacekeeping in Haiti through MINUSTAH and South Africa's conflict-mediation diplomacy illustrate this position. It has been argued that while

such orientation on a few niche messages and values enables small states to capture attention, it also has to do with the more general foreign policy tendency of small and medium-sized states to concentrate their scarce resources on a few niche areas which provide them with comparative advantages in international affairs.¹⁹

In sum, the main contribution of the framework that we have sketched in figure 2 is to move beyond the traditional dichotomy between autonomy and acquiescence,²⁰ including among the ideal-types of foreign policy strategy not only graduation and non-graduation, but also niche diplomacy and bridge diplomacy.

Figure 3: Ideal-types of regional strategies

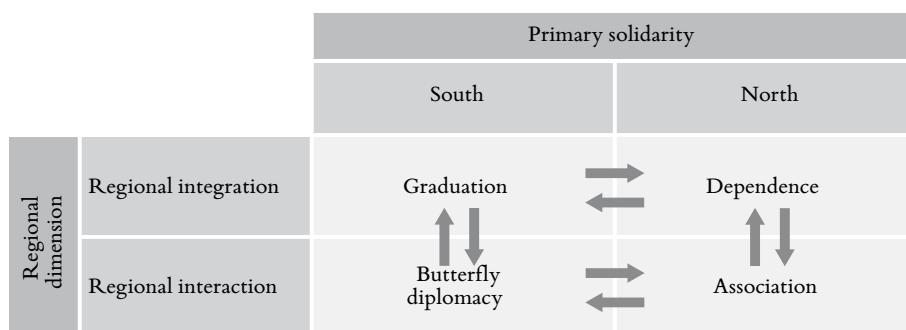


Figure 3 encapsulates how the regional dimension relates to a diplomacy displaying primary solidarity with either the geopolitical North (the core

¹⁶ Andrew F. Cooper, ed., *Niche diplomacy: middle powers after the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997).

¹⁷ Jozef Bátora, *Public diplomacy in small and medium-sized states: Norway and Canada*, Clingendael Discussion Papers in Diplomacy no. 97, 2005, p. 7, https://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20050300_cli_paper_dip_issue97.pdf. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 3 April 2017.)

¹⁸ Evan H. Potter, 'Niche diplomacy as Canadian foreign policy', *International Journal* 52: 1, 1996, pp. 25–38.

¹⁹ Alan K. Henrikson, 'Niche public diplomacy in the world public arena: the global corners of Canada and Norway', in Jan Melissen, ed., *The new public diplomacy: soft power in international relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 67–87.

²⁰ Roberto Russell and Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, 'Grand strategy', in Jorge I. Dominguez and Ana Covarrubias, eds, *Routledge handbook of Latin America in the world* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 58–73.

countries, in terms of global governance and decision-making structures) or the geopolitical South (countries occupying a peripheral or semi-peripheral role in global governance and decision-making). Only a primary focus on the geopolitical South, combined with a clear regional integration strategy, characterizes a country in the process of graduation. A foreign policy that is mainly focused on the geopolitical North, when associated with regional integration exclusively based on free-trade, leads to dependence (a current example would be Mexico).²¹ A foreign policy that is mainly focused on the North and associated with regional interaction leads to association (as in the case of Turkey in its relationship with the EU until recent times). In our framework, both dependence and association express modalities of non-graduation. As in the case of figure 2, horizontal and vertical movement between one ideal-type (strategy) and another is also possible.²²

‘Butterfly diplomacy’ combines a decision to give priority to the South with a structural or a political difficulty to build deeper ties with the region (owing variably to size, to a lack of political intention, or to power asymmetry). South Africa is the best example of butterfly diplomacy. South Africa’s post-apartheid economic foreign policy towards other African countries constitutes its highest priority, and Pretoria regards its long-term political and economic destiny as indissolubly linked with that of the whole African continent. The Department of Trade and Industry’s metaphor of a ‘butterfly strategy’ for South Africa’s South–South cooperation has placed the country ‘as the proverbial head, and the African continent as the body of the insect’,²³ describing a strategy that is designed to open up trading wings from Africa to other countries in the South, both west and east, in a deliberate attempt to promote links with Brazil, China and India, as well as continental Africa.²⁴

One of the risks of the ‘butterfly strategy’ resides in the gradual buildup of regional domination, as perceived by neighbours. A southern perspective on the region’s role may be combined with either a geopolitical vision or a sense of short-term imperative. In the first case, the Southern perspective would foster regional integration and lead to graduation; in the second, it would result in superficial ties of interaction, and thus might lead to regional domination (figure 4).

What, then, are the main graduation dilemmas? The idea of a dilemma has frequently been used in social science research. In 1944, the title of Gunnar Myrdal’s

²¹ It is worth mentioning that by the ‘geopolitical North’ we mean not those countries geographically located above the Equator, but those that take a western stance in international debate. In other words, our framework is based on the hegemony of the North and the West, which has crucial effects in the international development debate. Therefore, although China is geographically located in the North, it is considered here as an alternative to the western powers for the geopolitical South, despite perhaps being held responsible for another pattern of economic domination (in Asia, Latin America or Africa). In the same way, despite being geographically located in the south, Australia should not be considered as part of the geopolitical or ‘global’ South.

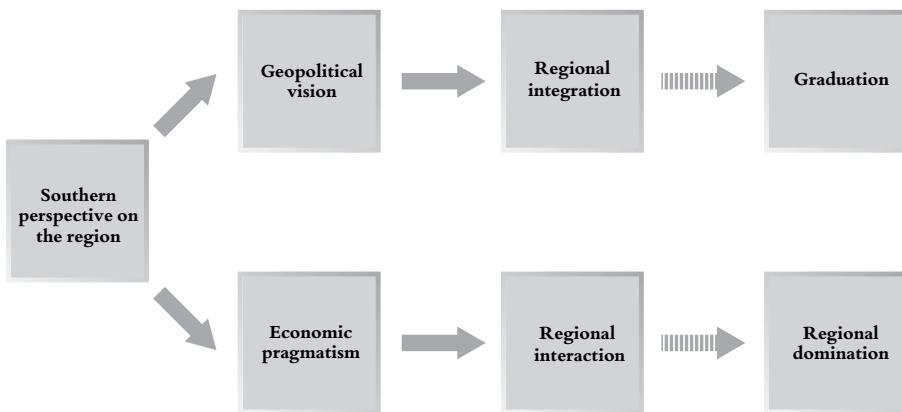
²² Our framework supposes an ambition of global prominence and rule-making, but not anti-systemic international behaviour. This means that a diplomacy of deviation (in the category used by Bertrand Badie to describe the role of Cuba and Venezuela in international affairs) does not belong in our framework. See Bertrand Badie, *Le Temps des humiliés* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2014).

²³ Chris Alden and Mills Soko, ‘South Africa’s economic relations with Africa: hegemony and its discontents’, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 43: 3, 2005, p. 369.

²⁴ Brendan Vickers, *Investment policy in South Africa: performance and perception*, discussion paper (Jaipur and Johannesburg: CUTS Centre for Competition, Investment and Economic Regulation, Institute for Global Dialogue, 2003), http://www.cuts-international.org/CR_safAB.pdf.

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Figure 4: Graduation, the geopolitical South and regional integration



edited volume referred to a dilemma involving racial inequality, stratification and democracy in the United States.²⁵ In game theory, the prisoner's dilemma, a particular model of the collective action problem, has often been used to explain how and why international cooperation occurs, international regimes are created and political institutions develop. The prisoner's dilemma is an archetypal example of the disjunction between individual and group rationality, considered to be one of the main features of many collective action problems. In our analytical framework, dilemmas are different from contradictions and inconsistencies, which may arise after the choice contained within a graduation dilemma has been made.

For countries that meet the criteria set out above, the graduation dilemma has several specific features. First, because these countries are in a second-tier position in the international hierarchy, their leaders must accept that it is not possible to anticipate all the potential contradictions that may arise in the course of graduation, which implies uncertainty in the process. Such uncertainty is for the most part related to the possibility of contestation by established global powers; it also refers to non-recognition by regional neighbours. Second, being non-veto powers, these countries use international institutions to change norms and rules. The dilemma here refers to the difficulty in using multilateral organizations to promote changes in an established regime within an asymmetric international order. Third, when asymmetry is pronounced at the regional level, country leaders face the dilemma of having to deploy a strategy of international prominence while paying heed to regional public goods without being crudely perceived as a dominant power. Fourth, foreign policy decision-makers confronted with a graduation dilemma have to consider the economic, social and political costs of their choices. If a state has high levels of domestic economic inequality and marked social stratification, key decision-makers may be obliged to justify to their national audience those foreign policy choices attributable to an ambition for regional and global

²⁵ Gunnar Myrdal, ed., *An American dilemma: the Negro problem and modern democracy* (New York and London: Harper, 1944).

prominence and for an international rule-making role. The dilemma here is that there are audience costs that leaders may incur from publicly announcing economic, financial, technical or political support to developing or least developed countries.²⁶ These are the main questions related to the graduation dilemma.

In the next section we shall present the conditions necessary for achieving graduated status, and analyse situations in which Brazil has had to face the associated dilemmas. Before we do so, we will provide an overview of the guiding themes of Brazilian foreign policy, underscoring two of its most commonly mentioned features: the Brazilian elites' recurrent pursuit of a prominent place for the country on the international scene; and some unambiguous patterns of action which have defined its international choices. This will provide useful context for the discussion of Brazil's ambition to graduate during the Workers' Party (PT) governments and the actual possibility of its realizing that ambition.

Brazil: a case of graduation dilemma

Researchers working on Brazilian foreign policy during the Republican period have frequently argued that the country's ruling elites have always pursued its international projection.²⁷ The idea that the country was destined to play a significant role on the international scene, whether through an active presence in multi-lateral forums or as a mediator between developed and developing countries, is usually considered to be unanimously held among the elites. This idea has been strongly anchored in the bureaucratic capacities of Brazil's diplomatic corps, whose professional recruitment and promotion procedures tend to insulate the foreign ministry from domestic politics in the implementation of foreign policy decisions.²⁸

Some lines of interpretation do stand out. The first one goes back to the Baron of Rio Branco's years as minister of foreign affairs (1902–12) and lasted until at least the end of the Cold War (1989); it seeks to understand the country's decisions in the international arena on the basis of a supposed dichotomy between Americanists (pragmatic or ideological) and globalists.²⁹ A second interpretation

²⁶ For example, in our specific case Brazil's foreign ministry may be urged to explain to Brazilian society why cooperation with Haiti or Mozambique is important when so many domestic social needs still demand attention. See e.g. Kai M. Kenkel, 'South America's emerging power: Brazil as peacekeeper', *International Peacekeeping* 17: 5, 2010, pp. 644–61; Lidia Cabral and Alex Shankland, *Narratives of Brazil–Africa cooperation for agricultural development: new paradigms?*, working paper, China and Brazil in African Agriculture, 2013, <http://www.future-agricultures.org/publications/research-and-analysis/1638-narratives-of-brazil-africa-cooperation-for-agricultural-development-new-paradigms/file>.

²⁷ Alexandra de Mello e Silva, 'O Brasil no continente e no mundo: atores e imagens na política externa brasileira', *Estudos Históricos* 8: 15, 1995, pp. 27–46; Maria Regina Soares de Lima, 'Ejes analíticos y conflicto de paradigmas en la política exterior brasileña', *América Latina/Internacional* 1: 2, 1994, pp. 27–46, and 'Aspiração internacional e política externa', *Revista Brasileira de Comércio Exterior*, no. 82, Jan.–Mar. 2005, pp. 4–19.

²⁸ Although we endorse this view of Brazilian diplomatic capacities, we do not adopt the hypothesis that Brazilian diplomacy is isolated from political debate, an idea nurtured by diplomats themselves in order to give foreign policy an aura of permanent continuity. See Zairo B. Cheibub, 'Diplomacia e construção institucional: o Itamaraty em uma perspectiva histórica', *Dados—Revista de Ciências Sociais* 28: 1, 1985, pp. 113–31; Letícia Pinheiro and Carlos R. S. Milani, *Política externa Brasileira: as práticas da política e a política das práticas* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 2012).

²⁹ Mello e Silva, 'O Brasil no continente e no mundo', pp. 95–118; Letícia Pinheiro, 'Traídos pelo desejo: um

also goes back to the early Republic, and persisted up to the inauguration of the Lula government (2003); this seeks to correlate the country's international action paradigms with its choices of development models.³⁰ A third line of interpretation ascribes a permanent objective to Brazilian foreign policy, namely the quest for autonomy, and describes the different strategies that have been used to attain this goal.³¹ This line of interpretation usually refers to the period extending from the Vargas years (1930–45) to the end of the Lula government (2010), and focuses on the quest for autonomy as a constant pattern of Brazil's diplomatic action. According to this third line of interpretation of Brazil's foreign policy, the quest for autonomy would be a claimed and official constant.

Each of these approaches attempts to make sense of the country's foreign policy behaviour through systemic or domestic variables, or both. All of them try to identify a paradigm capable of explaining foreign policy as a whole and throughout the period in question (for example, the military government's Americanism immediately after the 1964 coup). However, the paradigm then erases any *deviant* behaviour, or pushes it aside. The so-called *deviant* attitude (for example, the Brazilian nuclear energy policy since 1967, and the refusal to sign the NPT in 1968) is seen as the exception that proves the rule, and does not discredit the wider view about the period being analysed.

In building our argument here, we start from a perspective whereby the different positionings, and even contradictions, in foreign policy guidelines during the PT's years in power can best be understood as a consequence of what we have called the graduation dilemma. These specific behaviours might be seen as empirical demonstrations of the dilemma, since the absence of the necessary conditions to realize the ambition of prominence or, eventually, the absence of this ambition led to the use of different foreign policy strategies.

The pursuit of a bigger international role for Brazil was one of the hallmarks of the period from 2003 to 2014 (particularly during President Lula's second term), as were the promotion of the country's stability and awareness of its potential. In addition, Brazil was also very active in international economic forums, a strong champion of the internationalization of its capitalist interests within and outside South America, and a major advocate of regional integration on more equitable bases. It was often recognized by several of its peers—in both the political and the economic arenas, globally and regionally; but it was also the target of criticisms and objections, externally and domestically (mainly by the mainstream media). In each of these areas there were important coalitions, but also rifts within the government's support base and hard-hitting criticism from the opposition.

ensaio sobre a teoria e a prática da política externa brasileira', *Contexto Internacional* 22: 2, July–Dec. 2000, pp. 304–35.

³⁰ Amado Luiz Cervo, 'Política exterior e relações internacionais do Brasil: enfoque paradigmático', *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 46: 2, 2003, pp. 5–25.

³¹ Gelson Fonseca Jr, *A legitimidade e outras questões internacionais* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1998); Matias Spektor, 'O projeto autonomista na política externa brasileira', in Aristides Monteiro Neto, ed., *Política externa, espaço e desenvolvimento* (Brasília: Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada, 2014), pp. 17–58; Tullio Vigevani and Gabriel Cepaluni, *Brazilian foreign policy in changing times: the quest for autonomy from Sarney to Lula* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2009).

Therefore, while it is possible to speak of a project, or a joint narrative which sought to steer the country's foreign policy consistently towards its graduation in the international system, the non-fulfilment of one or more of the necessary conditions sometimes made it difficult, or impossible, to realize this ambition.

What, then, are these conditions? The first is an increase in relative material capabilities (mainly economic and/or military), which results in some degree of differentiation with respect to other peripheral countries. The second is a political will to graduate expressed in foreign policy actions, government decisions and development strategies. This political intention depends on how the key leaderships conceive of the possibility of systemic change, and on the nature and relevance of national assets. The third condition is recognition by major powers and peers. This recognition is crucial in times of peace, and can be manifested in invitations to participate in informal groups (e.g. in the G20 financial summits), in the demands for the state to take on certain international responsibilities, and in the acceptance of norms created by the candidate to graduation. In the regional context, the dynamics of recognition acquire some very specific contours which need to be considered, as we shall see in the discussion about graduation dilemmas below. A fourth condition is cohesion among government elites and strategic elites, that is, business groups, trade unions, the mainstream media, academia and civil society networks and movements. The fifth condition is the existence of societal backing for the graduation process, including the inherent costs of graduation (for example, greater involvement in global issues, international cooperation) and electoral support for the graduation policy platforms inevitably associated with greater international ambition. The definition of a strategy depends upon a complex negotiation among domestic agents, but also on the degree of openness and recognition of other key international players in a given international issue area. The actual dilemma is whether to stick to the ambition to graduate despite the lack of one or more of the necessary conditions or to renounce it because one or more of them is unfulfilled.

In what follows, we shall use some examples of Brazilian foreign policy during the PT governments to illustrate the analytical framework presented above. They have been chosen because they are representative of distinct foreign policy strategies implemented by governments expressing an explicit ambition for graduation, but also because they show a variety of successful ways of facing the graduation dilemma. They should clarify how Brazil faced the dilemma of going through the process of graduation in certain areas, between 2003 and 2014, considering the five conditions listed above. These cases refer to some of the country's initiatives both in global political institutions and at the regional level, when it faced graduation dilemmas and had to take into account domestic political coalitions, conflicts of interest, the need for societal support and its specific power resources in each area, while balancing the constraints posed by its external environment.

The first dilemma has to do with the relationship between global and regional leadership. To what extent does graduating to a higher global level of power and recognition imply a similar process at the regional level? Are these trajectories

independent, parallel or interdependent? The regional contexts in eastern Asia, southern Africa, the Middle East and South America are quite distinct as far as economic development, security and political stability are concerned, and there is also much variation in the regional integration of countries such as South Africa and Brazil, Turkey and Mexico, Iran and Saudi Arabia. There are no consolidated experiences in the history of Brazilian foreign policy which might offer us a clear indication about this relationship, but some arguments about the global/regional relationship do exist.³²

The regional level poses some relevant dilemmas. The first, which some authors have called the 'hegemon's dilemma' or the 'regional power paradox', argues that while neighbours recognize that the existence of regional powers may entail some potential benefits (such as the production of collective goods, or the internalization of security costs), this recognition is accompanied by the fear of domination and coercive hegemonic practices. The dilemma for the regional power (such as Brazil or South Africa) resides in the need to find a middle ground between two extremes: on the one hand, being the unconditionally cooperative partner who forgoes any immediate material gains; on the other hand, the use of force against a hostile act or one it perceives as such.

In the case of Brazil, another dilemma should be highlighted: the US presence in the region. Brazil is faced with the dilemma of whether to challenge a hemispheric hegemon that is, at the same time, a global superpower. In addition, at the regional level, the graduation dilemma must take into account the asymmetries within the region (which, in material terms, are favourable to Brazil with regard to South America) and the country's own domestic inequalities.

Keeping these considerations in mind, the twelve-year period under scrutiny offers some examples that reveal how Brazil—having adopted a geopolitical vision and a fundamental solidarity with the global South—sought to attain graduation through its regional integration policy. Faced with the dilemma of whether to remain loyal to its policy of redressing the power asymmetries in relation to its neighbours and contributing to political stability in the region, or to defend the more pressing interests of some of its domestic economic sectors, Brazil chose the former option, as the following events will demonstrate.

In the first case, when the Bolivian government of Evo Morales decided to nationalize hydrocarbons in 2006, Brazil agreed to sell its two natural gas refineries and to allow the Bolivian government to control 50 per cent of the Petrobras Bolivia company, in addition to accepting a substantial reduction in its profits in that country. However, none of this diminished the relevance of Petrobras's participation in the Bolivian economy, nor did it cause economic losses to the Brazilian oil giant. In the second case, between 2008 and 2009, in response to the

³² A case for the independence of the two levels can be found in Andrés Malamud, 'A leader without followers? The growing divergence between the regional and global performance of Brazilian foreign policy', *Latin American Politics and Society* 53: 3, 2011, pp. 1–24; also in Letícia Pinheiro and Gabrieli Gaio, 'Cooperation for development, Brazilian regional leadership and global protagonism', in Stephen Kingah and Cintia Quiliconi, eds, *Global and regional leadership of BRICS countries* (New York: Springer, 2016), pp. 67–91. For an argument positing regional protagonism as a precondition for global protagonism, see Maria Regina Soares de Lima, 'Brazil rising', *Internationale Politik* (global edition) 9: 3, 2008, pp. 62–7.

demand by the Lugo government in Paraguay for a renegotiation of the Itaipu binational treaty—by raising significantly (from US\$120 million to US\$360 million) the amount Brazil paid to Paraguay for electricity from the hydroelectric plant—the Brazilian government once again opted for strategic solidarity with the region by accepting the Paraguayan terms.³³

In both of these examples,³⁴ it is clear that when Brazil enjoyed material capability, political will and recognition by its peers it went ahead with pursuit of the geopolitical vision of strengthening regional integration as part of its graduation process (figure 4). Despite accusations from the opposition and the mainstream media that the country was acting like ‘a sucker’ (that is, cooperating unconditionally), and suggestions that it should use force to assert its rights in Bolivia (along the lines of military intervention by the European powers and the United States to collect customs debts from Latin American countries at the end of the nineteenth century), President Lula’s re-election for a second term at the time indicates that the government had managed to preserve its support base in society. On the other hand, if the government had given in to the more short-term economic pressures coming from the opposition, Brazil might have steered towards a butterfly diplomacy, leading to the exercise of regional domination.

Throughout the PT government’s tenure, Brazil took other initiatives in the regional sphere driven by the ambition of prominence. Among them, it is worth noting the credit lines opened by the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) to finance infrastructure projects presented by the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America and by some national governments individually.³⁵ The strategy, followed by both Lula and Rousseff, allowed the BNDES to offer subsidized loans to foreign governments, mainly in return for using major Brazilian contractors and engineering services. Also, the BNDES loans were supported by regional payment mechanisms that aimed to reduce the transfer of capital among the countries involved.

Nevertheless, as in previous initiatives, some dilemmas had to be faced in this case—even though the country had the material resources required to make the deals and the political will to implement them (the first two conditions of the graduation process). In this case, it was necessary to face the regional power paradox: that is, while neighbours did recognize the benefits received, they also feared the exercise of coercive domination. In addition, there was dissension within the ranks of the strategic elites, including business groups and unions, as well as strong criticism of the policy from some sections of society (thus going against the fourth

³³ For a description of both cases, see Marco Cepik and Marcos Carra, ‘Nacionalização boliviana e desafios da América do Sul’, *Análise de Conjuntura OPSA*, no. 4, April 2006, http://observatorio.iesp.uerj.br/images/pdf/analise/17_analises_Nacionalizacao_boliviana_desafios_America_do_Sul.pdf; also Orlando Fernandes de Paula, ‘A política externa brasileira e as relações com o Paraguai: a revisão do Tratado de Itaipu’, *Cadernos de Campo*, no. 17, 2013, pp. 117–32.

³⁴ These demands by the Bolivian and Paraguayan governments came at a time when their respective leaders, Evo Morales and Fernando Lugo, were going through a sensitive period internally, suffering increasing losses of domestic support owing to the delay in fulfilling their campaign promises concerning, respectively, the nationalization of Bolivian gas and changes to the Treaty of Itaipu.

³⁵ Pinheiro and Gaio, ‘Cooperation for development’, pp. 67–91.

and fifth conditions necessary for graduation). The government was rebuked for excessive state intervention in the economy and for causing market distortions; some Brazilian industry representatives were very critical of the BNDES's selective choices, which benefited only a few large companies while small and medium firms were excluded; finally, there was very strong criticism from social groups regarding the social and environmental impacts of the infrastructure projects. Even so, these elements did not hinder the country's process of graduation in the region. As for the risk of being seen as a hegemon, which could have irreversibly compromised Brazil's regional integration strategy, evidence suggests that, despite some fears and friction, recognition from its neighbours was sustained.³⁶

On the South American stage, Brazil's opting for a strong integration strategy, and for the institutionalization of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) as a regional governance body aimed at conflict resolution and security protection, reveals its intention to neutralize any US intervention in the event of serious political instability, such as that in Venezuela (during the Lula government) and Paraguay (in the Rousseff government). On this occasion, the first two conditions (material capabilities and political will) were present, though it was not possible to meet the other conditions, particularly given the absence of support from the media and elements of the strategic elites for any kind of cooperation with the countries of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America.

In the relationship with the United States, two important decisions during Rousseff's first term illustrate the geopolitical vision at the heart of Brazil's 'assertive foreign policy'. When Edward Snowden revealed publicly in 2013 that the US National Security Agency (NSA) had hacked into Rousseff's mobile phone and personal emails, she decided, first of all, to cancel her forthcoming state visit to the United States. Despite the local media's attempts to downplay the incident, the Brazilian government then decided to join German Prime Minister Angela Merkel, who had also been a victim of similar acts of espionage, in proposing a resolution on the subject at the UN. General Assembly resolutions are non-binding, but they can carry significant moral and political weight. Resolution 68/167 called for all countries to guarantee privacy rights to users of the internet and other forms of electronic communication. In April 2014 the Brazilian government held the Global Multistakeholder Meeting on the Future of Internet Governance, in São Paulo, in support of the general principle of freedom and the right to privacy on the internet. In this example, the first three conditions for graduation mentioned above were present.

Finally, another set of choices has to do with the graduation candidate's ideal position on the decisions and concerns of the global agenda. This can be thought of as a two-level game between the challengers and the dominant powers on any specific global governance matter. According to Putnam's argument, the

³⁶ It is worth mentioning the regional support received by Roberto Azevêdo, the Brazilian candidate for the post of director-general of the WTO in 2013, and the decision by the government of Ecuador to resume infrastructure cooperation projects with Brazil, even after conflicts broke out between the government of Rafael Correa and the Brazilian company Odebrecht. See Pinheiro and Gaió, 'Cooperation for development', pp. 67–91.

smaller the winning coalition on Level II (the domestic level), the greater the actor's bargaining power in negotiations on Level I (the international level).³⁷ The dilemma concerns the optimal size of the winning coalition in two distinct situations, as we shall see below, regarding the domestic actors' degree of cohesion. Whenever there is cohesion of the elites around an international issue, the winning coalition on Level II can be minimal and the country can exercise veto power on a given question. In this case the country will be a rule-maker in global negotiations. The logic behind this is that one of the parties will not change its position, to the extent that it is supported on the domestic level by a broad but cohesive coalition.

During the Lula administration, this was the case for Brazil's leadership, along with India's, in creating the commercial G20 in Cancún in 2003, and subsequently in the WTO's rounds of negotiation between 2003 and 2008. Against the expectations of those who would never rate highly the survival chances of a coalition bringing together countries with divergent trade interests in agriculture, the G20 changed the WTO's decision-making arena by including Brazil and India in the hard core of the negotiations, alongside the United States and the EU. In this example, Brazil successfully fulfilled all the necessary conditions for the process of graduation, and did not have to face any kind of dilemmatic choice. However, as we have argued above, this process is not linear or immune to setbacks.

According to Putnam's other situation, when there is no domestic cohesion around a position on a particular issue, the negotiator on Level II must expand the winning coalition in order to include sufficient domestic backing, from actors with convergent but not identical preferences on a given matter, in order to build a more solid base of internal support. However, the size of this domestic coalition cannot be so large as to coincide fully with the positions envisaged by the winning coalition on Level I (the international level), or else the country would have to accept the norms and rules in place, being unable to change them in the negotiation, and thus would have to act simply as a rule-taker. Following the fourth WTO Ministerial Conference held in Doha, Brazil was unable to sustain the same strategy of bearing the costs of collective action in order to ensure the coalition's cohesion.³⁸ During the organization's meeting in Geneva in 2008, when negotiations were making headway, it became much more difficult to coordinate positions among the members because differences that could easily be ignored during the early stages emerged quite strongly during the concession exchange stage. Furthermore,

the intensification of disagreements among the organizations representing agribusiness, and the divergences within the G20 eroded Brazil's ability to continue to negotiate at the international level through the coalition ... and contributed to the country's withdrawing from the G20 and accepting the package proposed by the WTO.³⁹

³⁷ Robert Putnam, 'Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games', *International Organization* 42: 3, 1988, pp. 427–60.

³⁸ Maria Izabel V. Carvalho, 'Condicionantes internacionais e domésticos: o Brasil e o G-20 nas negociações agrícolas da Rodada Doha', *Dados* 53: 2, 2010, pp. 405–45.

³⁹ Carvalho, 'Condicionantes internacionais', p. 434 (author's translation).

Adherence to the previous stance was no longer possible without the strategic elites' backing. Besides, the Brazilian position could no longer rely on recognition by its peers, particularly India and China. At this point, to continue pursuing the ambition of prominence at the WTO would have meant high domestic economic costs, apart from the political costs of using a multilateral organization to change an established regime without the support of peers.

Another example of the dilemmas faced in the graduation process, and of the foreign policy strategies used to navigate them, can be found in Brazil's suggestion of a conceptual change in the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), a political commitment launched during the world summit of 2005. Drawing on its traditional defence of state sovereignty and its scepticism about the use of force as a solution to issues of international security, and fearing that R2P could serve as a justification for military action taken outside the scope of the UN and of international law, Brazil tried to associate the principle behind R2P with a new concept, namely the Responsibility while Protecting (RwP).⁴⁰ The suggestion was meant to contribute to the improvement of an international norm already consolidated in the field of security, adapting it to Brazilian concerns. Since this is a very sensitive issue in foreign policy, the suggestion of an addendum to, rather than substitution for, the R2P principle illustrates the bridge diplomacy strategy adopted by Brazil, as it combines the ambition of prominence with acceptance of the country's role as a rule-taker in the regime. In taking this route, Brazil solved the dilemma by avoiding accusations of collusion with an international norm, which had traditionally been against the Brazilian diplomatic tradition, while also pursuing its ambition for international prominence.

Another dilemma concerns the size of the winning coalition on Level I. The smaller it is, the more cohesion there will be on Level I (i.e. the major powers will unite around a given issue) and the less bargaining power there will be on Level II, regardless of the size of the winning coalition at this level. This was the case in the trilateral negotiations between Brazil, Turkey and Iran in 2010 regarding the Iranian nuclear issue, in which the convergence of the US, Chinese and Russian positions in the UN Security Council negated Brazil's and Turkey's mediating role in that negotiation. So, despite the fact that Brazil's ambition of prominence met most of the conditions for its viability at the time, this was not sufficient given the absence of recognition by the major powers. Without the recognition of the Great Powers, Brazil was not able to play a key role on this issue.

Conclusion

We began this article by taking a critical perspective on the current theories of systemic change and power transition, which have under-theorized the ambitions and roles of second-tier powers in their models of how global order is built and changed. Our main objective was to understand how second-tier non-nuclear

⁴⁰ Oliver Stuenkel and Marcos Tourinho, 'Regulating intervention: Brazil and the responsibility to protect', *Conflict, Security and Development* 14: 4, 2014, pp. 379–402.

countries aim to change their international status and ranking peacefully, and the strategies they adopt to do so. We then developed an analytical framework of the expected patterns of behaviour of such states. Building upon our definition of graduation, we discussed four ideal-types of foreign policy strategy that may be adopted by these second-tier countries, as well as the graduation dilemmas they face. We have used the Brazilian case not to test our proposal, but as a tool to help verify its analytical usefulness, its scope and limitations when analysing the graduation dilemmas of countries falling into that category.

We started from the premise that Brazil's foreign policy trajectory throughout the PT governments was accompanied by dilemmas caused by the graduation process in which the country was engaged. Taking into account that power is contextually specific, that is, that incentive structures and power resources are different in each issue area and region, the extent to which the graduation objective was realized varied according to the availability of these structures and resources, at both the systemic and the domestic level. Similarly, to the extent that the salience of Brazil's international presence was not uniform across all the topics on the country's international agenda but differed across issues, and that it exhibited different dynamics over time, varying with regard to each issue during the process, new coalitions of support and opposition were formed, and others were redesigned or consolidated. Each coalition corresponded to a particular reading of the system's possibilities and constraints, just as they were built on the basis of different interests and ideologies. These observations reflect the key points in our framework, namely the non-linearity and the comprehensiveness of the process. In other words, in our framework countries going through a process of graduation may take a course of action that is context-specific, varies in trajectory, intensity and issue areas, and is also subject to interruption or retraction.

During the period considered in our analysis (2003–2014), we found five examples (concerning, respectively, Bolivia, Paraguay, BNDES, the first cycle of the commercial G20 and the US NSA) when all, or almost all, the conditions for success were present—material capabilities, political will, electoral support for the PT governments' political platforms (as victory in four successive presidential elections can attest) and recognition by peers—and thus Brazil was able to advance on its graduation route. Cohesion among strategic elites, however, was missing in all these examples, except for the first cycle of the commercial G20. Nevertheless, in three other situations (the second cycle of the commercial G20, launch of the RWP, and mediation with Turkey on the Iranian nuclear programme), the total or partial absence of cohesion among strategic elites, and of recognition by peers and by the world's major powers, contributed to make Brazil less successful in confronting its graduation dilemmas. Finally, in two other situations (later on in the RWP debate, and in Brazil's pivotal role in relation to UNASUR), as perceptions about the issues changed, so did the nature of the country's agency and engagement in relation to them, affecting the way Brazil faced the graduation dilemma: in the case of UNASUR, the changes became evident in the presidential transition from Lula to Rousseff; in the case of RWP, the change could be seen as

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the foreign ministry played down the previously announced norm in its official speeches, especially after the intervention in Libya.

On the basis of this framework, we claim that in the Brazilian case material capabilities, political will and cohesion among the strategic elites are crucial dimensions of the trajectory of international change and the successful confrontation of graduation dilemmas by a non-nuclear country situated on the second tier of international stratification. Further research on Brazil's specific foreign policy agendas (such as technical cooperation, health cooperation, regional security, regional integration and human rights), and comparative analysis between the Brazilian case and those of other second-tier, non-nuclear countries, could be the next steps in understanding how the analytical framework that we propose enriches existing debates in both the International Relations and the foreign policy analysis literatures.

